

TRYING TO GET IT RIGHT AT LAST!
SOURCES OF PARTY SYSTEM (UNDER-)INSTITUTIONALIZATION
IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

Fernando Casal Bértoa

One of the most accepted assumptions in political science is that the quality of a democracy is a function of the level to which its party system has become institutionalized. In this context, party system institutionalization has come to be seen as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the healthy functioning of democracy (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Morlino 1998). However, and notwithstanding the burgeoning interest in the consequences of party system institutionalization, little has been done to discover what it is that institutionalizes party systems in the first place.

It is in this context that, departing from the fact that ‘focusing on parties and party systems [...] remain[s] a basic if not the central theme for examining the quality of [...] liberal democracy [...] but also its progress towards and achievement of democratic consolidation’ (Pridham 1990: 2), this paper constitutes another attempt to discover the sources of party system institutionalization, on the one hand, as well as to understand which factors contribute to hinder this process, on the other. In particular, and building on a recent work on how such institutionalization has occurred in East Central European party systems (Casal Bértoa, forthcoming), this paper aims at providing an answer to the question on the determinants of systemic institutionalization through a comparative analysis of seven party systems in the Black Sea Region, whose obvious similarities reinforces the argument for treating them together as a compact small-N comparison. As a complement, this study will also evaluate the latter in light of other transitional experiences: namely, post-colonial and ‘Third Wave’ European democracies.

The first part of the paper summarizes the way in which the notion of party system institutionalization is operationalized, presenting a more accurate gradation of the level of systemic institutionalization in the Black Sea region. Section two reviews Casal Bértoa’s work on the sources of institutionalization in four Visegrad party systems. Section three starts with a MSSD, trying subsequently to apply the abovementioned theoretical framework by looking at the impact of institutions and cleavages on the structure of inter-party competition in Black Sea party systems.

Section four explores the extent to which previously found patterns in both East Central Europe and in the Black Sea region are found in other new European democracies. The final section concludes with a summary of the main findings.

Party System Institutionalization: Conceptualization and Operationalization

As it follows from the substantial body of literature devoted to the concept (Meleshevich 2007; Randall and Svåsand 2002), the notion of party system institutionalization (PSI) has no established definition (Casal Bértoa 2011). Notwithstanding the latter, the truth is that all meanings of the conception of PSI contain the idea of stability and persistence in the rules and nature of inter-party competition (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). As a consequence, and bearing in mind that the core of a party system is to be found in the patterns of interaction among its subunits (i.e. political parties) (Mair 2006), I consider PSI to be *the process by which the patterns of interaction among political parties become routine, predictable and stable over time* (Bakke and Sitter, 2005; Mair, 1997) In other words, a system of parties can be said to be institutionalized when political parties cooperate, collaborate and colligate in a standardized and structured way (Mainwaring 1998).

In order to determine the level to which party systems in the Black Sea region have (or not) institutionalized, I follow here Mair's analytical framework. In particular, Mair considers party systems to be institutionalized if (1) alternations of governments are either total or none, (2) governing alternatives are stable over a long period of time, and (3) some parties ('outsiders') are permanently excluded from participation in national government. Conversely, under-institutionalized party systems are to be characterised by (1) partial alternations of governments, (2) no stable compositions of governing alternatives and (3) access to government granted to all relevant parties (1997:211-214).

In order to minimize subjective judgements and opinions, and following my previous work both with Enyedi (2010) and Mair (2012), I quantitatively operationalize each of the factors suggested above with a so-called *composite index of party system institutionalization* (iPSI), which taking also time into consideration, captures each of the features mentioned above.¹

[Figure 1]

¹ For particular details on the calculation of the iPSI, please see Casal Bértoa and Enyedi (2010) or Casal Bértoa (forthcoming).

An overview of the level of party system institutionalization in the Black Sea region is shown in Figure 1, which ranks the seven democracies in the area in terms of the stability in the structure of inter-party competition for government during the period 1990-2011. The most evident conclusion derived from these summary data is that party systems in the Black Sea region have institutionalized at different rates and in different ways. At first sight, it is possible to distinguish two certainly opposite paradigms: namely, highly institutionalized ($iPSI \geq 2$) Georgia and Montenegro and totally under-institutionalized ($iPSI \leq -2$) Ukraine and Russia² (respectively). While in the first two countries, party politics has been dominated since the moment of democratization by basically two parties (i.e. Saakashvili's United National Movement and Đukanović's Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro, respectively), in the other two nations political parties played a secondary role until very recently with most cabinet composed by a majority of independent or non-partisan (proximate to the President) political figures. Interestingly enough, while this situation started to change in Ukraine in 2002, it continues to be the rule in Russia even now.

As also show in the figure, the remaining party systems in the region cluster around the centre. Still, a relatively clear cleavage can be observed between weakly institutionalized Moldova, Romania and Turkey ($iPSI$ close to 1) and non-institutionalized Bulgaria ($iPSI$ close to 0). Thus, in both Moldova and Romania government alternations have tended to be wholesale (either total or none) with two different blocs of parties confronting each other almost from the very beginning (Communist vs. in Moldova; Social Democrats vs. Liberal-conservatives in Romania). On the contrary, in Bulgaria alternations have tended to be mostly total after elections (except in 2005) but always partial between elections with new parties (e.g. National Movement for Stability and Progress, New Time, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria, etc.) joining the spoils of office and, therefore, making it difficult for governing formulas to close. Interestingly enough, Turkey lies somehow in the middle between these two modes of inter-party competition. Thus, while the 1983-1991 and the 2002-2011 periods have been dominated by just two parties (i.e. Motherland Party/ANAP and Justice and Development Party, respectively), between 1992 and 2001 alternations have tended to be partial, characterised by the accession of new parties

² Please note here that, contrary to the other party systems in the analysis (where the end point is December 2011), the Russian party systems is only examined between 1999 and 2004. Both previous and after this period, the Polity IV scores is clearly below 6.

almost at every time of government formation in different (always innovative) combinations (from 1992 until 1996: the Right Path Party with ANAP, with Social Democratic Populist Party or with the Welfare Party; from 1997 up to 2001: the Democratic Left Party alone or with ANAP and the Democratic Turkish Party or the Nationalist Movement Party).

It is to explain such variation in the degree of systemic institutionalization in the region that I will devote section 3. But first it is important to summarize the theoretical framework to be applied there.

Institutional and Sociological Determinants of Party System Institutionalization:

A Theoretical Framework

In his recent analysis of the determinants of party system institutionalization in four East Central European democracies, and after excluding up to 12 (possible) independent factors thanks to the use of a ‘most-similar-systems’ design (MSSD), Casal Bértoa found out that the institutionalization of (the Hungarian and Czech) party systems until the winter of 2011 had been enhanced not only by institutional factors (i.e. high institutionalization of individual political parties, low legislative fragmentation and parliamentarism), but also by supportive sociological features, mainly a cumulative structuration of cleavages. On the contrary, where like in both Poland and Slovakia parties frequently come and go, parliaments are relatively fragmented, semi-presidential practices are adopted and cleavages cross-cut each other dividing both elites and voters into inimical as well as compatible ideological lines, party system institutionalization is clearly hindered. The arguments behind such findings are briefly summarized in the following paragraphs.

1) Party Institutionalization (PI)

According to the majority of scholars, few institutional developments are more critical to the stability of a country’s party system than the development of institutionalized political parties (Huntington 1991; Lewis 2006; Toole 2000). The logic is that if party system stability as a process is all about stabilizing patterns of interaction among a ‘manageable’ number of political parties, then party institutionalization – understood as ‘the process by which parties evince consistent patterns of mass mobilization and internal organization’ – certainly constitutes an essential condition for the stability of the party system as a whole (Casal Bértoa and Mair 2012). All in all, it seems pretty obvious that for the patterns of partisan interaction in a particular country to become stable and predictable over time, the subunits of the system (i.e. political

parties) need to be relatively continuous over time (Moser 2001; Rose and Munro 2009; Toole 2000). The idea is that only when the same parties concur to elections, get into parliament and participate in the formation of governments, the structure of competition (mainly in terms of governing formula and access) can become stable over time. In other words, (systemic) *stability* cannot take place without a certain (partisan) continuity.

2) Party System Format

The format of a party system also plays a crucial role in the process of institutionalization itself. Thus, and according to Sartori, party system format has ‘mechanical predispositions’ (1976:178), if only because the number and size of parties determine a set of functional properties which, in turn, indicate the possible ‘paths of interaction’ parties have when competing for government. In this sense, by indicating the number (and strength) of ‘streams of interaction’ (Sjöblom 1968: 174), the format of a party system clearly affects the ease with which parties interact and governments can be formed. The logic is, therefore, that ‘the greater the number of parties (that have a say), the greater the complexity and probably the intricacy of the [interactions will be]’ (Sartori 1976: 120). More concretely, the more parties there are in a system: (1) the higher the probability that new cabinets contain parties from the immediately previous government (*partial* alternation); (2) the higher the number of possible combinations of parties in the executive (*innovative* formula); (3) the longer the period in which parties will have the opportunity to enjoy the spoils of office (*open* access). In other words, in a system where party leaders must follow manoeuvres among a large number of parties, predictability and stability in the structure of inter-party competition will be obviously hindered (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007; Tavits 2005).

Type of regime

Even if a first negative judgment on the effects of certain regime types (mainly presidentialism, but also semi-presidentialism) on PSI was passed by Linz as early as 1994, the truth is that this issue was merely neglected until Meleshevich (2007:chapter 8) focused on it. The idea is that while in parliamentary systems the election of the head of state – usually appointed either by the sole governing coalition parties (if disposing of the generally required ‘qualified majority’) or as the fruit of a compromise among the majority of political forces which see this ‘almost compulsory’ collaboration as totally *ad hoc* – has no effect whatsoever (neither positive nor negative) on the patterns of partisan interaction; in semi-presidential regimes, the popular election of the president

has a direct (negative) impact on the structure of inter-party competition itself. The logic is that because presidential candidates need to appeal to a wider segment of the electorate, ‘broad’ coalitions – most of the time across ideological lines – are likely to be formed. In this sense, an element of systemic instability is introduced either through the formation of a previously unseen cabinet coalitions or the inclusion of a party excluded from government up to that time.

Cleavage structuration

Cleavages are also closely related to the development of party systems.³ In this context, in a recent article, Casal Bértoa maintains, contrary to previous scholars, that the degree to which party systems institutionalized is not so much determined by the number, the type or the strength of a country’s cleavage(s) but by the way these different cleavages structure in relation to each other (Casal Bértoa, 2011 online). Thus, when cleavages are cross-cutting, parties will have it difficult to find ideologically contiguous partners with which to cooperate, as being close in one dimension may be accompanied by irreconcilable differences in another. Being forced to interact in multiplicity of non-coinciding directions definitively diminish the ability of parties to adapt to the *cross* pressures and stabilize the structure of competition. On the contrary, when cleavages are cumulative (i.e. coinciding), parties will tend to interact only with other parties within the same side of the cleavages, rejecting any cooperation that would lead them to cross such line. In this sense, cumulative cleavages, similarly to one-dimensional cleavage configurations, help to simplify the structure of competition in two different (and separate) blocs of parties, making the patterns of interaction more predictable and stable.

It is now time to examine to which extent the analytical framework designed to understand party system institutionalization in East Central Europe can travel to the Black Sea region and, more specifically, explain why the degree of institutionalization varies so much across the party systems in the area.

Can Theoretical Frameworks Travel?:

The Institutionalization of Party Systems in the Black Sea

Although I will mainly focus here on the four “independent” factors found to be relevant in Casal Bértoa (forthcoming), the truth is that comparative political theory has

³ I understand ‘cleavages’ as structured and persistent lines of division, requiring the presence of three different elements at the same time, namely: an ‘objective’ basis for conflict, mobilization around this conflict and organizations that represent the various sides of this conflict (Bakke and Sitter, 2005: 260).

offered other 4 different types of possible explanations for the distinct levels of PSI observed in new and old democracies: namely, historical, economic, temporal, and international. As in Casal Bértoa (forthcoming), and making use of a MSSD also here, I am able to reduce the number of (possible) ‘causal linkages’ to the minimum and, therefore, achieve a more ‘focused’ comparison.

In this context, the natural experiment produced by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the comparison of its different former federal states (Georgia, Russia or Ukraine), characterised by identical (not just similar) ‘background conditions’, will be exceptionally useful when trying to hold constant certain crucial independent variables (i.e. the length of previous democratic experience and authoritarian break as well as the year of political transformation). Likewise, the fact that both Romania and Bulgaria display a completely opposed degree of systemic institutionalization despite sharing a common communist legacy (i.e. national-authoritarianism) as well as joining the EU on the same day allows me to exclude historical ‘path-dependence’ as a possible explanatory variable. Moreover, and because we are dealing with countries which match closely in terms of system of government (with the possible exception of Russia, all are centralized states), political culture (as heirs of both the Russian and Ottoman empires all belong to the Orthodox/Muslim sphere), the time of transition (all democratized during the so-called ‘3rd Wave’) I am able to exclude three more rival ‘causal’ factors (i.e. nature of state, political culture and sequence/time of transition). Finally, most countries here not only share a common economic past based on centralized planning, but also a rather similar economic development since the time of transformation in 1989/90. As a result, economic structural differences (e.g. GDP, inflation, unemployment) are not enough to explain the distinct levels of systemic institutionalization observed. Once most possible ‘alternative’ explanations have been excluded, it is time now to examine to what extent it is possible to apply in the Black Sea region the theoretical framework analysed in the previous section.

First of all, I will start with the link between both party and party system institutionalization. In this context, and in order to try to capture the degree to which political parties in the region are themselves institutionalized, I will use a standard indicator: namely, the average party age (Jin 1995; Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Tavits 2005). The idea is that ‘the older an organization is, the more likely it is to endure even longer’ (Dix, 1992: 491). Assessing the data, it is obvious that there are striking variations in the extent to which political parties have been institutionalized in

the different Black Sea democracies. Interestingly enough, and to the point that variance in the level of party institutionalization largely associates with differences in the degree of systemic institutionalization, I may conclude saying that the process of PSI in Georgia, Turkey, Romania and, to a lesser extent, in Moldova was fostered by the institutionalization of those countries' individual political parties themselves. On the contrary, weak party institutionalization is to be blamed for the rather low degree of systemic institutionalization in Bulgaria and Ukraine, but especially in Russia. In this sense, a 'causal' relationship between these two variables is suggested.

Secondly, comparison among the seven cases here analysed clearly suggests that the number of parliamentary parties in a system, measured according to Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) index, offers a very powerful explanation of the variance in the degree of institutionalization between the different party systems, with low levels of fragmentation being associated with high mean institutionalization (Georgia, Moldova and Turkey), and high fractionalization being associated with low systemic institutionalization (Russia and Ukraine). The only exception to this seems to be Romania, as the Bulgarian party system, even if not highly fractionalized, has had on average much more ENPP than Georgia, Moldova or Turkey (to a lesser extent). Interestingly enough, these findings do not but to confirm Sartori's (1976) concerns about the perils of 'extreme pluralism' (ENPP>4), as the only party systems with such type of format are the only ones to be under-institutionalized. In this view, the Romanian party system, characterised by 'moderate pluralism' (ENPP<4) as early as in the year 2000, constitutes less an exception.

Thirdly, the fact that the only two parliamentary regimes in the region are at the top of the institutionalization ranking provides strong support for the positive relationship between the two variables. Thus, in all these countries the head of state has been elected in the majority of cases either by the super-majoritarian governing coalition (e.g. Özal in 1989, Demirel in 1993, Gül in 2007) or as a result of a compromise (e.g. Sezer in 2000, a non-partisan chief justice in the Constitutional Court) among governing and opposition forces.

On the contrary, in almost all the semi-presidential regimes here studied the composition of the electoral alliances as well as of governmental coalitions has been determined at some point by the patterns of inter-party collaboration established at the time of presidential elections. Russia, with the over-presidentialization of the party system, constitutes the best example with an important number of relying exclusively on

the President's support, even sometimes against the parliamentary majority. In Romania, where both presidential and legislative elections were concurrent until 2008, the effect of the former on the latter was a continuous one. The same can be said of Georgia where the continuous dominance of EMN has affected the structure of partisan competition in the opposite, although not very convenient, way: namely, over-institutionalizing it. In Ukraine, for example, the cooperation of opposition parties (i.e. VOB, NUNS, etc.) at the time of the 2004 presidential elections definitely affected the way cabinets were later formed in Ukraine. In Bulgaria, for instance, the 2005 governmental coalition between the Bulgarian socialists (BSP) and the Turkish minority (DPS), political enemies since the horrific ethnic persecution and violent discrimination perpetrated on the latter by the Communist precursor of the former in the 1980s (see Ganev, 1995), has its roots in the 2001 presidential elections when the DPS provided essential electoral support to the BSP's candidate, Purvanov.

Still, and notwithstanding what has been already said, Moldova constitutes, without doubt, the most fascinating case among all these countries as it represents a unique instance of regime change between semi-presidentialism and parliamentarism (in 2000). In this sense, it provides a "natural experiment" in order to examine whether change in the mode of election of the head of state has any influence in the level of party system institutionalization. Thus, the first Moldovan (direct) presidential elections altered the existing structure of competition, as President Lucinschi, who ran as an independent in the 1996 contest, decided to collaborate with his former party (PDAM), which had already lost its parliamentary majority, as a response to its support during the second round (Roper, 2008: 115).⁴ In clear contrast, both the successful Moldovan presidential elections (2001 and 2005)⁵ as well as the disastrous contests in Moldova (2009)⁶ responded to the already existing structure of competition characterised by the rather polarized confrontation between the parties of the PCRM-led government against the parties of the "democratic" opposition.

⁴ Snegur's defeat at Lucinschi's hands constituted also an obstacle to the governmental collaboration between their respective two supportive political forces, that is, PMDP and PRDM/CDM (Roper, 2008).

⁵ In 2001 the PCRM easily managed to have its secretary-general (Voronin) elected during the first round of voting. In 2005, the "ad hoc" support of the PPCD to the PCRM did not have any consequences for the party system.

⁶ The May/June 2009 presidential elections also responded to the above-cited pattern: even if the ruling party alone (i.e. PCRM) could not have their candidate elected as it was just one vote short of the required majority, it could still block (60 seats) any attempt of the opposition to get their candidate elected. President Voronin then dissolved the parliament and new legislative elections took place in July. Unfortunately, the result was again a deadlock parliament where the PCRM had 48 seats, enough to prevent the now governing "democratic" coalition to appoint a new president.

Last but not least, the last column in table 1 shows the degree of cross-cuttingness for the two most important cleavage dimensions in each of the countries here analyzed. As follows from the scores displayed above, and with the exception of Bulgaria and Ukraine, a striking finding appears: the lower the degree of cleavage cross-cuttingness, the higher the level of institutionalization observed in a party system. Moreover, in the case of the more institutionalized party systems (i.e. Georgia, Moldova, Turkey and Romania) the differences in the degree cross-cuttingness among the countries and the level of party system institutionalization run almost parallel to each other.

Black Sea Party Systems in Comparative Perspective

Though the focus of this paper has been to discover how well a theoretical framework trying to explain party system institutionalization in East Central Europe travels as an understanding of party politics in the Black Sea, it also aims to compare how well (or bad) party systems in this region are doing in comparison to other previous experience of transitional democratization. Hence, the primary interest of the current section is to check whether party systems in region analysed in this paper are more (or less) institutionalized than other 'Third Wave' and post-colonial European democracies. Secondly, to examine if differences in the degree of PSI found in other newly democratized European regions can also be explained using the same institutional and sociological 'causal' factors.

[Table 2]

Looking at table 2, which not only displays the levels of systemic institutionalization but the average degree of party institutionalization, parliamentary fragmentation, parliamentarism and cleavage cumulation found in five different European (newly democratic) regions (i.e. Southern and East Central Europe, together with the Baltics, the Balkans and the above-analyzed Black Sea region), I can state that, at least at first sight, the theoretical framework developed in Casal Bértoa (forthcoming) and here 'successfully' applied also works in the case of most new European democracies. Indeed, especially when looking at the extreme cases (i.e. Southern Europe and the Baltics) it is possible to observe an almost perfect association between systemic institutionalization and each of the previously studied independent variables. The only exception seems to be the type of regime. But even this hypothesis that links parliamentarism with systemic institutionalization becomes rather plausible when we look at the ranking of the countries in terms of systemic institutionalization in each of

the above-cited European regions. Thus, while in Southern and East Central Europe the three most institutionalized party systems are to be respectively found in Malta, Greece and Spain as well as in Hungary and the Czech Republic; in the other three regions, parliamentary regimes are always ranked at the top, either at the first place (as Estonia in the Baltics) or the second (as Albania in the Balkans or Moldova and Turkey in the Black Sea). Latvia constitutes the only exception to the previous statement, as even weakly institutionalized Kosovo features much better than other semi-presidential democracies (e.g. Lithuania, Poland, Russia or Ukraine).

Conclusion

In sum, this cross-national as well as cross-regional analysis reveals strong support for the theoretical framework developed in Casal Bértoa (forthcoming): namely, party systems characterised by high party institutionalization, low number of legislative parties, parliamentarian regimes and high cleavage cumulation score significantly higher in terms of institutionalization than more fractionalized, organizationally less rooted, semi-presidential, and politically cross-cut party systems.

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Tables and Figures

Figure 1. Black Sea party systems in comparative perspective⁷

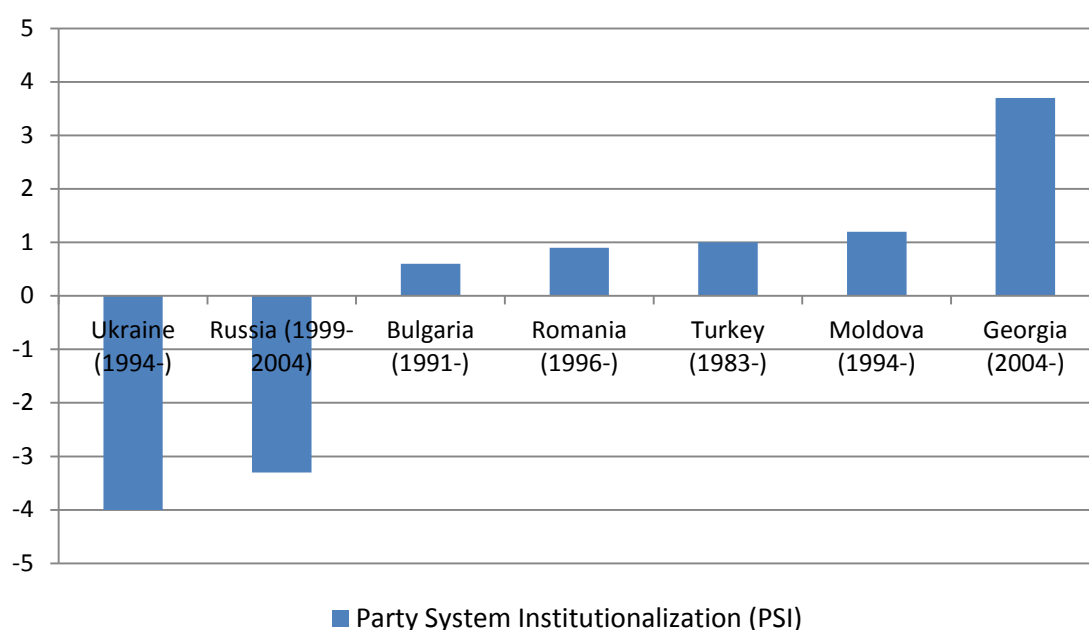


Table 1. Sources of PSI in the Black Sea: institutional and sociological

Country	Period	PI	ENPP	ToR	CC
<i>Georgia</i>	2004-2011	14.4	1.4	0.5	0.86
<i>Moldova</i>	1994-2011	13.3	2.7	0.8	0.88
<i>Turkey</i>	1983-2011	19	3	1	0.91
<i>Romania</i>	1996-2011	14.3	3.7	0.5	0.93
<i>Bulgaria</i>	1991-2011	12.6	3.1	0.5	0.85
<i>Russia</i>	1999-2004	7	5.9	0.5	0.92

⁷ All the countries included in the current study score 6 or higher on the *polity2* variable from the Polity IV dataset.

<i>Ukraine</i>	1994-2011	12.2	6.9	0.5	0.83
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Source: Gallagher's website (2012) and Selway (2009)

Table 2. Sources of PSI in new "Third Wave" and post-colonial democracies

Region⁸	iPSI	PI	ENPP	ToR	CC⁹
<i>Southern Europe</i>	2.3	57.2	2.7	0.88	0.84
<i>The Balkans</i>	0.5	17.3	3.6	0.64	0.85
<i>East Central Europe</i>	-0.4	11.9	4	0.79	0.87
<i>Black Sea</i>	-1	13.3	3.8	0.63	0.9
<i>Baltic States</i>	-2.2	10.6	4.8	0.83	0.9

Source: Own calculations based on Gallagher's website (2012) and Selway (2009)

⁸ Southern Europe includes Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Portugal and Spain; the Balkan region comprises Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia; the Visegrad countries (i.e. the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) are considered to form East Central Europe; finally, the Baltic region refers to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

⁹ Regional-economic: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Ethnic-economic: Bulgaria, Romania and Russia. Religious-economic: Turkey.