

BROTHERS IN ARMS?

Party-blocs and party system closure

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Sport activities are either individual or team sports. The former ones do not require cooperative skills, the latter ones do. Considering political parties as individuals, one may ask the question: is party politics an individual or a team-sport? In other words: what is the role of cross-party cooperation in shaping party competition and what do analysts gain from treating party systems as if composed of teams of parties? These questions are obviously particularly relevant in multiparty systems, but some of their aspects may be applicable to the - extremely few – two-party systems as well.

While we are not aware of systematic studies on the subject, it is obvious that party systems differ from each other concerning the readiness of parties to cooperate and concerning the average stability of party cooperations. The persistence of particular forms of team behavior is inherently related to party system institutionalization because one can speak of institutionalized systems only if parties confront each other and collaborate with each other in a structured way (Mainwaring, 1998; Casal Bértoa, 2012). In those instances in which party alliances exist and they are stable, the party system itself acquires stability (Rokkan, 1970; Mair, 2001). This stabilizing role can be particularly important if party identifications are not well entrenched or if the parties do not represent well-organized social groups, and therefore the stability of party politics cannot be based on the embeddedness of parties in their respective social context.

In spite of its relevance, the topic of cooperation among parties is a relatively under-researched topic, with the possible exception of two aspects of the phenomenon: cartel-parties and government coalitions. The first body of work (Katz and Mair, 1995, 2009; Biezen and Kopecký, 2014, etc.) emphasizes the collision of established parties against potential challengers and the growing overlap between these parties and the state. The second literature (Strøm, 1990; Laver and Schofield, 1998, etc.) seeks to explain why governments are based on particular combinations of parties.

Rather than working with these two bodies of literature the present paper aims at contributing to three other, potentially equally relevant, but less developed, fields within comparative politics.

The first field is the research on party blocs. This research does not have a strong and distinct theoretical layer, but some parts of the literature on political cleavages and party families, and the descriptive studies on specific party systems, especially the

Scandinavian and Benelux party systems, belong here. While the coalition literature focuses on single decisions, i.e., to enter, or to be allowed to enter, a government coalition, the party bloc literature goes beyond the governmental arena and deals with long-term association between parties. The second field is the research of the specific cooperative techniques. Most recently especially the work on pre-electoral coalitions (Golder, Ibenskas) belong here, but again studies that describe specific party relations are relevant. Finally, the third field is the study of party system closure: the institutionalization of party relations in the governmental arena. The latter concept has been used to grasp the predictability of party systems (Casal Bértoa, 2015; Casal Bértoa and Mair, 2012), but it also covers team behavior in party politics in the sense that it demands loyalty from parties towards each other in constructing government-coalitions.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part conceptualizes party cooperation and illustrates the different logics of cooperation with real-life examples. The second part introduces the concept of party system closure, discusses some conceptual and methodological challenges concerning the concept and examines its relationships to other aspects of party system institutionalization. The third part investigates on the sample of eleven East Central European new democracies how wide the field of cooperation is and how the presence of cooperative behavior is related to the general dynamics of party systems. In this last section we will describe the trajectory of the respective party systems by focusing on the central concepts of the paper: blocs, poles, electoral alliances, governing coalitions and party system closure.

The paper has no ambition to test specific hypotheses. It is rather an attempt at enriching the vocabulary of party system analysis and at demonstrating the utility of a party cooperation-perspective.

I. Blocs

The place of ‘party blocs’ in the conceptual network of party system analysis

Party systems are defined by parties and their relations. To the extent that one separates party systems from parties, one is left with relationships or interactions as unique, defining features of systems (Randall and Svåsand 2002, Casal Bértoa, 2011)¹. The study of party-relationships is, however, rather difficult. They are multi-faceted, elusive phenomena, unfolding in many arenas and not easily lending themselves to numeric representation. As a result, a gap exists between the conceptualization and the measurement of party systems. While the conceptualization is typically done in terms of ‘patterns’, ‘interdependencies’ and ‘boundaries’ (Sartori 1976), the measurement of party systems typically looks at aspects such as the ideological distances between parties, the number of parties, the change in the electoral support between elections and the distribution of electoral support across parties. These indicators provide relevant information about the logic of party politics, but they do not refer directly to party relations: that is, how parties compete/colligate/collaborate, whether parties are friends or foes, whether they stay loyal or betray each other, etc. In other words, the standard indicators remain silent about the way political parties “interact”. While the nature of the party relationships are known by the local citizens and even analyzed by local scholars, this information is rarely stored in the form that could be of much use for comparativists. In contrast, the two central concepts of the paper, party blocs and party system closure, directly refer to party-interactions and thereby help us to understand the functioning of party systems.

Let’s start with party blocs. The perhaps best known academic work dealing with party blocs is the classic study on the stabilization of European party systems by Bartolini and Mair (1990). But, in fact, this study used the term in a rather particular way. By blocs (or cleavage camps) the authors meant parties which share common historical origin and are on the same side of a cleavage (1990:41, 43). Cleavage, in turn, was defined as a

¹ “The *system of interactions* resulting from inter-party competition” is the definition given by Sartori (1976: 44).

dividing line between two groups. Block volatility was “the amount of electoral interchange occurring across the line which divides parties which represent the opposite sides of a cleavage.” (1990:41).

The definition anchored in social structure served well Bartolini and Mair, who analyzed the cleavage which happened to be also the principal dividing line of party politics in the studied era: the working-class cleavage. But if one wishes to utilize the term more broadly, then one needs to decouple it from the social structural element. Our suggestion is to replace the reference to sociological basis with a reference to cooperation (which was explicitly left out by the authors from the original definition). Accordingly, by blocs we mean parties that tend to cooperate with each other based upon some common political identity. Groups of parties that have the realistic objective to capture the leadership of the executive (prime minister or president) are considered as major blocs, those who have no such possibility as minor ones.² Cooperation can mean both pre-electoral and governmental cooperation.

It is important to emphasize that both components (cooperation and identity) are necessary. One cannot identify blocs automatically, simply based on participation in governmental or pre-electoral coalitions. If cooperation happens while parties preserve a distinct identity, then it is not legitimate of blocs. Especially in case of grand coalitions, when the political message of the cooperation is that opposing camps work together for an overarching purpose, the actual coalition is no basis for bloc-formation. And members of the bloc can occasionally campaign against each other because the concept doesn't require continuous cooperation but rather the presence of readiness to cooperate in a long-term: a cooperation-potential.

Identity overlaps with ideology. The ideological choice of coalition partners increases the bloc-logic, pragmatic partner-selection decreases it (Deegan-Krause and Enyedi 2010). Party blocs are relevant in those countries where the coalitional alternatives can be predicted from historical and ideological patterns (Enyedi and Casal

² In an earlier paper (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2011) we had not differentiated between major and minor blocs, and the purpose of capturing the premiership was considered as a general requirement for blocs. The current differentiation allows for more precise descriptions.

Bértoa 2011). But it is important to keep in mind that identity can have more than one source. Next to ideological and social factors, one needs to point to cooperation itself as a potential source of identity. The partners of cooperation may develop converging self-images and, more importantly, the environment can start regarding them as forming a separate unit, as belonging together. Such developments can be bases of actual bloc-formation.

In countries in which political identities are crystallized the separate identities of the parties can survive even long-term cooperation. But in less settled context, for example in new democracies or in societies undergoing large-scale changes, the identity can be, partly at least, a product of coalitions. If a social-democratic party participates in right wing coalitions then it may acquire a right-wing image even of the policies it stands for within the coalition are left-wing, and this fact can restrict its future coalition-choices.

This fact potentially seriously complicates the empirical work on party blocs: the establishment of the bloc-boundaries and the analysis of the relationship between coalitions and blocs. The statement that in some countries actual coalitions are based on bloc-logic obviously means little if membership in coalitions tends to lead to common bloc identity. Fortunately, the development of bloc identity based on cooperation is in fact not a frequent phenomenon. In those countries where it happens the splitting of the trajectory of the political system into distinct phases, or separate party systems, within which the identity of the parties is fixed, can solve the problem.

One can speak about the cartel-party phenomenon when a continuous cooperation in government turned the governing parties into a bloc in the eyes of the public and the excluded parties. In this the common identity is thin (we are the responsible parties), and the parties themselves dispute the existence of a bloc. Therefore, this is not an equilibrium situation. But the consequences of the external image can be large. Those voters who regard the established parties as belonging to one bloc can either abstain from voting (as it is not relevant which of the bloc-parties will win) or support parties which have the image of providing a genuine alternative.

There are three other concepts that come close to the bloc³-concept advanced here, but which we suggest to keep separate: party family, party alliance and pole. Party family refers to groups of parties that share origin, worldview and membership in international party federations (Beyme 1985, Mair and Mudde 1998, etc). Alliance, or electoral coalition, refers to a concrete and time-bound form of cooperation.

The third concept, pole, is understood here to refer to the fundamental ideological-governmental alternatives of a country. If the question is whether the country will be governed by a left/wing or a right-wing government, then the country is bipolar. If a centrist or an agrarian government is also possible, then there are three poles. Accordingly, some parties can be singled out as pole-parties (also called elsewhere as core parties or bloc leaders, Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2011): those parties which have the strength to determine the principal policies of the government. In most systems this means parties that can win the office of the head of the executive. Such parties are able to define the principal stakes of the electoral competition by turning elections into a choice between the governmental and ideological alternatives offered by them.

To illuminate the specific meaning of these terms take the examples of Israel and the Netherlands. The Israeli party system, one of the most fragmented systems in the world, is typically discussed in terms of four blocs: left-wing parties, right-wing parties, religious parties and Arabic parties (Mendilow, 2003). The Arabic parties, for example, form a minor bloc, but they do not form a pole (they have no chance to determine the government) and do not constitute a party family (their ideologies differ). But they share a common identity (Arabic) and, depending on the electoral incentives, they sometimes form electoral cartels or alliances.

The Dutch party system is traditionally described as three-polar, because the governments used to be led either by the Christian-Democrats, Labour, or the conservative-liberals (VVD). The radical-liberals (D66) belonged to the same family as VVD (they both have membership in ALDE, etc.), but they used to be part of the bloc of Labour because they both had a progressive identity and they preferred to cooperate with

³ 'Camp' is used synonymously to 'bloc'.

each other in government, and sometimes in the campaign too. D66, in itself, did not constitute a pole as it had no chance to become a senior partner in a government coalition.

The clustering of parties into blocs is primarily a matter of elite-decisions, but the association of parties influences the identification of voters too. In countries in which party blocs operate the citizens often develop bloc identities (Mair, 2006). Studies in political socialization has shown that in such countries those children who differ from their parents in terms of voting behavior most often will vote for another party within the same bloc (Ventura 2001). Bartolini and Mair (1990:28-29) suggested to differentiate bloc volatility from general electoral volatility exactly because in the mental map of voters the boundaries of blocs often appear more sharply than the boundaries between individual parties.

Our operationalization of blocs departs from Bartolini and Mair's in that we allow for more than two blocs to exist and allow for the existence of parties that do not belong to blocs. This way of approaching the issue creates practical problems for measuring bloc-volatility, and probably this is why Bartolini and Mair opted for a simpler solution. But this simpler solution works only if cleavages impact all parties and divide them into two groups. This is however, often not the case. The working-class cleavage, for example, may be irrelevant for an ethnic party.

Forms of cooperation

Party friendships, typically, materialize through joint electoral lists, party mergers and (pre-) electoral coalitions, but the list of cooperative techniques is in fact longer than often recognized. For example, the withdrawal of candidates in each other's favor is clearly a friendly gesture between parties, but in some instances running a candidate can also help another party. Major parties often benefit from the actions of minor parties who split the principal rival's support. The solidarity between parties can be also cemented by the sharing of resources such as electorally relevant information, patronage, campaign infrastructure, financial support or media outlet. The formulation of state rules (regulations of campaign finance, of legislative procedures, etc.) can also turn into a bloc-building activity if the rules are shaped with the purpose of helping parties that compete jointly.

The cooperation of parties is often asymmetric, sometimes even leading to situations in which one party dominates the internal decision-making of another party. Why would any party allow such an infringement on its autonomy? The most typical reason is the lack of resources necessary for an independent participation in the competition. For example, a party, like the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), may lack the territorial coverage necessary for attaining national relevance. Lack of financial resources (e.g. the Labour Party in Poland), the affiliation of the party with an ethnic minority (e.g. the Democratic Party of Turks in Macedonia) or a narrow issue profile (e.g. the Portuguese “Greens”) can also necessitate the goodwill of a stronger player. And, of course, sheer lack of popularity (e.g. the Reform Party in Latvia) may also motivate parties to establish alliances that can help to secure entry into the legislature.

Large, popular parties may also need the cooperation of smaller units. Their most obvious ambition is to bridge the gap between their size and the threshold that is necessary to access executive power. Affiliation with a small party can benefit them by bringing in international connections, expertise in specific fields, general reputation or access to otherwise inaccessible social groups. The Slovak Smer is a case in point. Smer has reached the status of a major party very early on in its career, but had no membership in any European party family and was widely regarded as populist and irresponsible. By initiating first cooperation and then merger with the Social Democrats (SD), a minor party in Slovakia, Smer gained membership in a European party family and a more reliable image.

Another possible logic is exemplified by the Hungarian Fidesz. Fidesz started as a liberal party. When it tried to re-establish itself as a conservative party it was confronted by an understandable suspicion among many traditional conservatives. The party’s answer was the development of a close collaboration with minor right wing parties. First this cooperation consisted of coordinated nomination of candidates, then of joint electoral lists. The partners of Fidesz, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the Christian-Democratic Party (KDNP), were small and dwindling electoral forces but possessed genuine conservative pedigree.

The collaboration of Fidesz and KDNP illustrates some further potential fruits of cross-party cooperation. There was a period, around 1996 and 1997, when KDNP turned

against Fidesz, in spite of the pro-Fidesz sympathies of a large part of the party elite. This new strategy has split the party into two, with the ‘party in public office’ largely defecting to Fidesz. In 2002, due to the electoral failure of the ‘party-in-central-office’ and due to a favorable court decision concerning the legality of the 1997 party congress, an opportunity opened up in front of the defectors to re-seize the party label. With the encouragement of Fidesz they grasped this opportunity, in spite of the low popularity of the KDNP-brand. Since then KDNP has never moved above 1% in the polls. In this regard the project could be considered a failure. But in other respects it succeeded spectacularly. In the current, 2014-2018, legislature, for example, KDNP has the fourth largest parliamentary faction and more than one fifth of the ministers belong to the party. This is so because Fidesz provides the KDNP leaders with safe seats and high placement on the electoral list. Fidesz benefits from the deal too. First, the association with a party that has “Christian” in its name is symbolically very valuable, especially given the original ‘non-Christian’⁴ background of Fidesz. Second, as a result of the cooperation Fidesz has not one but two voices in the parliament and in the various bodies established by the parliament. This affects the allocation of speaking time, of parliamentary offices, of party finance, and of the memberships in boards that supervise public media, the electoral procedures or various policy-sectors.

Of course, in order to assure that the shared resources are not used against Fidesz, KDNP had to be deprived from its autonomy. The fact that in national elections the KDNP candidates are either chosen by, or at least need the endorsement of, the Fidesz leadership illustrates how far a party can go in accepting the supremacy of another party. Such extreme cases are rare, but the close cooperation between parties is rarely symmetric.

Whether parties cooperate or not depends, to a large extent, on the institutional environment, particularly on the electoral system. Electoral rules define the thresholds that parties need to clear in order to achieve electoral success. The electoral coordination literature (e.g. Duverger, 1954; Katz 1980; Cox, 1997) has found that the relationship

⁴ Fidesz originally began as an anticlerical party.

between electoral systems and the number of parties is governed by quasi-universal rules. As opposed to that, a cursory look at party-alliances shows that the degree and the forms of cooperation among existing parties depends more on local context and norms.

The relationship between electoral systems and the coagulation of parties into blocs is anyway contradictory. Highly proportional systems allow small parties to enter parliament on their own, and thereby can make cooperation unnecessary, but in very fragmented systems there is a particular need for coordination in the legislature.

The various logics of cooperation

Party blocs and institutionalized alliances are not hundred percent identical with each other, although they typically overlap to a large degree. Members of a particular bloc may compete with each other and occasionally even cooperate with members of other blocs (e.g. the Czech Christian and Democratic Union; the Irish Labour Party; or the Luxembourgish Democratic Party). But if groups of parties are regarded to share ideology or social support then the voters and the general environment may expect them to cooperate. This expectation may be so strong that non-cooperative strategies may simply lack legitimacy. This is particularly so if the joint target-electorate of the parties is sharply defined, as in the case of parties representing ethnic groups (e.g. in Slovakia or Macedonia), and if the threshold of representation can be achieved only by pulling all votes.

The party bloc literature emphasizes social and ideological motives (Bartolini and Mair, 1990). The social content behind parties is provided by social aspects of cleavages, while the political commonality is provided by the membership in the same party family. The label 'working-class parties' refers to the first, while the label 'socialist parties' to the second. As opposed to the bloc-research, the literature on the cooperation of specific parties emphasizes rational calculations. While the explanations provided by the bloc-approach are based on the logic of convergence, the latter models are based on the logic of complementarity: only those parties are expected to cooperate which can exchange resources.

In real life the two logics often mix and one can even find instances when the changes in the relationships of parties reshape the bloc-structure of the party system and even the cleavage structure of the society. Take the example of the Netherlands. The

Dutch society used to be composed of four sharply opposed subcultures, the Catholics, the Protestants, the Socialists and the middle class and secular Liberals. The Protestants were the most fragmented, and therefore they were represented by a number of parties. The two principal Protestant parties were ARP and CHU. The Catholics were united behind KVP. These three parties cooperated in government ever since the dawn of Dutch parliamentary democracy, but their cooperation was meant as summit diplomacy: as the council of the leaders of distinct sub-societies. At the same time, from the very beginning there was the idea around that confessional parties may constitute a unique and unified bloc. Both their common interests (e.g. state finance of religious schools) and their common Christian worldview implied a belonging together. The idea of a separate confessional bloc was originally primarily supported by the ARP politicians and opposed strongly by the CHU leaders, who harbored stronger anti-Catholic feelings. But changes in the social context and the loss of votes finally convinced the parties to form a formal alliance in 1974 and, for the first time, to run under a common label in 1977. Since then their electoral cooperation transformed into a cohesive party, on the basis of which a new, Christian-Democratic identity developed, and this political process contributed to the weakening of denominational boundaries in the society.

The CDA's example (see also: Icelandic Social Democratic Alliance, the French Union for a Popular Movement, the Italian Democratic Party, the Latvian National Alliance or the Unity, etc.), also shows that close cooperation between parties can easily culminate into the dissolution of the pre-existing individual identities. At the same time parties also have the possibility to preserve separate identities within the organization, in the form of various sub-structures. The internally structured, heterogeneous parties and the closely-knit party alliances represent similar configurations but the impact of these two formats on party competition may differ. The former is more likely to break up under pressure, and therefore the stability of governments can be directly influenced by the format of cooperation. Therefore, political science needs to analyze why one option is chosen over another.

Party federations may also work as franchise companies, with one central and some peripheral parties. In franchise systems there is a main organization that builds up and maintains the brand, sets standards for the production, directs the national campaign,

and participates in governing, while the individual franchises deliver the vote on the ground. The difference between the cooperation analyzed here and the stratarchical parties discussed by Katz and Mair (1995) and by Carty (2004) is that the local units maintain a separate label for themselves and use the central brand only for specific purposes and at specific periods. The way how regional parties connect to the Latvian Union of Greens and Farmers, discussed in the last section of the paper, exemplifies the work of such a franchise.

II. CLOSURE

One eminent arena in which the team-behavior of parties can be studied is the governmental arena. While the coalition-literature, as mentioned above, focuses on single time points and tries to explain why certain government coalitions are formed, the party bloc perspective requires that we look for the long-term repetition of party combinations. The concept that helps us to both conceptualize and operationalize the relevance of team-behavior is the one of party system closure, originally introduced by Peter Mair.

Mair (1997: 206, 2001, 2007) proposed three major components of party system closure. The first is alternation in government. In this regard three patterns exist: wholesale-, partial-, and non-alternation. In the first case the incumbent government leaves the office in its entirety and is replaced by a completely different group of parties. The second option materializes when the new cabinet is a mixture of parties from inside and outside of the previous government. The third possibility is marked by a complete absence of alternation, as the same parties remain in control of government over an extended period of time being displaced neither wholly nor partially. The first and the third option imply the closure of the governmental arena, the second implies openness.

The second major component of the model, the familiarity of government formulae, shows whether the partisan composition of the governments is innovative or familiar. If there are stable groups of parties that tend to govern together, then familiarity, i.e. closure, prevails. If there is a tendency towards previously unseen party compositions, the system is considered to be open, innovative.

The final component is access to government. The relevant difference on this aspect is between, on one hand, systems in which all parties have the opportunity to participate in government and, on the other hand, configurations in which some of the

parties are permanently excluded. Closed governments consist exclusively of parties that governed in the past, the open ones include, or are even dominated, by novices (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi 2014).

There are two conceptual/methodological issues that we wish to raise here concerning the measurement of closure. We raise these issues not because we have perfect solutions for the dilemmas, but because talking about these issues allows us to reflect on the nature of party systems.

The chief weapon is surprise

The first issue concerns the phenomenon of predictability, or familiarity, a phenomenon that party system closure is supposed to tap (Mair, 2001). Considering the three components of closure, this link to predictability is least obvious in the case of alternation of government. Governments that continue after an election clearly strengthen the 'familiarity' of the system. The wholesale change of governments is also associated with familiarity in the sense that it occurs most often in two-party systems, where two standard alternatives compete and alternate. But wholesale change can also bring 'surprise' if the new government consists of a party, or of parties, that haven't governed before (e.g. Bulgaria in 2001 and 2009; Poland in 1993, 1997 or 2005; etc.). The third option of alternation, partial turnover, also has an ambivalent status in this regard. Most typically it indicates lack of predictability, as is occurs when some parties have no fixed position in some standard governmental alternative but can switch allegiance from one to another. But under certain scenarios this pattern can also become predictable, for example, if a centrist party (e.g the Free Democratic Party in Germany) regularly moves between partnerships with a left-wing and a right-wing party.

The other two components of closure, the access of new parties to the government⁵ and the innovation in coalition compositions, are explicitly about the

⁵ Following Mair we consider the first appearance of a party in government indicator of openness, or using the terminology of subjectivity: a surprise. But this is of course not equally accurate under all conditions. For example in Spain in 1996 PP took over the government. Since PP was the principal opposition party for a long time, this wasn't a move towards unpredictability but the beginning of a very predictable form of alternation between PSOE and PP.

predictability, or familiarity, of the system. In other words, closure is largely, although not entirely, about predictability versus deviation from predictability: surprise.

Using terms such as surprise reminds us that the concept has a subjective, psychological aspect. In order to estimate the degree of closure we should be looking for phenomena that surprise primarily not the analysts, but the participants: the voters and the politicians.

Subjective aspects play the smallest role in measuring alternation. Wholesale or partial: these are objectively observable outcomes. The subjective perspective is somewhat more relevant for access. Although the researcher only needs to determine whether a party has been earlier in government or not, this task raises the issue of party continuity. In many countries parties often change names, split up and fuse with other parties, and therefore the assessment of party continuity is not always easy (Bolleyer, 2013; Barnea and Rahat, 2011).

But subjectivity represents the largest challenge for the familiarity of government formula. It is, of course, not difficult to establish whether a particular partisan composition has been tried before (at least not difficult if one disregards the problems of party continuity and of data availability). But the question emerges: how far one should go back in history when looking for precedents? If by familiarity (vs. surprise) one means psychological phenomena, then one should investigate what the participants consider 'surprising' or 'familiar'. Lacking direct information on this, one needs to define what may plausibly be seen by the participants to belong to one of these categories.

It would be easier to answer this question if we knew what is the frame of reference of the participants, how far does their memory go back in time? Will they consider a coalition familiar if that coalition existed once, let's say 50 years ago? Most likely further in time a coalition-formula was tried, less it is remembered. Therefore one may want to weight the relevance of past coalitions by the number of years that passed since that particular coalition was formed, and thereby discounting the examples from the distant past. But it is also very likely that the trajectory of parties and party systems is conceptualized in a non-continuous form by the participants. For example, they may find the coalition of socialists and communists surprising, even if these two parties have been together in office e.g. twenty years ago, simply because the context has changed so much

since then (e.g. the Cold War ended). And the same participants may find the coalition of the conservatives and the liberals familiar, even though these parties haven't governed together for three decades, because the contextual changes have not affected this party dyad.

It would be also plausible to assume that the typical participant's memory runs back until the time of his or her political socialization. This intuition could be then converted into a moving (e.g. 25-30) year time frame. In this case, in order to establish familiarity vs. surprise, one would need to check whether a particular party was part of a government, or a particular coalition was practiced, in the previous three decades.

Of course, a particular cooperation of parties can be found surprising not only because it has never happened before but because it contradicts one's expectations based on the profiles of these parties (e.g. Syriza and Anel in Greece). This aspect could be operationalized in terms of policy differences among the parties, defining surprise as the cooperation of ideologically or programmatically distinct units. This avenue is practically attractive (though not for distant time periods) due to the wealth of data produced by manifesto research, expert surveys, textual analyses and mass surveys. But this solution would be also far from ideal as it would disregard the widespread practice of ideologically not connected governments. Probably the previously discussed concept, the party bloc, can help us here too, at least where parties operate within blocs. Those coalitions could be regarded as surprising which include parties that belong to different blocs.

While searching for the most efficient solution to this surprise-issue, we can tackle the problem by confining our analysis to relatively short time-spans of relatively similar party systems and by complementing the statistical analyses with country-studies. In the second and third part of the paper we follow these strategies.

Time and closure

The second challenge that needs to be confronted when conceptualizing and operationalizing closure stems from the fact that the indicators refer to specific developments at specific time-points (e.g. was the government-change in France in 1995 in line with the traditions or not), while the purpose of the exercise is rather to say

something about the nature of the party system, which is probably influenced, but is not determined, by the specific measured developments.

This contradiction does not emerge concerning many other aspects of party systems, or at least not so sharply. Take fragmentation. A particular figure collected from a particular year (e.g. 5.3. as the effective number of parties in Austria in 2013) expresses well the degree of fragmentation in that particular time point. As opposed to that one would be hesitant to consider a party system open (i.e. de-institutionalized and unpredictable) just because in a particular year the composition of a government was completely new. Even more obviously, the fact that in a particular year nothing happens in terms of government composition, i.e. the pattern of the previous year is repeated, does not mean that the system is hundred percent closed.

One solution is to use cumulative index, an index that takes all the years of a particular time-period into account, assuming that the state of affairs in a particular year is best portrayed by the average of all the years within the time-period. If 19 years out of 20 were spent in a predictable fashion, then the party system can be considered to be a closed, institutionalized system even during the 20th, more turbulent year.

Cumulative indices, however, also have their problematic aspects. First, as opposed to the year-by-year indices, they change only marginally from one year to another. The weight of the past is overwhelming, especially if long time-periods are examined. In other words, larger time periods come with smaller variance in values.

The second consequence is that the index will typically show high and increasing level of closure. This is simply a function of the fact that in most countries and in most non-election years the governments do not change. By experiencing a number of such 'normal' years then the party system (or rather the index) accumulates a capital of closure. Since the ratio of turbulent years are smaller than the proportion of normal years even in the most unpredictable and chaotic democracies, we are bound to find high closure figures. And indeed, existing empirical analyses show that most countries end up with cumulative closure indices, which theoretically vary from 0 to 100, with values between 80 and 100, and the most typical trajectory of a country is one of gradual increase.

This fact can be considered to be a problem, but can be also accepted and welcomed as a genuine reflection of reality. The high index values confront us with the (sometimes forgotten) fact that democracies possess highly structured and stable political systems. Actually this is the message of volatility figures too: while they can also range between 0 and 100, the actual figures typically come from a 0 to 20 range. Anything above that is normally considered extraordinary.

As far as the issue of increasing values is concerned, one must emphasize that this is a weak, far from deterministic regularity: a few years of innovation and turbulence can halt or reverse the process. Additionally, one may argue that the tendency towards higher figures also reflects reality. While party system institutionalization is not a “unilinear or irreversible” process (Stockton 2001: 95, Diamond, 1997, Huntington 1968, Powell, 1982, Mainwaring 1998), any form of consolidation requires habituation, which, in turn, requires time (Converse, 1962). The increasing figures of cumulative indices reflect the fact that from the point of view of closure the typical party system is similar to the brain of the child: it tends to become more structured as years go by even if the child has serious learning difficulties. Party systems that lack a tendency towards closure do not survive long, consider, for instance, Finland (1917-1930), France (1848-1851, 1946-1958), Germany (1919-1933), Latvia (1923-1934) or Estonia (1921-1934).

Both described approaches to index-construction have, therefore, some appeal. But both of them can lead to counterintuitive results. According to the year-by-year closure index, in 2005 Norway, one of the most institutionalized party systems in Europe, had a value of 58. Spain, another stable party system, had an even more extreme score in 1996, 33, suggesting a particularly open system. At the same time according to the cumulative closure index in 2010 United Kingdom had a value of 98.5, which indicates almost perfect closure, in spite of the fact that in that year the country was experimenting with a conservative-liberal coalition government and made a major step away from the two-party system format.

Intuitively one would argue that reality is between these two indices: both past and present matter. In line with this intuition, below we introduce a mixed index, one that gives equal weight to present and past. This index averages the year-by-year closure index with the cumulative closure index of the previous year, implying that a party

system's closure is equally shaped by the characteristics of the current year and by the entire preceding time period under consideration. As it will be seen in the graphs below, the year-by year index fluctuates wildly, the cumulative index varies little across the years, while the mixed index is indeed in between.

Closure: indicator of, and contributor to, institutionalization

Closure is supposed to reflect well the overall level of institutionalization of a party system. We examine whether this is the case here by relating the cumulative closure index to such standard parameters of party systems as electoral volatility, number of new parties, age of the party system and electoral fragmentation.

The sample for this validation exercise consists of 34⁶ European countries. The starting point is either 1990 or, if in 1990 the country hasn't been a competitive democracy according to Freedom House, the first year of democratic party competition. The endpoint, in all instances, is December 2014.

The first question is how closure is related to the age of the party systems. The sample is very heterogeneous from the point of view of age of party systems, spanning from countries such as Denmark, with 1911 as starting date, to Montenegro, with 2007. The correlation between the cumulative closure index and party system age indicates a strong relationship: .52⁷.

The covariation with the average number of new parties (parties that receive at least 0.5% of the vote) and with average electoral volatility is even stronger: .74 and .71. Closure, age, electoral stability and lack of new parties seem to be tightly bundled together into a general package of institutionalization. More instability at the electoral level goes together with more instability in government.

⁶ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom

⁷ If one considers all the 43 existing European democracies, and calculates the closure index from the very beginning in each case, then the correlation between age and closure is .44. On the other hand, the relationship between closure and the number of years that are covered by the dataset of 34 countries (e.g. 24 years for Germany or Hungary but only 7 for Montenegro) is not significant.

⁸ All correlations reported in the text are significant at the .05 level unless otherwise noted.

Electoral volatility and governmental closure can be related in two simple, mechanical ways: the (1) changes in the balance of power (i.e. electoral support) among existing parties and/or (2) the disappearance of old parties from the parliament and the appearance of new ones may exclude the possibility of the continuation of old coalition patterns even if no dyad of parties has actually changed relationship: no foes became friends or vice versa. In order to find out whether the latter mechanic link is behind the covariation of volatility and closure one needs to separate internal and external volatility, the former meaning vote-change among established parties, the latter meaning vote-shifts between established and new parties. This we can do on a sample of 14 East-Central European countries for which Powell and Tucker (2009) provided the data on the different forms of volatility. These data are averages of all the elections held prior to 2007. Since the number of cases is very small, it is not surprising that the correlation coefficient concerning the relationship between closure and volatility is smaller than in the previous data-set, $-.29$, and is non-significant. More important is from our perspective that extra-system volatility proves to be unrelated to closure ($.07$, n.s.), while intra-system volatility produces a large and statistically significant correlation: $.6$ (sig. $.02$). It seems that the openness vs. closure of the governmental arena is mainly related to the movement of voters among existing parties and not to the shift of support to new parties, in spite of the fact that the replacement of old parties with new ones can have a direct and mechanical effect on the closure index.

Returning to the sample of 34 party systems, we can report that closure was found to be inversely related to fragmentation both at electoral level ($-.43$), and at parliamentary ($-.32$) level⁹. The weaker correlations do not undermine the status of closure as an indicator of institutionalization because fragmentation itself is supposed to be only loosely related to the consolidation/institutionalization package. Since Lijphart early work it is well known that fragmented countries can also institutionalize. What is

⁹ The idea is that the lower the number of parties: (1) the lower the transaction costs and the potential conflicts are likely to be; (2) the fewer the electoral shifts, with the implications this may have for the balance of power between parties; and (3) the lower the number of possible interactions and, hence, the greater the simplicity/stability of the patterns of cooperation and collaboration (Casal Bértoa, 2015).

surprising, to some extent, is that the (effective) number of electoral parties predicts closure better than parliamentary fragmentation does, although the immediate environment for coalition-building is provided by the latter.

As discussed above, closure is a composite index. One can understand better the mechanisms behind these relationships if one zooms in on its components: alternation, access and familiarity. Re-running the correlations discussed above with these components, a number of interesting patterns were detected. First, the number of new parties is related to closure primarily via access (-.79) and formula (-.76), less through alternation (-.47). The same applies to electoral volatility (-.76, -.75, -.43). Fragmentation, on the other hand, has no significant relationship with access and formula. It is related only to alternation (electoral fragmentation: -.39, parliamentary fragmentation: -.41). That is, operating in a fragmented environment does not go together with more easily penetrable governments or more innovative coalition-building. It rather increases the likelihood of partial government changes.

The analysis of closure-components showed that the appearance of new parties and electoral volatility shape closure primarily by forcing governments to admit new parties, while fragmentation influences closure primarily by increasing the chances of partial turnover.

Regressing closure on the examined variables one gets, as expected, a very high R^2 , 79%. The conclusion must be that closure is very well embedded in the general process of institutionalization.

Of course, the fact that aggregated mean values of time-periods are related to each other does not necessarily mean that these variable are also moving together within smaller time-units. To get a more accurate picture of the dynamics of the relationships we need year-based data. Fortunately we have the needed information for eleven East-Central European EU-member countries. The starting years are: 1990 (Hungary), 1991 (Bulgaria, Poland), 1992 (Estonia), 1993 (Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia), 1994 (Latvia), 1996 (Romania), and 2000 (Croatia). The endpoint for all cases is 2014. Altogether 60 elections are covered in this time-span. The sample consists of 228 year-country units.

Closure figures were available for all years within this time-span. Fragmentation, the number of new parties and volatility were, of course, measured per election. Since we were interested in whether changes in the level of closure are followed or preceded by electoral instability, we introduced the variable ‘volatility at the next election’. This variable was assigned to years.

For this limited sample all the three, above discussed, operationalizations of closure were available: year-by-year, cumulative and mixed¹⁰. The cumulative index averaged the cumulative components, and thereby took into consideration the entire time-period prior to (and including) the examined year. This index is built on the assumption that at any point in time the closure of a party system is determined by the previous history of the party system (in this case reaching back maximum till 1990). The year-by-year closure index, as discussed above, simply averaged the year-by-year components, assuming that only the developments of the particular year count, the characteristics of the preceding years are not relevant. Finally, the mixed index gave the same weight to the year-by-year index of the particular year and the cumulative index of the previous year, assuming that a country’s closure score is equally shaped by the developments of the current year and by the previous history.¹¹ The mixed and the cumulative indices correlated with each other at .68, the mixed and the year-by-year index at .81, the cumulative and the year-by-year index at .43.

The correlation analyses confirmed that closure covaries with electoral volatility in the same (election-) year (i.e. just before closure is measured). This observation is supported both by the mixed (-.45) and the year-by-year (-.42.) indices. That is, elections that produce high volatility tend to be followed immediately by open governments. The cumulative index, on the other hand, doesn’t seem to be sensitive enough to pick up these short-term changes.

¹⁰ The year-by-year and the cumulative alternation, access and formula figures were the input-data. The correlation between the year-by-year and the cumulative figures (.48 for alternation, .41 for familiarity and .64 for access) indicated that these two alternative operationalizations provide rather different information about the party systems.

¹¹ The correlations coefficients indicate that the mixed index is somewhat more related to the year-by-year components than to the cumulative components. It covaries most closely with year-by-year familiarity, .77.

The analysis of summary measures already indicated that alternation is the component least related to volatility. In the year-by-year dataset the two were not related at all. Volatility covaried only with the year-by-year index of familiar formulae (-.31) and the cumulative index of access (-.44). In other words, after a volatile election the governmental stability is disturbed primarily by new combination of parties in government, and by the access of new parties, and least by a change in alternation.

Closure at any particular time-point was found to be unrelated to the degree of electoral volatility at the next election according to all three indices. At the same time if one disaggregates closure into its components then some relationships appear. Electoral volatility at the next election is weakly, but statistically significantly, related to the cumulative version of familiarity (-.14) and access (-.16). That is, introducing innovative coalition-formulae and allowing new parties into the government may somewhat destabilize the electorate.

To put this observation in other words, governmental changes may have an electoral impact, by destabilizing the electorates, but the evidence is weak. Most probably in some of the instances the new combinations of parties in government constituted responses to the changed societal conditions, and therefore they led to more electoral stability, while in other cases they were elite innovations, and in these cases they triggered new forms of behavior in the masses.

III. PARTY SYSTEMS IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

In the last section we describe the trajectory of party systems in 11 Eastern Central European EU-countries focusing on blocs, concrete forms of cooperation, the closure of the governmental arena, and on three further aspects of party system institutionalization: electoral volatility, fragmentation, and the number of new parties. Since we want to relate the observations on blocs and on closure to other aspects of party institutionalization, new democracies, particularly the much-researched post-communist democracies, provide an ideal terrain for investigation. The high level of general volatility, however, poses a challenge.

In order to understand the nature of the challenge consider that we are after friend vs. foe relations, the nuclei of both closure and party blocs. In other words, we are interested in the dynamics of loyalty vs. betrayal in party relations. Unfortunately,

however, the changes in the composition of actually formed governmental or pre-electoral coalitions cannot give us an accurate picture of the ratio of loyalty and betrayal. The reason is simple: parties can continue participating in coalitions only if they continue to exist. If they don't, either because they haven't received enough votes or because they have merged with another party, then the coalitions are bound to change even if nobody betrayed anybody. The disappearance of old parties and the appearance of new ones influences therefore not only the 'access' variable, but the 'formula' variable too. In countries where the fluctuation of party labels is high there is little possibility for maintaining loyalty.

Therefore, the study of the causes and consequences of change in party relations is best done in established and relatively stable multi-party systems. On the following pages we will, however, look at new democracies. Thereby we put the idea that the dynamics of party alliances is a consequential phenomenon, to a particularly hard, „If it can make it there, it's gonna make it anywhere.”-type of scrutiny.

The party system trajectories will be illustrated by the graphs of closure index values. The values for the first years of the trajectories need to be taken with a pinch of salt as one can hardly speak about a 'system' in place during the very first years of a democracy. To give an example of the potential misperceptions, think of a re-elected first government of a new democracy. The graphs will show a 100% level closure at the beginning of the trajectory. Followed by the, almost inevitable, changes, the impression can be one of de-institutionalization, even if the survival of the first government had non-systemic reasons and the actual institutionalization took place later.

Before moving to the narrative case-studies, let's check, by looking at the correlations of time with the variables introduced above, whether East-Central European party systems are on the track of institutionalization. To the extent that one regards electoral volatility or the number of new parties as indicators of institutionalization, the answer must be negative. The values on these variables have neither decreased nor increased significantly, indicating that there is no general trend of stabilization at the electoral level.

Fragmentation, on the other hand, was negatively related to time (-.36 at the electoral level, -.22 at parliamentary level, sig. .07), showing that the number of

competing parties has declined substantially. The mixed (.21) and the cumulative (.19) closure indices also increased with time. The positive relationship is due to the growing cumulative familiarity (.2) and access (.22), the alternation scores fluctuated without a clear direction. The year-by-year index, on the other hand, is unrelated to time, although one of its components, access, is (.16). This means that while an increasingly large portion of Eastern European history is spent under ‘normal’ years, meaning that new governments tend to resemble old ones, at any given year the chances for innovations are as large as ever before.

Country-studies¹²

In the first country to be examined, in **Hungary**, most parties can be grouped (and typically group themselves) into two alliances. These are the left-liberal and the center-right blocs, which also constitute the two poles of an essentially bipolar party system.¹³ Two other, minor blocs have existed in Hungary, the liberal and the extreme-right blocs, but none of them managed to acquire a poles-status yet

The leftist bloc was formed in 1994 by the socialist MSZP and the liberal SZDSZ. This particular party-combination ended after the 2010 election, when SZDSZ¹⁴ dissolved, but the bloc itself still exists: the SZDSZ politicians who stayed in politics remained loyal to the bloc and the new leftist and liberal initiatives established after 2010 also continued the traditional cooperation.

The center-right bloc was formed originally even earlier, in 1990, by MDF, FKG (Smallholders) and KDNP. While the bloc’s ideological character, the combination of nationalism, clericalism and anti-communism, remained relatively solid, its party composition fluctuated. In 1992 the leading faction of the Smallholders and in 1995 the leading faction of KDNP abandoned the alliance. But within a few years both parties

¹² The subsequent session is a continuation of the analysis done by us earlier (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2011) on the same party systems, adding Croatia, using updated data-sets and refined conceptual framework, and focusing not on periodization of the trajectories but on the assessment of team-focused behavior

¹³ Next to these two quasi-permanent blocs there was also a liberal alliance between 1990 and 1994, composed primarily of SZDSZ and Fidesz.

¹⁴ Even in 2008, when SZDSZ pulled out of the government-coalition, the party supported the governing MSZP from the opposition.

returned to the flock.¹⁵ More importantly, around 1995-1996 the bloc was joined by a new party, Fidesz. Within a few years Fidesz became the dominant player, to the extent that the politicians of the other parties either dropped out of the parliament or integrated into Fidesz. Those who chose the latter option retained some sort of symbolic reference to their original party affiliation through forming ‘platforms’ or ‘societies’. In case of KDNP even the party-format was preserved. But in all instances this strategy implied a subordinated symbiosis with Fidesz. Between 2003 and 2010, MDF, the only party that seemed to be able to resist the pull of Fidesz, gradually departed from the center-right alliance, but this experiment ended in an electoral disaster in 2010, after which the party dissolved.

After 2010 the Hungarian party system has shifted towards a center-based configuraton, given that Fidesz is surrounded by right-wing (Jobbik) and left-wing (Socialists and minor parties) rivals. While the competition is among three alternatives, the fact that in the decade following 2006 Fidesz has about 20% advantage in front of the second party one can even speak about a unipolar pattern.

Most center-based systems are also fragmented systems, and therefore imply coalition governments in which left-wing and right-wing parties have junior positions. But in Hungary, because of the large size of Fidesz, the concentration of the party system, and the high level of polarization, this standard pattern is not viable. Until Fidesz maintains a firm grip on parliamentary majority the current pattern survives, once the party loses majority a realignment will follow, most probably a return to the bipolar logic. The blocs in Hungary materialized not only through governing coalitions but also in the form of pre-electoral coalitions. The first such pre-electoral agreement was concluded by Fidesz, SZDSZ, and two smaller parties, prior to the 1994 election. At that time all these parties identified as liberal. The federation was unsuccessful and after the election it was dissolved.

¹⁵ The Smallholders rejoined the center-right alliance in 1998. About half of the KDNP leadership has always stayed loyal and by 2002 they regained the right to use the ‘KDNP’ label by successfully challenging in the court the legality of the 1997 party congress.

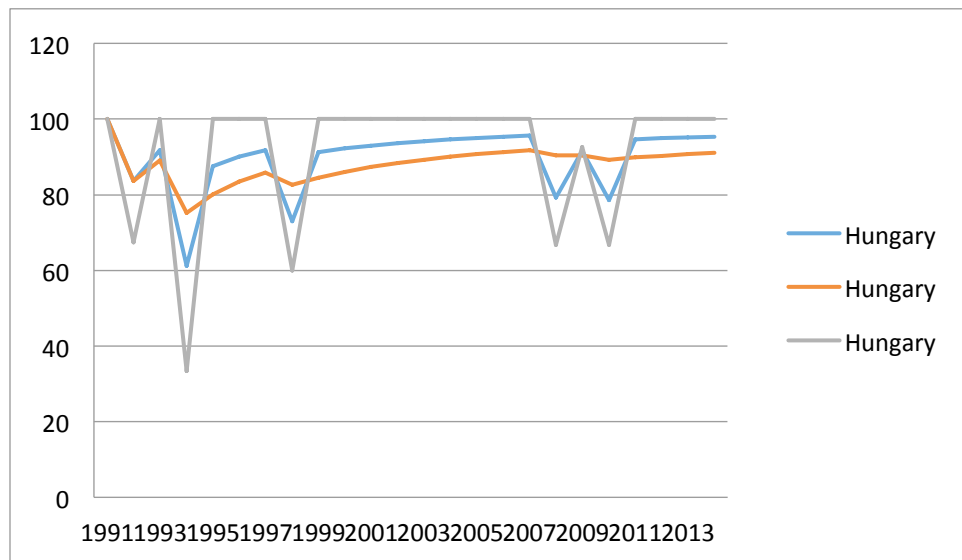
The first successful pre-electoral pact was created by Fidesz and MDF prior to the 1998 election. The two parties have not only decided to govern together but they have also nominated candidates jointly in SMD districts. In 2002 they completed the cooperation with a joint electoral lists. In 2006, 2010 and 2014 Fidesz and KDNP had united electoral lists and joint individual nominations. The coordination on the right responded with a similar coordination on the left. MSZP and SZDSZ also pledged to govern together, and they repeated these pledges at the subsequent elections until 2006. In 2014, after the disappearance of SZDSZ, the various small splinter parties (Együtt-PM¹⁶, DK, Hungarian Liberal Party) have all joined MSZP on the bloc's united electoral list.

In general, obviously largely because of the mixed-majoritarian electoral system, the coagulation of Hungarian parties into blocs is particularly pronounced. Chiru (2014) found that more governments are based on pre-electoral pacts than in any other country in the region. Party politics tends to be a team sport in Hungary.

The data on formula and access largely reflect this characteristics of Hungarian party politics and record well the developments in the alliance structures. The closure index drops in 1994 due to the first left-liberal alliance and in 1998 because of the incorporation of Fidesz into the center-right alliance. These were indeed the two largest innovations in Hungarian bloc-structures. The data also show that there were minor changes in government formulae in 1992, when the center-right coalition temporarily lost the Smallholders, in 2008, when the Socialists tried to govern on their own for the first time, and in 2010, when Fidesz and the Christian Democrats formed a government without a third right-wing partner for the first time. The 1999-2014 index of closure is the highest in the region, in line with the relative stability and comprehensiveness of the blocs. The only reason that makes one hesitant to regard the Hungarian system as fully institutionalized is the fact that the largest party is led from its inception by one person, who dominates the party to very large extent.

¹⁶ Együtt and PM were also too separate parties but during the three 2014 elections they formed an electoral cartel.

Figure 1. Hungary



The party system in **Czech Republic** had fewer stable alliances, but a clear structure. The center-right ODS and the center-left CSSD emerged relatively early on as principal contenders. Indeed, remarkably, and in spite of the relatively high fragmentation, no other party has managed yet to capture the premiership in the Czech Republic. During the first two decades of democratic politics the Communists, on the left, and the Christian Democrats and the liberals, in the center, complemented the party landscape. Electoral inter-party cooperation was typically relevant only for the centrist parties, for the KDU/CSL, ODA, US and DEU (the latter two merged in 2001). From the second half of the 1990s till the mid-2000s they formed pre-electoral alliances and joined government together¹⁷ but they haven't formed a separate pole of the party system: the governments they joined were either left-wing or right-wing or technocratic, never ideologically distinctly liberal or Christian-democratic.

Seemingly contradicting the clear left-right polarization between ODS and CSSD, in certain periods the two parties cooperated with each other in the legislature. But they haven't entered government together and the cooperation was always justified with reference to need for stable governments. Even more importantly, during these 'grand coalitions' the two parties regarded each other as principal rivals. Therefore, these can be

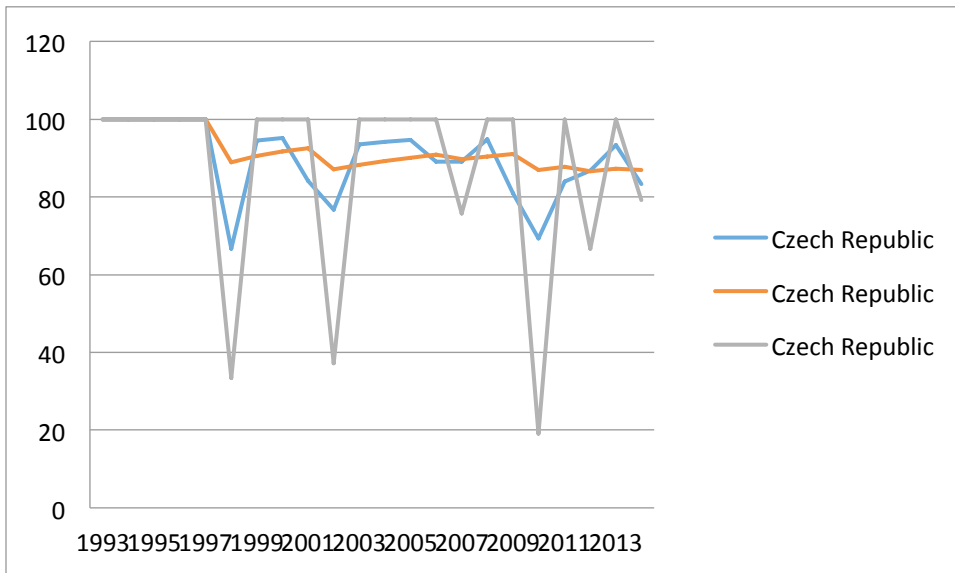
¹⁷ ODA lost significance by the end of the first decade.

considered as instances of cooperation when the consequence is not the creation of a new bloc but exactly the opposite: the (re)confirmation of the fact that the two parties are the two principal alternatives.

The meltdown of the Czech party system at the end of the 2000s, which implied primarily the downfall of ODS and of the small liberal parties, opened up the possibility for new alliances. But the new parties proved to be pursuing individualistic strategies, in line with their protest-character. Eventually one of them ANO, established itself as the largest party of center-right orientation, but it hasn't acquired yet the pole-party status of ODS. Its participation in the CSSD-led government indicates that the previous simple structure: 2 major and 1 minor bloc and 2 poles, belongs to the past.

The closure figures of the Czech party system reflect well the relatively high degree of predictability of the first decade. In this period there were two major innovations: the first single party Social-democratic government in 1998 and the first cooperation of the centrist parties with the CSSD in 2002. After the mid-2000s electoral volatility increased and party system closure declined. As far as the latter is concerned, the experimentation with the Conservative-Christian-democratic-Green combination in 2007, and the access of the new protest parties (first TOP09 and VV, and its splinter Lidem, then ANO) in 2010 and in 2014, increased the unpredictability of the system. The high number of caretaker governments and the long-lasting, and often unsuccessful, attempts at assembling majority government have contributed further to the disorientation of voters. Next to the numerous scandals there is a structural reason for the difficulty of the maintenance of bloc boundaries: the presence of the Communist part, a party that is not regarded to be fit to govern, means that the options for building majority government are limited, and therefore the room for ideologically motivated rejections is also limited.

Figure 2. Czech Republic



The cumulative closure index still places the Czech Republic in the more institutionalized half of the East-Central European spectrum. This example illustrates well that this closure index does not capture the character of the system at a particular time point, but it summarizes the experience of an entire time-period. The more sensitive mixed index places the country to the regional mean.

In **Estonia** the post-communist period started with a diffuse party structure. The astronomic fragmentation was moderated somewhat by some early mergers among parties, but the party system remained highly fragmented because parallel to the fusions a number of new parties emerged. The polarization between the conservative-liberal, nationalist and pro-West forces and the moderate-leftist-populist and less anti-Russian forces provided some structure to the competition, although the awkward adjectives above signal that the overall ideological structure was rather weak.

Within both camps large number of pre-electoral coalitions emerged. The alliance between Coalition Party and the Country People Union (later renamed into People's Union) formed the core of the first (without better term: leftist) bloc, to which the Center Party was loosely connected. The right-wing bloc formed around Pro Patria. The Moderates (later Social-democrats) and, after 1995, the Reform Party contributed to the fuzziness of the camp-boundaries, because although in terms of origin they belonged to the right-wing camp, in terms of their policies and their attitude to politicking they had a

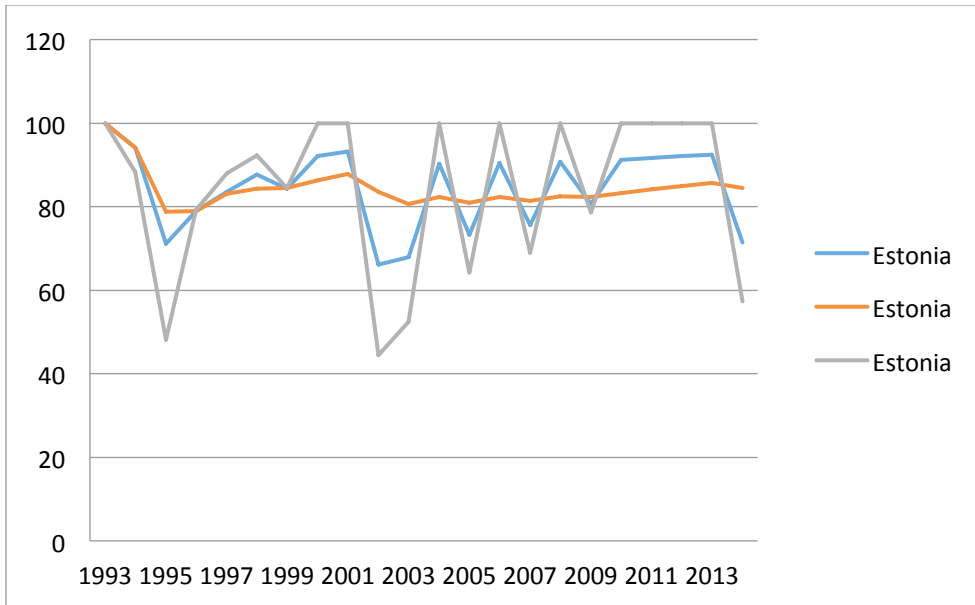
more centrist orientation. The gradual decline of those parties that were prominent during the 1990s, mainly the Coalition Party, and the growing popularity of the Center and Reform parties led to a new configuration. Reform became the leading left-wing and Center the leading right wing party. The permeability of the bloc boundaries was strengthened by the fact that these two parties, before they occupied their corresponding positions, governed together between 2002 and 2003, and by the willingness of Reform in the subsequent years to govern together with both right- (Pro Patria and Res Publica Union or IRL) and left-wing (Social Democrats) parties.

In other words, the bloc structure of the Estonian party politics is rather weak. So far the Center Party and Pro Patria (and its heir, the IRL) are the parties that have never cooperated in government. Arguably they¹⁸ provide the two opposing poles of the Estonian party system. But due to the fact that governments can operate excluding both, the Estonian party politics maintains an almost ‘anything goes’ character. On the other hand, the long-term exclusion of Center from government makes the Estonian system similar to the Czech and Latvian systems, which possess large non-coalitionable parties. If the association of Center with foreign (Russian) interests continues then the party may end up as Harmony in Latvia: not simply representing another bloc, but defined as an extra-system force by the environment.

In spite of the high fragmentation and high volatility, the second part of first decade produced a relatively high level of closure in the governmental arena as in those years the Coalition Party managed to keep governments within its own camp. The innovations of the 2000s in the coalition-patterns, especially the Reform-Center Party coalition and the government led by a new party, the Res Publica, brought down the closure index to lower levels.

Figure 3. Estonia

¹⁸ In 2015 a new (although rooted in the People’s Union) party, the Conservative People’s Party appeared on the right of IRL.



Interestingly, these innovations were followed by a consolidation of the party landscape at the electoral level. In fact, between 2003 and 2015 electoral volatility and fragmentation had declined after each subsequent election. Finally, the fact that Reform was in all governments since 1999, and was actually able to dominate them since 2002, led to a somewhat more predictable structure at the governmental level as well.

Yet, Estonia remains one of the more open systems in the region. This openness is underlined by the fact that in 2015 two new parties made it into the parliament, one of them being established only months before the election. But the Estonian system remains open primarily not because it cannot prevent the emergence of new parties. The number of new parties is not higher than in most countries in the region. It is open rather because the parties tend to have a pragmatic attitude to coalition-building. They reach across the aisle so easily that one wonders whether there is an aisle.

The **Bulgarian** system started with a very clear-cut two-bloc competition. Both camps, the ex-communist and the anti-communist, operated electoral coalitions, around SDS and BSP, respectively.

The polarized two bloc system received the first blow from the Movement of Simeon (NDSV) in 2001, a non-ideological party that channeled public protest against the status quo. Through the gap created by the success of NDSV on the walls of the system a number of new parties poured in during the subsequent elections. In 2009

electoral volatility reached 55,8%, a truly astronomic figure even within the volatile post-communist environment.

Yet, the party system hasn't lost all of its structure. The Socialist party (BSP) remained a dominant player, ruling the left-spectrum together with its allies. The ethnic-Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) became a stalwart player of the Bulgarian party system, gaining virtually the same support at every election and serving in a number of left-wing cabinets. The parties that form the traditional anti-communist bloc have regrouped several times, their leader, SDS, became a minor party and the whole bloc shrank, but it hasn't disappeared.

The Right in general became more fragmented due to the rise of a number of nationalist parties, but the most significant development was the establishment of GERB, a party that can match the Socialist Party in strength. As opposed to many populist formations GERB managed not only to survive elections but to organize governments within which the traditional right wing parties have a junior role.

In other words, the Bulgarian party system of 2015 resembles the party system of the 1990s to the extent that it is dominated by two large parties that have a clear left vs. right character. The landscape of the traditional anti-communist parties is still fragmented, but these parties continue to cooperate with each other, most recently under the umbrella label of Reform Bloc.

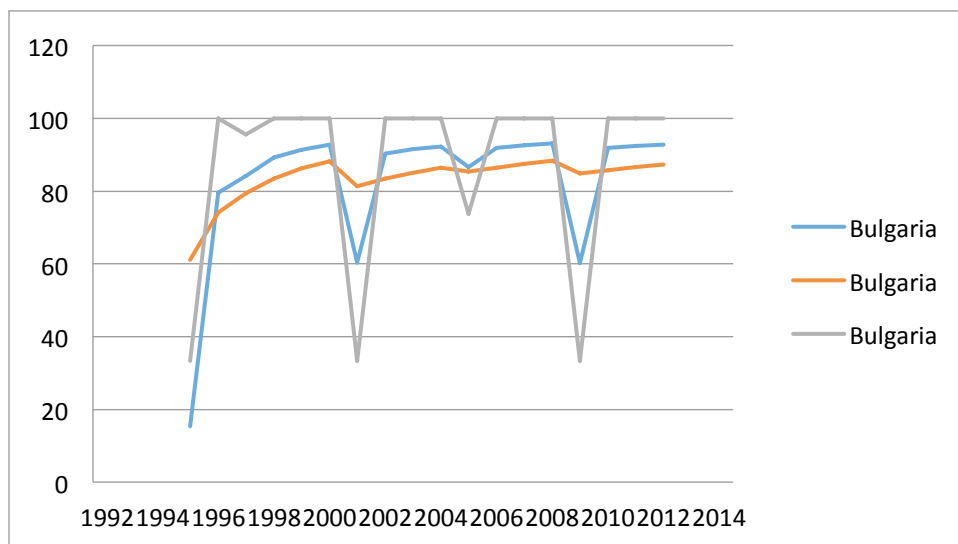
While the electoral arena has been very unstable throughout the two decades, the governmental arena was characterized by more predictability. During the 1990s left-wing and right-wing coalitions (and technocratic governments) alternated. But this tendency towards consolidation was stopped by the earthquake elections in 2001 and in 2009. These elections led to major innovations in government building: first the NDSV-DPS government, then the single party GERB government. The third drop in the closure index happened in 2014 due to the emergence of the Reform Bloc as a coalition partner and due to the fact that rather unusually the previous (2012) coalition pattern was modified, after a year of an expert cabinet, instead of being repeated or replaced.

The long-standing cooperation of traditional center-right parties (in 2009 called the Blue Coalition, since 2013 called the Reformist Bloc, but both times formed around SDS and DSB) is similar to the Czech centrist bloc in the sense that both regroup from

time to time, and both tend to be parties of notabilities. The Bulgarian cluster, however, has a clear right wing identity, its members are not willing to govern together with the Socialist Party. Interestingly the Socialist Party also tends to compete as part of electoral alliances. While for the center-right parties cooperation is a must if they want to secure the access to the Parliament, the Socialists do not have such concerns. In their case the alliances with small parties is rather a tool to dilute the negative image of the Communist past and to benefit from the association with labels such as “Social-democratic”, “Agrarian” or “Ecological”.

The widespread use of pacts in Bulgaria is remarkable as the electoral system is proportional, allowing even minor parties (above 4%) to access the legislature. Neither this phenomenon, however, nor the relative importance of the bloc-logic, was able to stabilize Bulgarian party politics. Both the closure figures and the volatility figures indicate continued instability. It seems that while the elites do see clear differences between friends and foes, the electorate is unhappy with all of them and is ready to rally behind new parties at each election. As a result the number of new parties per election is the highest in this country (roughly 5, on average).

Figure 4. Bulgaria



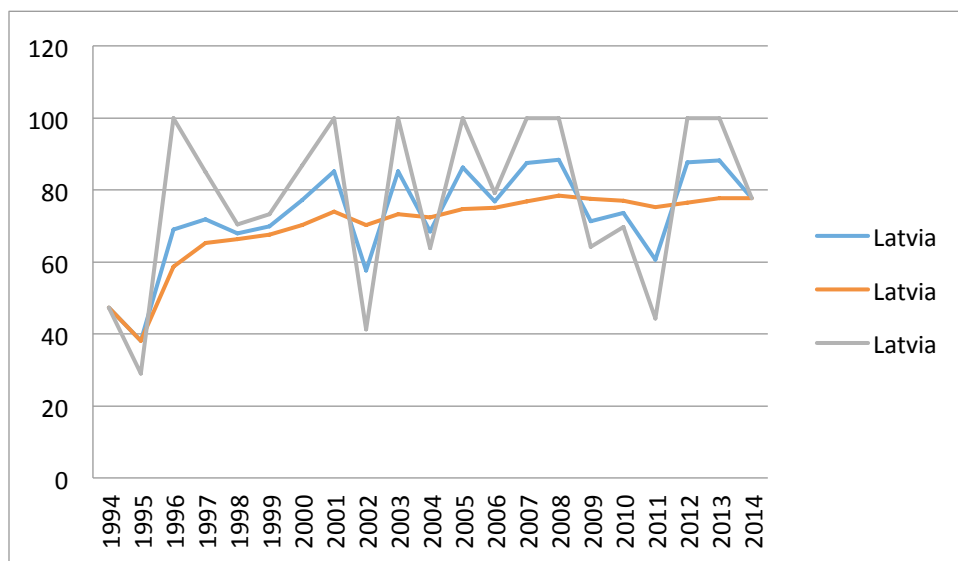
Latvia stands out as an archetypically under-institutionalized party system: extreme fragmentation, extreme volatility, constant influx of new parties and relatively open government-building process. The elitism that characterizes many party systems in the region is particularly visible in Latvia: most of the new parties are launched by the

members of the social and political elite (former president, former Chief State Auditor, well-known actor turned radio talk show host, former deputy Prime Minister), and remain associated with their founders during their typically short life span.

Somewhat similarly to the Czech Republic, the openness of the governmental arena is constrained by the constant exclusion of certain political forces, in this case the Russian parties. The ethnic divide may be thought of marking the boundaries between the two major blocs. Alternatively, the Russian parties may be considered to be outside of the system altogether.

The Latvian parties have a very short lifespan (in the vocabulary of Deegan-Krause and Haughton (2012) they tend to be annuals as opposed to perennials). Latvian Way, with its 14 years of existence, was the Methuselah of the party system when it merged with Latvia's First Party. Winning the Premiership can require no more than a few months of existence and 15% of electoral support. The campaign of the new protest parties against the 'corrupt' government parties only marginally structures the government-building process. On the other hand, Harmony, in the Russian-leftist corner of the party system, and the National Alliance, in the Latvian-rightist corner, managed to consolidate recently the cooperation of their various smaller units, and may have halted the growing fragmentation of the party system.

Figure 5. Latvia



The Latvian parties often forge pre-electoral agreement. The most successful long term pact is the *Union of Greens and Farmers*. This electoral cartel, which exists since 2002, illustrates well the relevance of ideology-based convergence logics as the two involved parties share a right-wing view. Within this overall ideology the parties identified a commonality of environmentalist preferences and smallholders' interests. At the same time the Union also illustrates the rational-choice based complementarity logic as the two parties bring different assets into the 'marriage': the Farmers (LZS) bring a historical, pre-war, reputation and the support of older generation rural voters while the Greens (LZP) adds a more modern narrative and party image. LZP has never entered the parliament on their own, but thanks to the alliance and to the peculiarities of the Latvian party system this is the party that gave the very first Green Prime Minister to the world. The common label proved to be so successful that since 2006 small parties (i.e. For Latvia and Ventspils as well as the Liepaja Party) lend their well-defined regional support to the Union in return of safe seats on the party list. This particular form of cooperation resembles loosely structured, stratarchically organized parties, which provide autonomy to their various units and the franchise metaphor discussed above is also applicable.

Given the short life-span of parties most Latvian governments can be considered to be innovative in one way or another. But even within such a fluid system it is possible to identify ruptures. The largest ones happened in 2002, when a new party, the appropriately named New Party, was able to enter the government and to capture the premiership, and in 2001, when a larger group of political notabilities, who launched three different parties during the 2000s, decided to create the so called Unity alliance.

Latvia has always been and remains the most open¹⁹ party system in the region according to the cumulative index of closure. While the index of most countries usually stays above 80%, so far Latvia hasn't reached this level. At the same time, due to the sheer fact that during the last twenty years Latvians experienced some years without any innovation, the value of the index is on the rise.

¹⁹ Although the last elections brought the same government coalition as before the 2014 elections for the first time since the dissolution of the USSR.

Few countries started their post-communist phase with as clear regime-divide as **Poland** (Markowski, 1997). But the bipolar opposition was not accompanied by a two-party system. Rather two clusters of parties competed, with a clear core-party on the left, the Socialist party (SLD), and a succession of leading parties on the post-Solidarity side (Stanley, 2013). The fact that liberals and conservatives differentiated themselves within the post-Solidarity camp further complicated the party-landscape. The turnover of parties on both sides, but especially on the right, implied the necessity of constant innovation in coalition-building.

By the mid-2000s the conflict lines were redrawn, a new generation of parties grew up and SLD marginalized. The conflict between PiS and PO gave a new structure to the competition (Szczerbiak, 2008; Markowski, 2008). Although the electorates of the two parties differed on dimensions such as urbanization, education or geographical location, this structure was expected to be even more feeble than the previous one because both actors were right-wing, post-Solidarity parties. But in fact the new structure proved to be more robust than expected. More than a decade by now the competition for the premiership is confined to these two parties, no other party comes even close to rival them, fragmentation, and most recently, electoral volatility declined, although new (even if marginal) parties continue to appear (e.g. Palikot's Movement, Poland Together or United Poland).

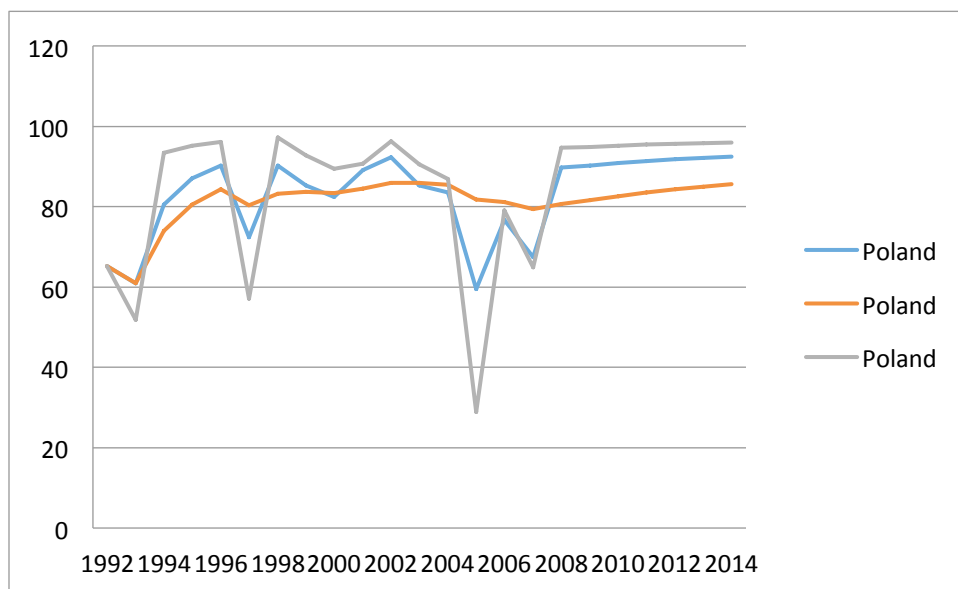
The two parties compete alone, not as members of electoral cartels. This indicates a rupture with the tradition of the previous decades when many of the electoral units were alliances of parties (Catholic Electoral Action, Democratic Left Alliance until 1999, Peasant Alliance, Solidarity Electoral Action AWS with UW, Left and Democrats, etc.). At the same time, because in the Polish system single-party governments are rare,²⁰ PO and PiS need to keep searching for coalition-partners. Perhaps at one point both parties will develop a stable circle of potential partners, and thereby they will become core-parties of their respective party-blocs, but at the moment they mostly behave as

²⁰ Just twice (between November 2004 and May 2005 as well as between August and October 2007) since 1991.

individual competitors, with the Peasants' Party (PSL) as a “potential” hinge between the two.²¹

The three largest shocks to the governmental arena were caused by the first AWS-dominated government in 1997, the first PiS-led cabinets in 2005 and 2006 and the first PO-PSL government in 2007. The last one is often seen as the event that inflicted the final blow to the old regime divide as the post-Solidarity PO teamed up with a party that was tolerated during Communism. Thanks to the stability since this last innovation the Polish closure figures moved up into the middle of the regional spectrum.

Figure 6. Poland



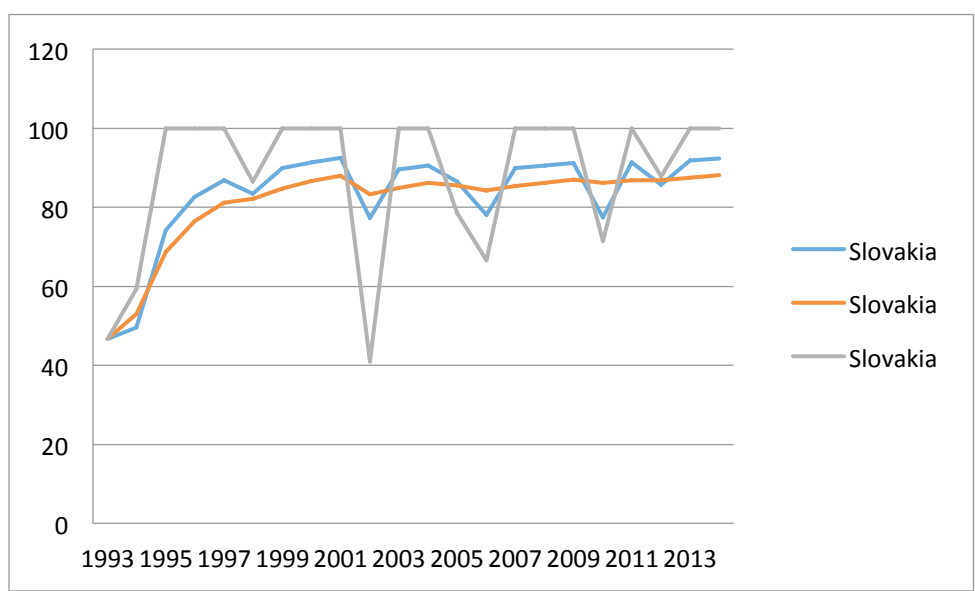
In the first decade of **Slovak** party politics everything revolved around HZDS and its domineering leader. The dividing line was between those who were willing to cooperate with him and those who opposed him (Haughton, 2014), 2006). SDKU emerged as the leading party of the latter bloc. Its role, parallel to engineering radical reforms, was to keep the very heterogeneous bloc together. This task became particularly difficult after HZDS was replaced by the less polarizing Smer and after the emergence of a host of new small parties at the end of the 2000s (e.g. Freedom and Solidarity, Most,

²¹ It shouldn't be forgotten that PSL voted, together with SO and LPR, in favour of PiS minority government in November 2005.

Ordinary People). On the other side of the aisle Smer was probably not mourning the disappearance of its controversial partners (SNS and HZDS) from the parliamentary arena, especially after managing to obtain an absolute majority²² in 2012, but being left alone the party may need to develop new partnerships and thereby erode the underlying logic of Slovak politics.

Although the various rainbow coalitions (particularly the ones in 2002 and in 2006), the first coalition led by Smer in 2010 and, finally, the first single-party Smer government in 2014, constituted setbacks for the closure of the governmental arena, Slovakia is above the regional average in the closure index. Fragmentation has also declined in the last years. But the ideological identity of the new parties is uncertain. Due to the decrease of hostility between the main contenders more coalition-configurations are possible than before, although until SMER is able to govern alone these configurations will not materialize. The number of pre-electoral pacts declined as parties would like to keep their options open.

Figure 7. Slovakia



The **Lithuanian** party system was relatively well structured during the 1990s, most parties could be assigned to the post-communist or to the anti-communist camp. The

²² The second (of a single party) in the region since the collapse of communism in 1989.

party system was also relatively concentrated. On the left the Democratic Labor Party, on the right the Homeland Union dominated. As none of these parties could govern alone they had to enter various pre- and post-electoral alliances, but the governments had a clear leftist or rightist profile.

In 2001 the Democratic Labor Party did something very similar to Smer: namely, it merged with a small party whose main contribution was that it had social democracy in its name and it could refer back to a long, pre-war history. While in terms of the new name (Social Democratic Party of Lithuania) the merger appears as the victory of the small party, in reality the unification resulted in the dominance of the reform communists. On the right Homeland Union also merged with a number of smaller (right-wing) parties. After the fusions it usually changed the second part of its name, but the Homeland Union label was retained. As a result, the Lithuanian party system shows considerable continuity in the sense that two parties which were present at the dawn of democracy still compete, and receive a significant portion of the vote. With the exception of the few months between 2000 October and 2001 July, the Prime Minister always came from one of these two parties. But as of 2015 these parties are not seen any more as the leaders of two opposing camps. Although they haven't yet entered into a government coalition together, this option is much less unimaginable today than it was twenty years ago, indicating further that they have lost their pole-status.

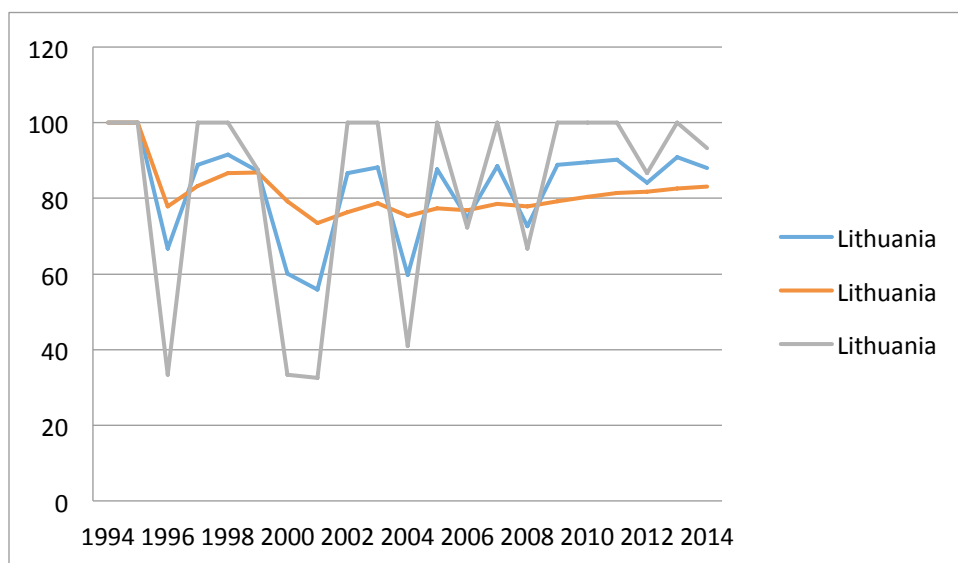
The reason for their new position lies in the fact that since 2000 a number of new parties appeared that brought new issues and new conflict-lines into the system. Most of them joined either a left-wing (e.g. the liberal NS, the leftist-populist Labor Party and Order and Justice) or a right-wing (e.g. the liberal Resurrection Party) government, but their centrist or populist profiles (or both) blurs the boundaries of the camps. This can happen easily because Lithuania has a multidimensional ideological space (Duvold and Jurkynas, 2004), within which the state interventionist and a cosmopolitan socialists, the equally interventionist but traditionalist agrarians, the traditionalist and pro-market conservatives and the pro-market and modernist liberals compete.

The Lithuanian developments are very similar to the Hungarian ones in the sense that in both countries liberals attempted to create a separate pole, but after some transitory success they realized that only right wing or left wing governments are viable.

Interestingly, the ideological configurations in the two countries are also similar as the pragmatic ex-communist-Socialists are opposed in both countries by the nationalist conservatives. In both countries the liberal family split, some joined the left, others joined the right. One could speculate that next to the polarization and bipolarity inherited from the past, the electoral systems explains this outcome: Lithuania and Hungary are the two countries that have mixed (as opposed to proportional) electoral systems in the region. But in fact electoral systems operate very differently in these two countries: Hungary has the least, Lithuania has one of the most fragmented party system in the region. Therefore the ideological explanations probably carry more weight.

In spite of the tradition of the bloc-logic and in spite of the survival of two founding parties, the governmental closure is low in Lithuania compared to the other countries in the region. The first right-wing coalition in 1996, the first - and only - liberal coalition in 2000, the first left-wing coalition in 2001 (until then left wing governments were single party governments), and then the entry of new parties into the government (Labor, Order and Justice or the Liberal and Center Union) halted the closure of the party system. On the other hand, the Lithuanian case also demonstrates the pull of consolidation: the populist parties, Labor and Order and Justice proved to be able to become fairly regular establishment-parties.

Figure 8. Lithuania



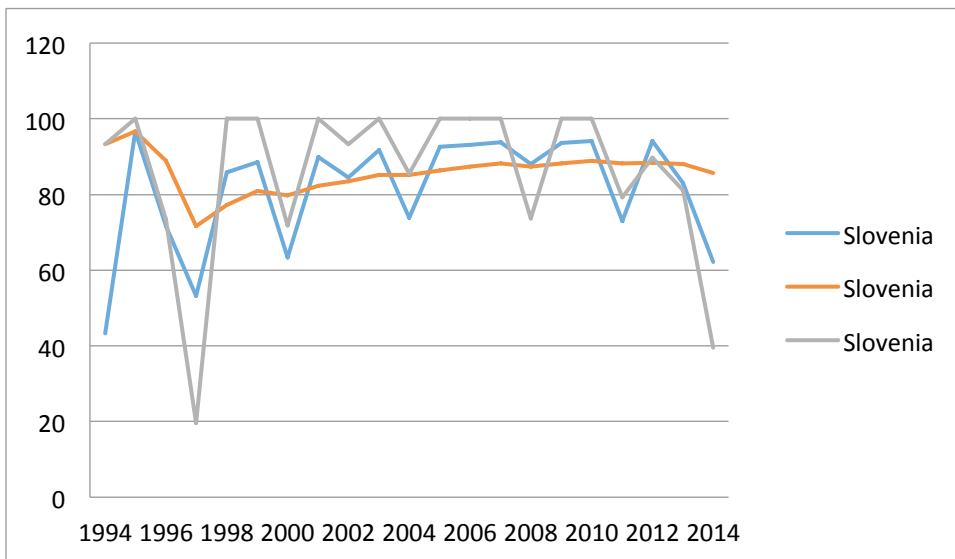
During the last decade Lithuania had only few pre-electoral coalitions, but the parties experiment with various institutional solutions of electoral coordination. Like in Latvia mergers are frequent (e.g. Liberal and Centre Union), but there are many splits too. The Lithuanian Nationalist Union, for example, merged with Homeland Union in 2008, but then defected in 2011. The cooperation between Socialists and left-liberals was sealed in 2004 by the Working for Lithuania cartel of the Social Democratic Party and New Union, which later merged with the Labour Party.

The original **Slovenian** pattern was in between a bipolar and a center-based structure. The governments were dominated by LDS, which was leftist in terms of origin but centrist in terms of ideology (liberal) and in terms of coalition-making, admitting both leftist and rightist parties as junior coalition partners. The LDS-coalitions ruled Slovenia until 2004 (with a few months of interruption in 2000), when a stable right-wing government was finally able to replace LDS. Given the highly fragmented party system no party could completely dominate the parliament or the government, but gradually LDS and the right wing SDS emerged as the leaders of the two opposing camps, moving the party system towards a bipolar pattern. The role of LDS as bloc leader on the left was taken over by the SD, its previous junior partner, but the alternation between the two blocs continued.

The fact that the ideological distances among parties have been rather small and that some parties could be used by both type of governments (like the party of pensioners), preserved the centripetal character of the party system, in spite of the decline of LDS and the rise of the more confrontative SDS. The alternation between these relatively well-defined camps came under threat in 2011 and ended in 2013. In 2011 two new parties (Positive Slovenia and Civic List), both electoral lists of well-known individuals without clear ideology and program, gained the support of one third of the electorate. One of them (Zoran Jankovic's PS) won the electoral contest and, two years later, captured the premiership. Eventually both parties proved to be ephemeral phenomena, not even surviving the 2014 election, but the established parties were unable to reconquer their lost territories as this election was again won by a political entity (Miro Cedar's party) established a few weeks before the election.

The trajectory of the last decade is one of de-institutionalization and de-alignment at all levels: electoral, parliamentary, and governmental. There is continuity across governments, thanks to the participation of SD, DeSUS, NSi or SLS, and there is also ideological continuity in the sense that centrist and liberal parties are represented in all governments, but the flow of new parties (the latest newcomers were United Left and Bratusek's Alliance) seems to be unstoppable and the logic of coalition-building is even more ad-hoc than before. Because of the survival of a number of small parties none of the recent coalition formulae are completely innovative, they are variations of previous governments, but the majority of the ministries are controlled by the new parties. Most parties have been proven to be ready cooperate in government with all other parties. The thin existing structure is primarily provided by the tendency to exclude parties seen in the local context as radical: SNS on the right or United Left in the opposite corner, and by the lack of cooperation between SDS and SD. As a result of these contradictory aspects, Slovenia is at the regional average according to cumulative closure index.

Figure 9. Slovenia



In Slovenia the practice of pre-electoral coalitions has been so far confined to a small group of parties. The People's Party cooperated in the 1990s with the Christian Democrats and then merged. The dual identity was expressed in the new name, but a few years later the original Slovenian People's Party name was readopted. In 2008 this party cooperated with the Youth Party, while the other Christian Democratic party, NSi,

campaigned together with SDS prior to the 2004 election. Apparently even at times when the left-right opposition was visible the Slovenian parties preferred not to tie their hands and preferred not to get absorbed by larger units.

Croatia is the newest member of EU and also the country that has the shortest history in our dataset as it is registered as a consolidated democracy only since 2000. Given this background one would expect the Croatian party system to be particularly fluid. Actually, the opposite is the case. On virtually all dimensions (electoral volatility, fragmentation, age of parties, and closure of governmental arena), Croatia is in the more institutionalized part of the region. The post-communist vs. anti-communist competition, just as in Hungary and, partly, in Lithuania and Poland (until 2005), has a thick cultural layer: the anti-communist camp is conservative and nationalist, the post-communist camp is liberal and cosmopolitan. Unlike in most other countries, both camps have one clear leader, and this leader is not a person but a party: SDP on the left and HZD on the right. This institutionalization is even more remarkable taking into account that HZD was established as a ‘charismatic party’, led by the ‘father of the nation’ Franjo Tuđman.

The centrist parties were particularly likely to form pre-electoral pacts. In 1995 the Peasant Party (HSS), the People’s Party (HNS), the Christian Democrats, and two regional parties submitted a joint list. In 2000 a similar alliance (HNS, HSS, Liberal Party and Istrian regionalists) was formed. In 2007 HSS, HSLS and three regionalist parties formed the Green/Yellow coalition. But these blocs never became poles, and the parties involved finally had to choose between a left-wing or right-wing governments. This put the liberals under particularly large stress. In 2003 they split, and since then some liberal groups campaign on the left, others on the right.

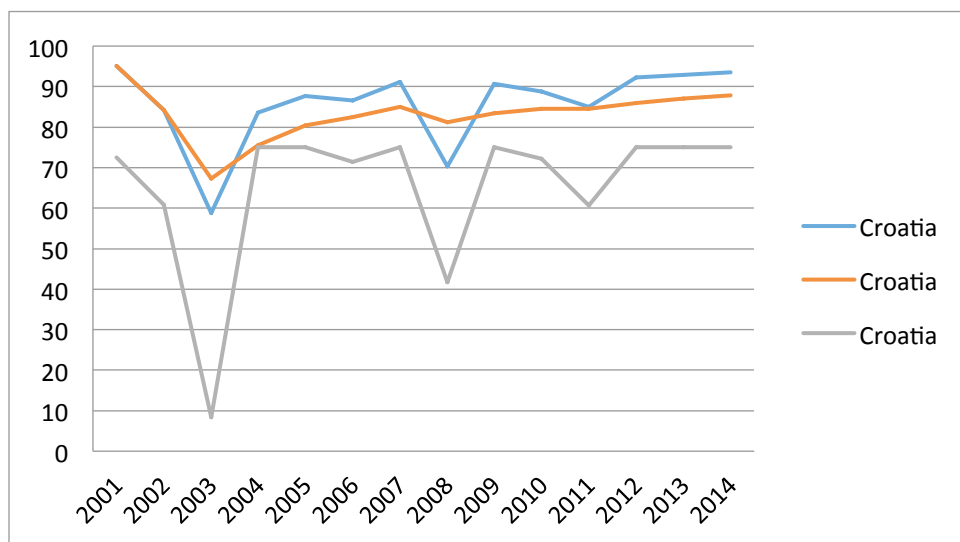
Croatia also provides examples of transitions from one bloc to another: HSS and HSLS cooperated until 2007 with the left, but since then they are part of right wing coalitions. However, both parties lost heavily, indicating that crossing the principal dividing line of the party system for short term gains works only if parties have a very solid social base.

On the left side of the spectrum the Social-democrats have also developed a stable entourage. In 2003 SDP was joined by the Istrians, the Party of Liberal Democrats, the Liberal Party and LIBRA (those who split from the Social Liberal Party). In 2010 SDP

institutionalized further its long-standing cooperation with such smaller parties as the People’s Party-Liberal Democrats, the pensioners’ party and a regionalist party, under the label of Alliance of Change, later renamed as Kukuriku coalition. The electoral cartel won the 2011 election. On the other side, and with the exception of the last elections, HDZ tends to competes alone, although cooperates closely with the Democratic Centre, HSS and the Party of Rights.

In spite of the huge corruption scandals that led to the imprisonment of former prime minister Sanader, Croatian voters stayed loyal to the existing parties, and electoral volatility is well below the regional average. It seems that voters appreciate the configuration that allows both for the survival of parties with narrow social profiles and for a clear left-right competition. The 2008 government, when HDZ was joined for the first time by HSS and HSLS. is registered by the closure index as a major innovation, as in 2011 the Kukuriku coalition, but in spite of these ‘shocks’ the Croatian system is one of the more closed system not only according to the analysis of party relations but also according to the index monitoring government compositions.

Figure 10. Croatia



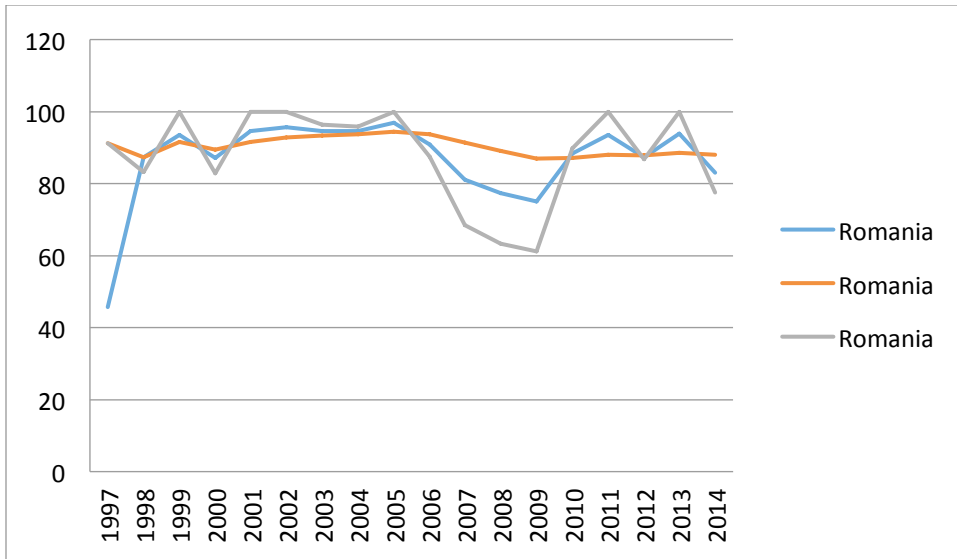
The last country to examine is **Romania**. The post-communist vs. anti-communist opposition known from other countries characterized the first decade of Romanian politics too. Broad alliances represented the two camps. Within the large blocs smaller

alliances existed. The Socialist camp had a clear leader-party, the PDSR, later renamed as PSD. On the right CTR, the Convention, was an umbrella party dominated by the Christian Democrats. CTR was able to coordinate the right wing parties only until the end of the 1990s, then it fell apart, after which the Liberals (PNL) became the leading party of the right. In the meantime the Democrats (PD, later PDL), transformed from a minor party rooted in the post-communist camp into a party that could challenge both the Socialists and the Liberals.

During the first decade of the 2000s all the three parties had the chance to form a government, either alone or with the help of satellite parties. UDMR, as an ethnic party, was not part of these three blocs and, therefore proved to be compatible with all of them in government. More importantly, in those instances when one bloc was unable to govern alone then it simply coalesced with one of the other blocs. Some governments were dominated by PDL-PSD, others by PSD-PNL and some by PNL-PDL combinations. This merry-go-round appeared to be halted two times by the integration of two of the three main players into one organizational unit. In 2004 the Justice and Truth Alliance united PDL and PNL, while in 2011 the Social Liberal Union was based on the cooperation between PSD, PNL, and some smaller parties. Both alliances, however, broke up soon. Most recently a more definitive step was made in the direction of integration: in 2014 the party congresses of PDL and PNL approved the merger of the two parties, under the PNL label. Time is necessary to establish whether this integration proves to be stable. If yes, then Romania will re-enter the phase of a bipolar competition.

Romania used to have the highest cumulative closure figures during the first part of the 2000s thanks to the prevailing two-bloc competition. As the three-polar configuration unfolded and as the country started to experiment with innovative governments, such as the two-party PNL-UDMR government of 2007, or the PDL-PDS coalition in 2008, the closure index dropped substantially. The country still has one of the most closed governmental arenas in the region largely because new parties have very little chance to become major governmental players.

Figure 11. Romania

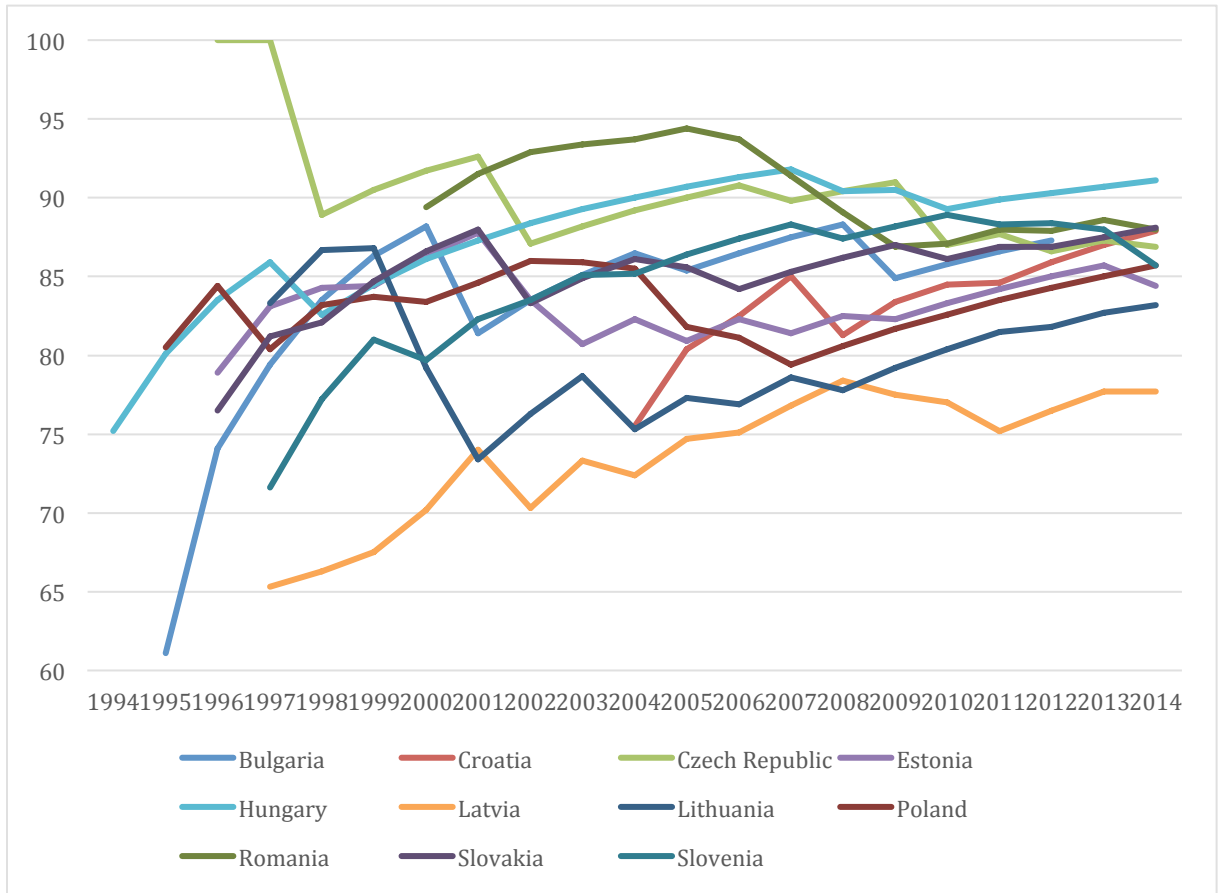


The formation of pre-electoral alliances, as seen above, is a widespread custom in Romanian party politics. Since 2000 PSD has always campaigned together with the Humanist (later renamed: Conservative) Party. In 2012 two minor parties joined PDL to create the Right Romania Alliance. At the 2014 presidential election PNL and PDL joined forces to support a common candidate under the Christian Liberal Alliance title. Both the occurrence of these alliances and their break-ups has a lot to do with the importance of the presidential power. The logics of presidential politics often necessitates the creation of larger units, but since presidential politics can easily be at odds with parliamentary politics, a particular cooperation rooted in a particular arena can end up being destroyed by the other arena.

Placing the cumulative closure values²³ of the eleven countries next to each other (Figure 12) one can observe a general tendency towards consolidation and convergence. The convergence is primarily due to the increasing values in the Baltic countries and Poland and the decline of structure in case of the Czech Republic and Romania. But only one country, Hungary is above the 90% mark. Given that the Western European average, as of 2014, was 92.9, the new EU-members can be still regarded as having particularly open systems.

²³ The figures for the first three years are not shown, for reasons explained at the beginning of the chapter.

Figure 12. Cumulative closure in East-Central Europe



The review of the regional party systems demonstrated that in a number of countries the bloc-logic is relevant (primarily Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia), in some of them parties frequently resort to electoral alliances (especially Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia), and in some of them the governmental arena is rather predictable (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia). If we consider these aspects as three facets of team behavior, then the conclusion must be that team mentality is strongest within the region in Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia and Romania. Given that these four countries also happen to have the least volatile electorates, the regional analysis gives support to the observation derived from the analysis of a larger dataset in the second part of the paper: disciplined and team-focused elite behavior tends to go together with more stable electorates. At the same time the examples of Slovakia and Lithuania indicate that relatively team-focused elite behavior can coexist with turbulent mass

political behavior, while the example of Poland suggest that the electorate can stabilize even if the bloc-logic is not a primary factor in party politics.

Conclusions

The paper was primarily intended to demonstrate the utility of the focus on party cooperation. It showed that in multiparty system cooperation is ubiquitous. In the first part we have introduced and refined concepts that can help researchers in analyzing groupings of parties which have functional roles within party systems. We emphasized the often asymmetric nature of party cooperation and the mixture of ideological, social and rational motives.

In the second part we discussed the concept of party system closure. We pointed out that the concept can have a subjective interpretation, and directed attention to the frame of reference of the participants. We also demonstrated that the cumulative and year-specific measures reveal different aspects of the phenomenon, and suggested the use of multiple indices. We argued that the closure of the governmental arena is related to the collectivistic vs. individualistic strategies of parties and proved that closure is part of a general syndrome of party system institutionalization. The analysis found that the opening up of the governmental arena is primarily related to the vote shifts among established parties, and less to the electoral volatility between new and old parties. Volatility and the number of new parties were found to be related to closure primarily via access and formula, while fragmentation via alternation.

We have also shown that in the interaction of the governmental and the electoral arena the latter has the upper hand. While volatile elections are followed by open governments, for the opposite we found only weak and uncertain evidence. But the final, descriptive part indicated that loyalty to friendships and investment into forging party alliances have a role in supporting the survival of the established players, even in the particularly fluid post-communist setting.

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