CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The Problem of Multi-Party System Formation and Consolidation in Non-Recognized States of the South Caucasus

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The article discusses the issues of formation and consolidation of a multi-party system in non-recognized states, drawing upon the cases of Artsakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The formation of a multi-party system is a complex process throughout the post-Soviet space. It is particularly important in terms of state consolidation and political system formation. In non-recognized states, the problems caused by post-Soviet transformation are compounded first and foremost by the fact that they are not recognized, secondly by the complicated and long-lasting process of conflict resolution, the influence of geopolitical factors, the lack of economic and political stability, etc. In non-recognized states, party systems are typically characterized by a low level of competition. Meanwhile, the processes of establishing and institutionalizing a multi-party system contribute to the resolution of post-conflict problems and the introduction of democratic traditions and, more generally, state consolidation.

Introduction

The formation and consolidation of a multi-party system is a complex and multi-vector process throughout the whole post-Soviet space. It is central to the formation of a stable political system and state consolidation, as the introduction of democratic principles in all areas of social life can guarantee the stable and complementary work of a

well-established political system and civil society institutions. In general, the existence and interdependent work of political parties finds its reflection in almost all areas of state power, especially in decision-making process. To understand what activities political parties can undertake during the formation of a government, it is necessary to clarify three main directions of the variables, i.e. the relationship between the legislature and the formation of the government, if it exist as such; the responsibility of individuals presenting political parties for the decision to form or make part of the government and, ultimately, the choice of individuals involved in the formation of the government (party representatives)[1].

Justifying the need for the existence of political parties, M. Duverger points out that they are the key components of modern democracy, and thus a political regime could not be democratic without consolidated political parties[2].

The process of forming a multi-party system, in the face of the ongoing competition between political parties, is at the centre of conflicting interests. At the same time, it is meant to ensure the balance between the social ideal and the political course providing the maximum possible outcome under the given circumstances. Being the most influential institution shaping the public administration system, the multi-party system presents a macro system which contributes to or plays an active role in the formation of various other systems[3]. The study of the political systems of post-Soviet transformation states allows to reveal both the shared peculiarities of political systems and those typical to each country, as well as the influence of the Soviet legacy.

The article examines the activities of political parties and the peculiarities of the creation of multi-party systems in the post-Soviet

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[1] **Ware A.,** Political Parties and Party Systems, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 12.

[2] **Duverger M.,** Political Parties, Academic Project, Moscow, 2000 (in Russian).

[3] **Torosyan T.,** Prerequisites for the Formation of Multi-Party Democratic System and Challenges in Post-Soviet Transformation Countries, Lraber hasarakakan gitutyunneri, 2005, 3, 12-31 (in Armenian).

space, particularly in non-recognized post-Soviet states. Based on it, the article presents the course of multi-party system formation in the three non-recognized states of the South Caucasus, as well as the opportunities and challenges of their consolidation.

The article also addresses the impact of the multi-party system formation on the state consolidation, political system, institution-building, and the challenges of the post-conflict phase. In terms of the issue under study, it is necessary to observe the parliamentary elections held in non-recognized states since the declaration of independence as well as their impact on the democratic processes in those states.

The Peculiarities of Multi-Party System Formation in Post-Soviet Space

In the newly independent states emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the formation of multi-party system was one of the most unprecedented processes, in which the number of political parties increased dramatically. In the post-Soviet states, it was natural for the political parties to be inherited from the Soviet era or to replicate the party organizational system of the transition period. Moreover, political parties can be large and influential, which is explained by the importance they have had as actors of the political system[4]. An example is the notion of "party of power" that appeared in Russian political science as early as 1993-1994. This is a vicious phenomenon, and sometimes the term is used to describe the entire Russian political elite as a single whole[5]. However, multi-party systems created in the post-Soviet space are not always unambiguously perceived by researchers. For instance, Polunina[6] notes that in the post-Soviet space

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[4] **Poghosyan L.,** Optimization Problems of the Multiparty System's Institutionalization in Post-Soviet States, Armenian Journal of Political Science, 2014, **1**, 1, 63-79.

[5] **Golosov G., Lichtenstein A.,** "Parties of Power" and Russian Institutional Design: Theoretical Analysis, *Polis*, 2001, 1, p. 6 (in Russian).

[6] Parties and Party Systems in Modern Russia and Post-War Germany, Moscow, Rostov-on-Don, 2004 (in Russian).

we are dealing with a set of political parties rather than multi-party system in iself.

A consolidated multi-party system is a self-regulating system, but it is not formed automatically. At least in the first phase, especially when formed in a short term, it needs to be guided in a democratic way. Meanwhile, artificial steps aimed at forcibly reducing the number of political parties and particularly creating a two-party system is doomed to failure[7]. The political system in each country is characterized by:

- the number of political parties and the peculiarities of their creation;
- ideological differences between political parties, the electoral system and the legal basis for political struggle;
- parliamentary features of party activities[8].

The first structural precondition is typical to almost all countries of the post-Soviet space, as a series of political parties have been created after the collapse of the USSR. The key issues were related to the second structural precondition. The programs of the established political parties largely replicated one another or reminded of Communist ideology. The most serious problems arose in the process of organizing presidential and parliamentary elections in the newly independent states, perhaps due to the lack of experience and knowledge in organizing and conducting the electoral process.

According to Golosov, multi-party systems have also their drawbacks: multi-party system emphasizes ideological differences, while one-party system facilitates the conduction of elections. Moreover, under the multi-party system, large flows of information and large numbers of candidates, harden a reasonable choice. Ultimately, a multi-party political leadership usually runs coalition

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[7] **Torosyan T.,** op. cit.
[8] **Duverger M.,** Op. cit.

politics, which increases the threat-blackmail potential of that system[9]. All post-Soviet transformation states chose the path of pluralism and multi-party system, as it was believed that a two-party system would not ensure the involvement of all social groups in political processes (including the involvement of all groups in the system of government).

States, that entered the post-Soviet transformation phase and considered the establishment of a democratic system as an ultimtate goal, faced a number of problems (the solution of these problems would allow to achieve the final result:

- Ensuring national unity and acquiring or rethinking national identity;
- Ensuring a high level of economic development;
- Mass dissemination of cultural norms and values implying the adoption of democratic principles and norms, trust in the main political institutions, and a high level of cohesion and civic consciousness[10].

Although there is a link between socio-economic development and democracy, the opinion of the advocates of a structural approach to democratization - maintaining that the higher the level of welfare of the people, the more likely it is to be democratic - have been already rejected. Doubts are about both the theoretical plan and the facts[11]. Thus, it is necessary to create a set of values and cultural preconditions within the society, first and foremost through values and norms associated with "civic culture[12]" as well as with social, religious and cultural traditions, as the formation and establishment of

[9] **Golosov G.,** Towards a Classification of the World's Democratic Party Systems, step 1, Identifying the Units, *Party Politics,* 2013, 19, 122-142.

[10] **Melville A.,** Democratic Transitions, Transitological Theories, and Post-Communist Russia, 2000, pp. 337-368 (in Russian).

[11] **Lipset M.,** Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy, The American Political Science Review, 1959, Vol. 53, № 1, pp. 69-105.

[12] **Almond G., Verba S.,** The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations, 2015, p. 576.

democracy is more realistic in homogenous rather than fragmented societies[13]. From this point of view, the process of the establishment of democratic institutions, the existence of a stable multi-party system and democratic elections are of particular importance.

Features of the Establishment of Multi-Party System in Non-Recognized States

The study of the formation and development of political system and, in particular, the multi-party system in non-recognized states is important in terms of overcoming the difficulties and challenges of the transition period. The process of establishing and institutionalizing the multi-party system can also help to overcome the complex and long-lasting phase of introducing democratic traditions. Thus, in non-recognized states, the creation of party systems and the level of efficiency in the way of creating a multi-party system are really important, as non-recognized states seek to gain a place in the system that does not accept them as part of that same system[14]. Recently, non-recognized states have chosen the path which they consider as normative change in the international arena. Kosovo's "supervised democracy" is regarded as an example. The major focus is on democratization process, and it is concluded that recognition is realistic if effective democratic institutions are established in non-recognized states[15]. This is central in terms of state consolidation and international recognition.

As Huntington points out, the institutionalization of the party system is a process that should result in the creation of a political party with its inherent value and stability[16], but the institutionalization

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[13] **Dahl R.,** Polyarchy, Participation and Opposition, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1971.

[14] **Caspersen N.,** States without Sovereignty: Imitating Democratic Statehood. In: Caspersen, N., Stansfield, G. (Eds.), Unrecognized States in the International System. Routledge, London, 2011, p. 4.

[15] **Caspersen N.,** Separatism and Democracy in the Caucasus, *Survival,* 2008, Vol. 50, №4, pp. 113–136.

[16] **Huntington S.,** Political Order in Changing Societies, Moscow, Progress Tradition, 2004, p. 480 (in Russian).

of a single political party does not yet imply the institutionalization of the whole system[17].

Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of the process, attention must be focused on the relationship of political parties with each other and with the rest of the society. It must be based on compromise, which means that each political party must be sustainable and operate according to its own strategy in order to be ready for cooperation, and particularly to competition. This precondition is most evident in non-recognized states, where competition is often seen as an obstacle to recognition.

In non-recognized states of the post-Soviet space, the problems caused by the post-Soviet transformation are compounded by the complexity of non-recognition as a de jure state by the international community. These states also had to face challenges stemming from the post-conflict phase. In general, the problems of forming political parties and a multi-party system in post-conflict environment remain poorly studied, perhaps because they have been regarded as an integral part of the process of establishing state structures or governments[18].

Thus, on the way to the creation of a multi-party system, non-recognized states face the following problems:

- problems common to both recognized and non-recognized post-Soviet states (transformation of political system or formation of a new political system, process of institutionalization of political parties, formation of multi-party system, etc.);
- the process of international recognition;
- post-conflict challenges (economic problems, threat of resumption of hostilities, etc.).

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[17] **Randall V.,** Svasand L. Party Institutionalization in New Democracies, Party Politics, 2002, № 1, pp. 21-32.
[18] **Neandovic M.,** An Uneasy Symbiosis: the Impact of International Administrations on Political Parties in Post-Conflict Countries, Democratization, 2010, Vol. 17, № 6, pp. 1153–1175.

In terms of shaping political system, the first and foremost challenge for non-recognized states is to create a competitive system of political parties. Strengthening democracy, that is declared a priority in non-recognized states, is important for creating an atmosphere of mutual agreement and trust between political parties. Therefore, studying and analyzing the development of political systems in non-recognized states is important for several reasons[19]:

1. A party system can be an indicator determinig whether non-recognized states are characterized by genuine democratic features or not.
2. How do international actors and impulses affect "internal" political factors, which in turn influences the development of party systems?
3. The way in which political parties develop in non-recognized states will show what status it will ultimately receive.

In non-recognized states, recognition is seen as a primary precondition and an end goal, it is the main characteristic of non-recognized states and occupies a central position in programs of political elites[20], and it can be used for propaganda during the elections. In addition, the political elites of de facto states believe that the state's functioning, results registered in the process of democratization and "demonstration" of progress can have a positive impact on the process of recognition[21].

International law does not lay down the preconditions for the creation of new states, except for the Montevideo Declaration, adopted in 1933. The first article of the Declaration states: "The state as a subject of international law should possess the following

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[19] **Ishiyama J., Batta A.,** The Emergence of Dominant Political Party Systems in Unrecognized States, Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 2012, № 45,pp. 123-130.

[20] **Caspersen N.,** States without sovereignty…, pp. 73–89.

[21] **Ishiyama J., Batta A.,** The Emergence of Dominant Political Party Systems in Unrecognized States, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 2012, 45, 123-130.

qualifications: a permanent population, a defined territory, government and capacity to enter into relations with other States"[22].

The starting point for the formation of a multi-party system for each country may be different:

- the peculiarities of state formation;
- conduction of free elections;
- availability of data or sources (analysis of electoral and post-electoral processes). Analysis of previous elections in all states ends immediately before the next elections.[23]

One of the most important indicators is the conduction of free elections in states that are in the process of overcoming the challenges of the democratization process. However, there is a problem of analyzing electoral and post-electoral processes and accessing data in almost all non-recognized states (Abkhazia, South Ossetia), while such analyses could help to explain the mistakes made at a certain stage and prevent further complications on the way to democratization.

The South Caucasus: The Impact of Parliamentary Elections on the Process of Recognition

In non-recognized states of the South Caucasus, self-determination has been preceded by high levels of discrimination and repression, due to which the metropolis sought to change the situation, and particularly the demographic picture. As a result, the number of the titular population has declined significantly as compared to the general population. Currently the number of titular population is high in Artsakh and South Ossetia, while the picture is quite different in

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[22]Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States https://treaties.un.org/pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=0800000280166aef, (29.06.2017)

[23] **Caramani D.,** The End of Silent Elections: The Birth of Electoral Competition, 1832-1915,*Party Politics*, 2004, **9**, 4, 411-443.

Abkhazia. However, this is not a decisive factor influencing the democratization process in Abkhazia[24]. The status of those states under the USSR is also of no key importance; Artsakh and South Ossetia had the status of an autonomous region, while Abkhazia was an autonomous republic[25]. All three non-recognized states of the South Caucasus claim that they have proved their viability as democratic states and thus have gained their sovereignty[26]. However, it is necessary to verify the validity of these claims through scientific studies.

The process of establishing a multi-party system in the non-recognized states of the South Caucasus, albeit to a lesser extent than in the recognized states, began shortly after the collapse of the USSR. The imperative of forming a new political system and institutions gained primary importance. In general, the process of political party formation in the non-recognized states of this region has taken place almost simultaneously; the historical and political context has greatly influenced this process. This refers to the preceding hostilities, which took place almost simultaneously.

Along with the struggle for the recognition, these states had to overcome the challenges of the transitional period and handle the issues related to domestic and foreign policy. In parallel with the formation of political institutions, there was also a need to ensure the effective and complementary work of these structures. While one of the main challenges of creating a multi-party system - the experience and knowledge of the Soviet legacy one-party system - was also specific to the recognized post-Soviet states, the other challenge - the great influence of the military on post-war political life - was specific only to non-recognized states. However, in the process of institutionalization of political parties in non-recognized states, it is

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[24] **Kolsto P., Blakkisrud H.,** Living with Non-recognition: State- and Nation-building in South Caucasian Quasi-states, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2008, **60,** 3, 483-509.
[25] Ibid.
[26] **Caspersen N.,** Separatism and Democracy in the Caucasus, *Survival*, 2008, **50**, 4, 113–136.

more important to substantiate them in the public consciousness, as a result of which the party starts to function independently of its leaders, constantly displaying "meaningful behavior"[27].

In terms of multi-party system development and consolidation, of notional importance is the conduction of elections in a fully competitive environment, the distribution of seats between political parties, conduction of parliamentary elections since independence. This is equally important in terms of introducing democratic traditions, since elections are held immediately after the hostilities, when political institutions are not fully established and there is a high risk of new violence. In this case, the efforts of international actors in the process of post-war elections may have the following outcomes: resumption of hostilities, new shocks and escalation of tensions, or prevention of the risk of war resumption through the conduct of peacekeeping operations and the formation of political institutions[28]. As Lakhdar Brahimi, the former UN Ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq, believes[29], elections can meet all expectations only if they are held at the right time and in parallel with the conflict resolution process.

Post-conflict elections can be a turning point from the perspective of state-building and recognition, and the solution of many post-conflict issues. In some instances, the first post-conflict elections are the first step towards peace and democracy, but more often they can lead to the resumption of hostilities or the establishment of authoritarianism[30].

Post-conflict elections are worth considering for two main reasons: first, they may be indicative of the choice to regulate and organize the public life of non-recognized states (democracy or

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[27] **Janda К.,** Comparative Political Parties: Research and Theory, 1980.

[28] **Brancati D., Snyder J.,** Rushing to the Polls: The Causes of Premature Post-conflict Elections, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2011, **3**, 55, 469-492.

[29] **Brahimi L.,** State Building in Crisis and Post-conflict Countries, Seventh Global Forum on Reinventing Government, June 2007, http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN026305.pdf, (18.07.2017)

[30] **Brancati D., Snyder J.,** Op. cit.

authoritarianism); second, they may indicate to what extent the authorities came to power as a result of the elections are ready to withstand the post-conflict problems. Only elections organized and conducted on the basis of democratic principles can guarantee the sustainable work of state institutions.

At the same time, post-conflict democratic elections in non-recognized states can contribute to overcoming the complex and long-lasting process of international recognition, even though observation missions are lacking here and after the elections international organizations usually declare that they do not accept the election results. Observation missions are mainly carried out by the initiative of individuals rather than by the format of official delegations.

International organizations do not recognize the results of elections pointing to the non-recognition of those states. But in reality it has nothing to do with the international recognition of the state. The response of these organizations is largely conditioned by the fact that they are involved in the conflict settlement process or have geopolitical interests in the region. After all, properly organized and conducted elections are closely linked to democratic processes. The purpose of the elections is first and foremost to organize the internal life of the country, and elections are in the spotlight of the international community only in two cases: first, if the state has a significant influence on international relations or unexpected turnarounds occur during the elections[31].

No state or international organization has the power to recognize or not to recognize elections held in another country (for instance, the Council of Europe's assessments refer only to the states that are its members, and to their obligations with regard to the process of democratization rather than the actual elections)[32]. From this point of view, the opinions and assessments of various states regarding the process of recognition of elections are completely groundless.

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[31] **T. Torosyan**, Ilham Aliyev lost the presidential elections in Karabakh, https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1559948.html, (08.09.2017)
[32] Ibid.

Breaking this approach of international organizations towards elections in non-recognized states is important, as democratization processes, including electoral process, can be an impetus to the conflict resolution.

In terms of the integration and acceptance by the international community, it is also important to address the following issue: the link between elections and state recognition leads to the isolation of political parties from both regional and international political processes. Positive tendency has been observed only recently. In April 2015, Ashot Ghulyan, a member of the Central Council of the Democratic Party of Artsakh, participated in the work of the 13th Congress of the European Free Alliance (EFA) as part of his visit to the Federal Republic of Germany. The Democratic Party of Artsakh has been unanimously accepted as an associate member of EFA as a result of voting held within the congress[33]. The opposite process is also undesirable, when the determination of final status is conditioned by a certain level of democratization. The case of Kosovo is noteworthy to mention in this regard. In December 2003, the document entitled "Standards for Kosovo" was introduced. The "standards" were to prepare Kosovo for its final status. They concerned eight areas: functioning democratic institutions, rule of law, rights of communities, returns of displaced persons, the economy, dialogue with Belgrade, property rights and the Kosovo Protection Corps[34]. As further developments (new military clashes) have shown, a clear determination of status is crucial to the conflict settlement process.

The practice of isolating non-recognized states from international processes creates social injustice by economically, socially and politically isolating the population of the territory, the so-

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[33] The Democratic Party of Artsakh as an Associate Member of the European Free Alliance, http://www.dpa.am/wp/archives/2059?lang=hy (03.09.2017).
[34] **Torosyan T.,** Conflict Resolution in the Framework of the International Law. Case of Nagorno- Karabakh. Yerevan, 2010,

called "fault lines" of government[35]. Moreover, it also reduces the possibility of acquiring the experience and knowledge needed for the establishment of multi-party system which is of exceptional importance in terms of state consolidation. From the point of view of integration and cooperation, the development of educational systems of non-recognized states, in particular the integration into the Bologna process may have a direct and decisive impact on democratization process of these states. Ensuring equal opportunities, access and representation in curricula for all groups of society is of paramount importance in the field of higher education. The states not making part of the European Higher Education Area, including non-recognized states, can and should model their higher education systems based on the Bologna process, incorporating the values underlying it in their programs of educational reforms. This will create basis for using the opportunities provided by this process[36], since the right to education is one of the fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[37] and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights[38].

The above-mentioned should be applicable irrespective of whether the state is recognized or not. Meanwhile, non-recognized states are subject to discrimination. Unlike Kosovo, the other non-recognized states are not provided with such an opportunity. Excluding the local population from the process of modernization of higher education sector hardens the conflict resolution process, despite the fact that in most of studies education is viewed as a tool of

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[35]**Torosyan T., Vardanyan A.,** Development Paradigm for the Post-Communist Countries in Higher Education and Political Science, *Armenian Journal of Political Science*, 2014, **1**, 1, 5-22, DOI: 10.19266/1829-4286-2014-01-05-22.

[36] **Schulze R.,** Higher Education without Discrimination: The Bologna Process and European Values, *Armenian Journal of Political Science,* **1**, 1, 2014, 37-50.

[37] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html (07.09.2017)

[38] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx , (07.09.2017)

reconciliation[39]. Joining the Bologna process is not only about introducing higher education based on higher and postgraduate programs, developing a transparent credit system, ensuring quality and comparability, and promoting student and staff mobility. It also implies the adoption and development of the European values underlying the Bologna Process. After all, solving external problems is impossible without solving internal ones[40]. The Bologna Process can develop a mechanism aimed at establishing a regional network of higher education in the South Caucasus by developing conflict-sensitive regional models of higher education. It may help to create regional structures of government in the field of education, since higher education can be a reliable tool for peaceful coexistence and development in non-recognized states[41].

Due to an immediate and direct connection with the conflict settlement process, post-conflict elections are of great importance. In this regard, the establishment of a multi-party system can also play a key role as a successful outcome of democratization process of a non-recognized state.

The Case of Artsakh

The process of establishing a multi-party system in Artsakh began shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union on December 10, 1991, when the NKR referendum on independence was held according to the "Temporary Regulations on Holding a Referendum"[42].

The first parliamentary (Supreme Council) elections in Artsakh were held on December 28, 1991 (81 MPs). The peculiarity of the National Assembly of the first convocation is that 13 servicemen

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[39] **Ohanyan A.,** Frozen Conflicts or Frozen Governance? A Role for the Bologna Process in Conflict Regions, *Armenian Journal of Political Science*, 2014, **1,** 1, 23-36.

[40] **Schulze R.,** Op. cit.

[41] **Ohanyan A.,** Op. cit.

[42] On the results of the referendum on the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, http://nkr.am/hy/referendum/42/ (12.06.2017), (in Armenian).

received parliamentary mandates. However, the militaries, despite great authority enjoyed in the society, did not try to dictate their will in parliament, but acted within the common approaches of their political organizations. The parliamentary elections held on April 30, 1995 were of crucial importance (the number of deputies was reduced to 33), as these were the first elections since the signing of the ceasefire agreement. In 1996, the Supreme Council was renamed the National Assembly[43]. On June 18, 2000, regular parliamentary elections were held. Parliamentary seats were given to 33 deputies from the "Union of Democratic Artsakh" (UDA), the "Armenian Revolutionary Federation" (ARF), the "Armenakan Artsakh", the "Social Democratic Party of Artsakh", as well as two nonpartisans. The fourth parliamentary elections (June 19, 2005, political parties – "Democratic Party of Artsakh", "Free Homeland", "ARF-Movement-88" party alliance, independent deputies) were followed by a few key events. The elections to the National Assembly of the 4th convocation (June 19, 2005 – "Democratic Party of Artsakh", "Free Motherland", "ARF-Movement-88", independent deputies) were followed by several key events. First, the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Artsakh in December 10, 2006, then the new situation in the negotiation process and the disclosure of the negotiations document called the "Madrid Principles". In May 23, 2010 elections to the National Assembly of the 5th convocation were held with the new quotas for seats of the proportional and majoritarian systems[44]: 17 proportional and 16 majoritarian seats respectively. The following parties received the seats: "Free Motherland", "Democratic Party of Artsakh", "Armenian Revolutionary Federation" and parliamentary group "Artsakhatun". However, no opposition MPs have been presented at the fifth convocation National Assembly. As a result of the last parliamentary elections of the sixth convocation (May 3, 2015), the opposition "National Renaissance Party" also took a seat in

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[43] National Assembly of the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) Republic, http://www.nankr.am/hy/32 , (12.06.2017).
[44] NKR Electoral Code, http://cecnkr.am/լրի-ընտրական-օրենսգիրք/, (15.06.2017), (in Armenian).

the parliament. The "Free Moherland Party" has received the maximum number of seats in the last two convocations. When we compare the number of population turnout in this period, which is rather important especially in terms of local trust in electoral processes, it turns out that unlike 2010, voter turnout of 2015 rose by almost 4% - to 67.8% and 70.6% respectively. The activities of political parties in Artsakh are regulated by the NKR Law "on Political Parties", which stipulates that at the time of registration the political party is obliged to have at least 100 members and territorial subdivisions in at least 1/3 of the regions of the Republic of Artsakh, including Stepanakert[45]. The study of the law proves that it does not impede the creation and functioning of political parties, but there are no clear mechanisms to promote the process. Although, as stated above, the "Democratic Party of Artsakh" is actively engaged in international activities, which is unprecedented for the South Caucasus region. However, it should be noted that in Artsakh, as in other non-recognized and recognized post-Soviet states, it is still too early to speak of a multi-party system.

In terms of the institutionalization of political parties, not only the competition but also the mutual compromise between them is important, which must be expressed first and foremost in programs, strategies adopted, etc. Overall, the limited potential of political parties and the weakness of mechanisms are a serious obstacle to the development of a multi-party system that provides political competition of a new quality. Moreover, sometimes party struggles in non-recognized states are viewed as a "luxury" that is not affordable due to non-recognition. In non-recognized states, the political opposition is perceived as a source of instability and a threat to security[46]. Post-war non-recognized states, including Artsakh, are characterized by the involvement of militaries in parliament as they

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[45] The Law of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic on Political Parties, http://minjustnkr.am/nkr/Պետական-ռեգիստր.php, (05.04.2017), (in Armenian).
[46] Nagorno-Karabakh, Freedom in the World 2012, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/nagorno-karabakh, (05.04.2017).

have a high authority. All these processes hinder the institutionalization of parties, which has a direct impact on the formation of a multi-party system. Post-war non-recognized states, including Artsakh, are characterized by the involvement of the military in parliament as they have a high authority. All these processes hinder the institutionalization of political parties, which has a direct impact on the formation of a multi-party system. The historical developments, political environment, the process of conflict settlement and the status issue have also greatly influenced the formation and functioning of political parties in Artsakh. It is not by chance that the issue of status determination is included in almost all political party programs.

It is noteworthy that the parliamentary and presidential elections in Artsakh are conducted without shortcomings and complaints, with the participation of international observers, and the quality of the electoral processes can once again prove that the people of Artsakh are committed to democratic processes and principles.

The Case of South Ossetia

The formation of political parties and various movements in South Ossetia has been greatly influenced by the historical and political context in the region. Political and economic instability, obstacles to the formation of a new political system had an impact on the ideology and programs of political parties.

In 1990, before the parliamentary elections in Georgia, the Supreme Council of Georgia approved the Electoral Code, which prohibited the election of political parties operating only in certain administrative districts (including in the South Ossetian Autonomous Region). This decision was taken in South Ossetia as a barrier to participation in the decision-making process, and it clearly showed what South Ossetia could expect from an independent Georgia[47]. Immediately after that, on September 20, 1990, South Ossetia's

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[47] **Sammut D., Cvetkovski N.,** The Georgia—South Ossetia Conflict, London, 1996, p. 11.

Autonomous Region declared independence and boycotted the general elections in Georgia held in October of the same year. As a result of the Supreme Council elections, the "Round Table-Free Georgia" Alliance won the most seats, and Zviad Gamsakhurdia became the Chairman of the Supreme Council[48].

The first legislative body of the Republic of South Ossetia, the Supreme Council, was formed on December 9, 1990, comprising 64 MPs. On the basis of the referendum held on January 19, 1992[49] the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of South Ossetia was adopted in May of the same year. The second general elections were held in 1994. Unlike the previous one, the activists of "Adamon Nykhas" group have not received seats, and the political forces of the Supreme Council, which had a communist ideology, were united within a single political force led by Ludwig Chibirov. The Supreme Council, formed in 1990, started its activity at a very difficult period, since all decisions were made in parallel with hostilities and were aimed at resolving the issues of national security and the state legitimacy. A dramatic change in the situation took place after the elections of 1994, when the hostilities were over and the conflict was in the process of settlement. The legislative body began to actively discuss the issues of the Constitution and the laws arising from it.

As a result of constitutional reforms of 1996, South Ossetia made a transition from parliamentary to presidential form of government, and the Supreme Council was renamed Parliament. It is noteworthy that after the second parliamentary elections, the majority of the Communist Party members or nonpartisan deputies adjacent to them formed the majority. As a result of the elections, the Communists received more than 50% of the votes, and the second political force receiving the parliamentary mandates was the "Fidibaste" (Фыдыбӕстӕ) National Movement.

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[48] **Kochieva I., Margiev A.,** GEORGIA: Ethnic Cleansing of Ossetians 1989-1992, Moscow, p. 6.
[49] History of Parliamentarianism of the RSO, (10.07.2017), (in Russian).

The picture of South Ossetia's third convocation parliament was almost the same; the draft of a new constitution was a subject of active discussions, and it was adopted in 2001[50]. The following political parties competed for seats in the fourth convocation parliament formed in 2004 - the "Communist Party of South Ossetia", "Fidibaste" national movement, as well as the newly formed "National Party" and the "Unity" Republican Party. However, the "Fidibaste" national movement, emerged shortly before the election, was forced out from the struggle by the special decision of the Central Electoral Commission. The greatest number of seats in the National Assembly of the fourth convocation was received by the "Unity" Republican Party, which was formed a year ago and was able to operate quite actively. It was during this period that the 2004 clashes and the 2008 Five-Day war took place[51]. After the Russian-Georgian War, Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, established active cooperation with Russia in economic, intergovernmental, social, financial and other fields[52].

After the Five-Day war, a number of laws have been adopted and amended in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, including the Law on "Parliamentary Elections of the Republic of South Ossetia"[53], which specifically stipulated that the number of MPs is 34 and the elections are held through the proportional electoral system, with parties presenting lists before the elections. The new law reduced the age limit for candidates to 21.

All four political parties took part in the parliamentary elections held on May 31, 2009, but only three of them the "Communist", "National" and "Unity" parties received seats in the parliament.

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[50] Constitution of the Republic of South Ossetia, http://minjust-rso.org/law, (10.07.2017), (in Russian).
[51] History of Parliamentarianism of the RSO, http://www.parliamentrso.org/node/7(17.10.2016), (in Russian).
[52] **Andre W., Gerrits M., Bader M.,** Russian patronage over Abkhazia and South Ossetia: implications for conflict resolution, *East European Politics*, 2016, **32**, 3, 297–313.
[53] On the Election of Deputies of the Parliament of the Republic of South Ossetia, http://www.parliamentrso.org/node/24, (10.07.2017), (in Russian).

Before the next parliamentary elections, the number of political parties actively operating in South Ossetia reached to 9, but as a result of the parliamentary elections of 2014, the "United Ossetian Party" won 20 out of 34 parliamentary seats, the "National Unity Party"-6, the "National Party"-4, and "Nykhas"-4. In 2015, amendments were made to the Law on Parties[54], which was adopted in September 4, 2002. The key changes were related to the minimum threshold of members at the time of political party formation (500 instead of the former 100). Unlike Artsakh and Abkhazia, the minimum threshold of party members in the territorial subdivisions was also set up as 50.

The structural foundations for the creation of a fully democratic state are present in South Ossetia, so it is important to carry out a comprehensive and subjective situational analysis to avoid new mistakes, such as those following 2008 Five-Day war. Moreover, in terms of content, these structures still needs a consolidation, as the knowledge and experience required for this process are very limited, and the political forces with long-term authority do not see the need to provide the necessary conditions for their formation.

The Case of Abkhazia

The Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia[55] was adopted on November 26, 1994. The legislative body is the National Assembly, which comprises of 35 MPs who are elected for a five-year term. The parliamentary elections in Abkhazia were held in 1991, 1996, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017. It is noteworthy that almost all parliamentary elections since independence have been won by pro-government political parties and once by opposition forces (2002). Elections in Abkhazia are held only by the majority system (thirty-five constituencies).

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[54] On amendments to the Law of the Republic of South Ossetia "On political parties", http://www.parliamentrso.org/node/418, (10.07.2017), (in Russian).
[55] Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia, http://presidentofabkhazia.org/doc/const/ , (15.07.2017), (in Russian).

The first parliament of Abkhazia (Supreme Council, 1991-1996) is also often referred to as "golden" because of the large number of respected and prominent public figures here. The majority of the parliament was represented by the "Unity" National Forum of Abkhazia (the first socio-political movement in the territory of Abkhazia, which was formed in 1989 and ceased to exist after the 1991 elections, since all the leaders of the movement were included in the Supreme Council)[56].

The first multi-party elections in Abkhazia since the declaration of independence were held in 1996, as a result of which the parliamentary seats have been distributed among the Abkhazians (19), the Armenians (3), the Russians (4), the Georgians (2), the Greeks (1) and others. 81% of the population participated in the parliamentary elections of the first convocation. The high turnout rate was explained by the fact that the initial (post-conflict phase) level of public confidence in electoral processes was very high, and thus expectations were also high. This time, the members of the Communist Party were quite active, and they received a large number of deputy mandates.

A number of serious and important events preceded the parliamentary elections held in March 2002. First, the Abkhazia's Central Electoral Commission refused to accept the requests of members of the "Renaissance" movement, which was followed by mass protests. As a result, the leaders of the "Renaissance" movement decided not to run in the elections, believing it to be a violation of the Law on Elections. Thus, representatives of the republican "Apsni" Party and the Georgian-Abkhaz War Veterans' Social-Political Movement "Amtsakhara" received seats in the parliament.

The law on the "Election of deputies of the National Assembly of Abkhazia"[57] was adopted in March 2009, which clarified the

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[56] **Sergeeva L.,** The Peculiarities and Limitations of the institutionalization of the party system of non-recognized (partially recognized) states of the post-Soviet space on the example of Abkhazia, *Bulletin of Perm University*, 2015, 2, 24-39.

[57]Law on the Election of Deputies to the People's Assembly-Parliament of the Republic of Abkhazia, http://presidentofabkhazia.org/upload/iblock/51c/Конститу-ционный_закон_о_выборах_депутатов_Народного_Собрания_-

criteria for nominating candidates and the procedure for holding elections. According to the new law, since the parliamentary elections of 2007 only political parties have had the right to nominate candidates. This promoted the involvement of political parties in political processes and set up their constitutional basis. After the elections of 2007, the "Renaissance", "Amtsakhara" and "United Abkhazia" received 28 parliamentary seats. The oppositional political parties, namely "Forum for National Unity of Abkhazia", "Communist Party of Abkhazia" and "Russian Citizens Union" received seven mandates. 148 candidates were running for the 35 seats in the parliamentary elections of the fourth convocation. According to preliminary lists, Republican political powers had 35 candidates, 11 candidates were introduced respectively by the "United Abkhazia" and "Forum for National Unity of Abkhazia", 7 candidates - by "Communist Party of Abkhazia", 6 candidates by – "Economic Development Party of Abkhazia", etc.

The parliamentary elections of spring 2017 were held in two rounds, with 27 of the 33 MPs running for re-election. Voter turnout was unprecedentedly low in the parliamentary elections of the sixth convocation, with even a 25% turnout in some constituencies. This once again demonstrates the low level of confidence of Abkhaz citizens in electoral processes.

The main political forces that have been running in the elections for the last decade are the following: "United Abkhazia", Socio-Political Movement of Georgian-Abkhazian War Veterans – "Amtsakhara", "Communist Party of Abkhazia", as well as the opposition "National Unity Party".

The Law on Parties was adopted in Abkhazia on February 24, 2009. It specifically states: "The Republic of Abkhazia recognizes political pluralism and a multi-party system, and the state guarantees equality of political parties before the law and guarantees the rights

_Парламента_Республики_Абхазия_2015_03_31_13_14_27_563.pdf (15.07.2017), (in Russian).

and legitimate interests of political parties"[58]. The law specifies that the definition of the party, the purpose and objectives of their formation, the spheres of activity. It clearly stipulates that at the time of its creation political party shall have territorial subdivisions in at least five administrative-territorial units, and the minimum number of party members shall be 1000. The study of the Law on Parties in Abkhazia allows concluding that, although the law provides for technical issues, legal bases for the establishment of political parties in the territory of the Republic of Abkhazia, defines the main areas and responsibilities of their activities, however, there are no clear instruments fostering the process of institutionalization.

Conclusion

The study of the problems of multi-party system formation and consolidation in non-recognized states, and in particular the study of the peculiarities of the creation of multi-party systems in the three non-recognized states of the South Caucasus, the parliamentary elections conducted in these states, as well as the peculiarities of political parties demonstrates that:

1. On the way to the formation of a multi-party system, the non-recognized states of the South Caucasus have been facing problems common to both recognized and non-recognized post-Soviet states (transformation of the political system, formation of a multi-party system, etc.). The solution of these problems is largely affected by the process of international recognition and the challenges of the post-conflict phase.
2. Not only the lack of knowledge and experience on such systems, but also the involvement of militaries through informal mechanisms in post-conflict administration has a

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[58] Law of the Republic of Abkhazia on Political Parties,
http://presidentofabkhazia.org/upload/iblock/d9b/Закон_о__политических_партия
x_2015_03_31_13_16_59_485. (11.07.2017), (in Russian).

strong negative influence on the formation of a multi-party system.

3. In non-recognized states, recognition is seen as an ultimate goal; it is the main characteristic of non-recognized states and occupies a central position in the parties' pre-election programs and is sometimes used for propaganda during the elections. The creation of political parties on the basis of their inherent value and stability is essential, but the institutionalization of a single party cannot ensure the institutionalization of the whole system and the formation of a multi-party system.

4. The relations between political parties are crucial. They must be based on competition and mutual compromise, which implies that each political party must be sustainable and operate according to its own strategy to be ready for cooperation and competition. The first and foremost challenge in non-recognized states is to create a competitive system of political parties, as competition between political parties in non-recognized states is sometimes viewed as a source of instability.

5. A study of the Law on political parties in non-recognized states proves that although they do not hinder the development and functioning of political parties, there are no clear mechanisms to promote this process, and the reduction in the number of people participating in elections demonstrates a low level of public confidence in the electoral processes. Positive tendency is observed only in the Republic of Artsakh.

6. The post-conflict elections are of great importance because of their direct link to the conflict settlement process, as well as in terms of the choice of regulating and organizing public life in non-recognized states. The results of elections indicate to what extent the elected government is ready to withstand the post-conflict problems.

7. Although international organizations do not recognize the results of elections in non-recognized states, actually it has nothing to do with the process of international recognition of the state. The response of these organizations is largely conditioned by the fact of being involved in the conflict

settlement process or having geopolitical interests in the region. The failure to recognize the election results, linking them to non-recognition, is not only groundless under international law but also impedes the conflict resolution process.