Against all odds: aiding political parties in Georgia and Ukraine

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CHAPTER TWO: PARTY ASSISTANCE AND NORM PROMOTION

There is a remarkable degree of similarity in party assistance by different actors. This concerns the types of activities that are common in party assistance – training seminars, consultations, study trips - (section 2.1); a number of ‘standards of good practice’ consisting of formal and informal constraints which guide party assistance by all major actors (section 2.2); and a shared ‘party assistance norm’ which conveys a conception of how parties are supposed to operate in a democracy (section 2.3). In this chapter, these different elements are presented in subsequent sections. Finally, drawing on the academic literature on norm diffusion, the chapter sums up insights which have relevance in explanations of the compliance or the lack of compliance of parties with the ‘party assistance norm’.

As the assistance providers themselves confirm, the bulk of party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine has not been unlike party assistance in many other places, especially elsewhere in the post-communist world. A sound understanding of what conventional party assistance is, then, is imperative to explain why party assistance overall in Georgia and Ukraine has been inadequate in its opposition to domestic constraints on party development. Viewing party assistance as a type of norm promotion provides the opportunity to connect with theoretical and empirical literature on norm diffusion, which has been investigated in relation to a wide variety of phenomena of which some share characteristics with party assistance, but not to party assistance itself. The wealth of insights accumulated in this literature, which is mainly associated with the international relations theory of social constructivism, helps explain the failure of providers of assistance to transmit the gist of their programs to political parties in the case studies in chapters five and six.

2.1. INTRODUCTION TO PARTY ASSISTANCE

The range of providers of political party assistance comprises party-related actors, international organizations, and party internationals (Carothers 2006a: 78-83). In Georgia and Ukraine, international organizations and party internationals have not been involved in noteworthy assistance efforts as direct providers, leaving only the party-related actors. Rough calculations have put the amount of overall aid to political parties around the mid-2000s at 139 million euro (Catón 2007: 12) and 200 million dollar (Carothers 2006a: 86). Of the party-related actors, by far the largest are the two U.S party institutes National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)
and International Republican Institute (IRI), and two German political party foundations, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), affiliated with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), respectively. Party-related actors from other countries are considerably smaller, and typically have no permanent offices in recipient countries. NDI and IRI have been present for a relatively long time in both Georgia and Ukraine.

FES has a considerable party assistance program in Ukraine, but not in Georgia. KAS equally has a large program in Ukraine, and started working with parties in Georgia only in 2007. A third German political party foundation, the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung für die Freiheit (FNS), affiliated with the Free Democratic Party (FDP), works with parties in Georgia and Ukraine, albeit on a modest scale. In Georgia, finally, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), in close cooperation with a local NGO, implemented an assistance program from 2005 until 2008. Party assistance efforts by other actors in Georgia and Ukraine, most notably party-related actors from European democracies, are substantially more limited.

The principal actors in party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine, then, are NDI, IRI, KAS, FES, FNS, and NIMD. These six organizations probably account for over ninety per cent of expenditures on party assistance worldwide. On a considerable more limited scale, the Dutch party institutes Eduardo Frei Stichting (EFS), Alfred Mozer Stichting (AMS) and the international bureau of VVD are also involved in party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine. The identity of these organizations is shaped by their relationships with political parties and with the state. The U.S. party institutes are only loosely affiliated with the Democratic and Republican Parties. The exact relationship of the party institutes’ work with U.S. foreign policy is disputed: while the institutes prefer to view themselves as independently acting NGOs, the fact that they are funded largely by the U.S. government implies that their work is part of official foreign policy in a broad sense (Carothers 2006a: 146). The Stiftungen are deemed to be close to their mother parties (parteinah), but they are autonomous in formal terms (Egger 2007: 41-3). As organizations that complement German foreign policy and advise the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Pogorelskaja 2002: 33), the Stiftungen are also closer to the state than the U.S. party institutes are. NIMD, while enjoying considerable autonomy, is steered collectively by seven political parties that have representation in the Dutch parliament.

The mandate for party assistance by the U.S. party institutes is put down in several USAID documents. Among USAID’s four overarching goals is ‘building sustainable democracies’. The Center for Democracy and Governance, responsible for implementing this goal, in turn, is organized in line with four democracy-related
objectives, one of which is ‘more genuine and competitive political processes’, comprising, among other things, assistance to political parties (USAID 2006b: 25). ‘Strengthen democratic political parties’ is also mentioned explicitly as one of eleven program components related to democracy and governance from a total of forty USAID program components (USAID 2006a). Government-funded German democracy promotion is said to have three objectives: to contribute to peaceful relations between states, to create and stabilize regime types with which the West can effectively cooperate, and to help create market economies which can become reliable economic partner of the West (Lapins 2007: 15-6). The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the principal funder of party assistance by the Stiftungen, is careful to note that promoting democracy coheres with other goals of foreign aid and that the German government with regard to its democracy promotion is not limited to a specific form of democracy’ (BMZ 2005: 5). No mention is made in government documents of party assistance by the Stiftungen. A KAS report (2007a: 375) merely notes that ‘German law does not prohibit cooperating with and/or promoting political parties’. NIMD, established in 2000 by seven of the biggest Dutch political parties, and funded primarily by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs within the framework of development cooperation policy, is the only one among the organizations discussed here for which party assistance is an exclusive focus of activity. Besides party assistance, the U.S. party institutes are engaged in, among others, civil society assistance, election monitoring, civic education and governance reform. The international work of the Stiftungen includes assistance to civil society, support for scholarly research, organization of discussions and debates, and counsel to governments and parliaments (Egger 2007: 45)

Funding for assistance by the U.S. party institutes comes mostly from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), with a much smaller portion from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). With IFES, NDI and IRI are part of the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), which is primarily a funding mechanism designed to streamline procedures of application for funding. By virtue of their inclusion in the CEPPS, NDI and IRI enjoy a privileged status as recipients of USAID funds. Party assistance by the U.S. party institutes is in most cases carried out under cooperative agreements, granting the party institutes a considerable degree of autonomy. IRI and NDI reportedly spend 43 and 35 per cent of their budgets on party assistance, amounting to an estimated combined sum of $68 million in 2005 (Carothers 2006a: 85). Total U.S. expenditures on party assistance are still modest: in 1999, only three per cent of USAID Democracy and Governance funds were directed at party assistance (USAID 1999b: 4). In Georgia, NDI and IRI have
worked with budgets of between half a million and one million dollar annually. In interviews, representatives from NDI and IRI in Georgia have chosen not to disclose what part of these budgets was used for party assistance specifically. NDI and IRI budgets in Ukraine were larger than in Georgia, but exact information on funding has not been disclosed in interviews. Funding for party assistance in Ukraine by the Stiftungen comes from the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ). Estimates of the percentage of funds (for international activities) spent on party assistance vary from 5%-10% to 10-30% (Carothers (2006a: 85) and 20-30% (Erdmann 2006: 3), amounting to a combined party assistance budget in the tens of millions of euros. Representatives of KAS, FES and FNS have not revealed in interviews how much their organizations spend on party assistance in Ukraine. The NIMD program in Georgia, finally, was funded by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE at a cost of around two hundred thousand euro per year.

There are several ways to discern between different forms of party assistance programs, mostly on the basis of what element of the party’s functioning is targeted. A distinction that is often made regarding assistance to individual parties, whether provided to only one party or several individual parties simultaneously, is between ‘operational and structural development’ programs and ‘election-related’ programs (Doherty 2002: 6; USAID 1999b: 12; USAID 2007: ii). The former category of programs addresses, among other things, membership recruitment, message development, the organization of regional and local branches, outreach, financial management, and inclusion of women and youth; programs of the latter category are often about campaign strategy, mobilizing party members, message development (again), and campaign finance. The distinction also concerns the timing of the programs, with election-related programs typically executed in the run-up to parliamentary elections. Election-related programs are not primarily interested in longer-term, structural development of parties. Publications issued by the donors and providers of assistance, however, reveal that the development of stable, representative, and responsive parties is the overriding objective for all actors involved in party assistance (see section three in this chapter). In this sense, structural-operational development in party assistance takes precedence over election-related activities.

A different area of parties’ functioning, in the legislature, is the target of a third type of assistance programs, which variably are seen as part of party assistance or as a separate type of assistance. Here, this type of assistance is not understood as party assistance for two reasons. First, parties and parliamentary factions are often far from
congruent in the Georgian and Ukrainian parliaments, signifying a shortage of party cohesiveness. Therefore, it is often factions rather than parties which are recipients of this type of assistance, sometimes called ‘legislative strengthening’. Second, actors in party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine distinguish between assistance to the legislature and assistance to parties organizationally. In Georgia since the Rose Revolution, for example, NDI works in parliament, while IRI assists parties, whether represented in parliament or not, with regard to their operation outside parliament.

Party assistance in a broad sense, it has been argued, also encompasses ‘party system assistance’, and ‘indirect party assistance’ (Carothers 2006a: chapter four). Party system assistance comprises the promotion of interparty relations (a major focus of NIMD’s multi-party approach) and amending the institutional framework under which parties operate. Given the impact of institutional design on party development and operation, amending legislation on political parties and the conduct of elections can help create more favorable conditions for stable and democratic party development. Promoting interparty relations often takes the form of ‘coalition-building’ among parties, with coalitions being either temporary electoral coalitions or formal mergers of several parties. Since coalition-building has been an important element in assistance programs in both Georgia and Ukraine, it is understood as an inherent element of the party assistance effort for the purposes of this research. Assistance targeted at legislative reform, on the other hand, is not included conceptually here as party assistance. Finally, ‘indirect party aid’ concerns other types of democracy assistance than party assistance, which indirectly have an impact on the functioning of parties (outside parliament), such as electoral assistance, aid to civil society, and legislative strengthening (Carothers 2006a: 90-1).

The quintessential activity in direct party assistance are educational training seminars (Carothers 2006a: 113). Party assistance training can be classified according to the number of parties participating in the seminars, the audience present at the seminars, the type of instructor(s), and whether the topic has been selected by the recipient party, or has been proposed by the provider of assistance, alternatively. First, seminars are held either for an individual party or for several parties at once. If providers of assistance organize seminars for individual parties, they often also organize seminars for other parties, unless they maintain a strictly fraternal, party-to-party approach with only one party. Multi-party seminars can be for parties from the same part of the political spectrum or to a range of parties which represent a cross-section of the party universe of a country. Second, factors which mark the type of audience present at party assistance programs are the hierarchical position of participants (from party leaders to rank-and-file activists and party members),
whether participants are from the capital or from regions outside the capital, gender
distribution, and age. Providers of assistance are often keen on having ordinary party
activists, party representatives from the regions, women, and young people
participate in seminars. Third, particularly seminars at an early stage of assistance
programs are often conducted by Western experts. As programs evolve, the training is
sometimes delegated to local instructors. Training of trainers (ToT), who pass on their
acquired knowledge and skills to people from their party, is viewed as a desirable aim
of assistance programs. Finally, topics of seminars are sometimes proposed by the
provider of assistance, and in other instances picked by the parties themselves. Since
it is generally agreed that assistance should be carried out in accordance with parties’
particular needs, this latter variant is regarded as the more desirable one.

Next to seminars, two standard elements in party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine
and elsewhere, but not necessarily everywhere, are political counsel, mostly to party
leaders, and study trips (Carothers 2006a: 113). Counsel is typically offered to parties
during ‘consultations’ of the heads of the local offices of the providers of assistance
with the leaders of individual parties. For providers of assistance, these consultations
also serve the goal of maintaining contact with party leaders and getting updated on
party development and inter-party relations. The main purpose of study trips is to
familiarize political party representatives, most of whom are from the party leadership,
with political processes in the donor countries of political party assistance, and to
contribute to the integration of recipient parties into international networks. In
addition to these standards elements of party assistance, some providers of assistance
include different types of activities that may be rubricated under party assistance.
European providers of assistance which maintain fraternal relations with parties in
recipient countries, for instance, sometimes lobby for their parties to receive
membership in transnational parties. IRI organizes public opinion polling, the findings
of which are communicated to parties. NIMD organizes round tables for party
representatives with the explicit aim to foster interparty dialogue. There is
considerable variation in the leeway providers of assistance on the ground have in
designing and implementing assistance programs. To varying degrees, NDI, IRI, KAS,
FES, and FNS receive orders from the central offices and have to report to embassies
and, in the case of NDI and IRI, to USAID. In Georgia and Ukraine at least, the
country offices of the main providers of assistance all say to enjoy a large degree of
autonomy vis-à-vis the central offices of their organizations.19
2.2. Standards of Good Practice

The implementation of party assistance is constrained by a number of formal requirements and informal norms, to which the providers of assistance are kept in part by legal obligation and in part by voluntary adherence. These ‘standards of good practice’ are extensively put down in policy documents and strategy papers of the funders and providers of assistance. The standards of good practice in party assistance are driven by two overriding motives. First, the assistance should not interfere too directly in the internal political affairs of recipient countries or be perceived as doing this. USAID even states that, because of ‘the need to avoid interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states’ (1999: 2) the assistance it funds by law ‘may not be used to influence the outcome of any election’ (1999: 20). FES (Saxer 2006a: 7) acknowledges that party assistance is not neutral, but assistance providers should avoid creating the impression that they interfere in internal affairs. Second, aiding parties should ultimately be aimed at promoting democracy in recipient countries. Party assistance, in other words, is always at the service of the superior objective of democracy promotion. The first motive instructs assistance to avoid favoring certain political forces over others by working with parties across the political spectrum, while the second motive imposes seemingly strict criteria regarding the selection of recipient parties. As will be demonstrated in chapter five, the extent to which providers of assistance comply with these standards has important implications for the effectiveness of the party assistance effort.

The requirement of non-partisanship compels providers of assistance to work with a set of political forces which collectively are representative of the democratic part of the party universe in a given country (USAID1999b: 20; Doherty 2002: 4). USAID (2003b: 1) prescribes that USAID-funded assistance must make ‘a good faith effort to assist all democratic parties with equitable levels of assistance’. Since it is difficult for individual providers to cover a wide range of forces, inclusiveness is often expected to be achieved by the cumulative efforts of assistance providers from the same country. Having agreed on how to divide the party universe, the two U.S. party institutes may thus each work with a different set of parties. The traditional focus of the Stiftungen on only one party or one part of the political spectrum is defended by pointing to the alleged situation that, by granting assistance simultaneously to different parts of the political spectrum, the work of the Stiftungen collectively does ensure inclusiveness.20 The argument is untenable because the Stiftungen are in fact unevenly represented and involved in party assistance in many countries (Carothers 2006a: 149-50; Erdmann 2006: 6-7). Until 2007 in Georgia, for instance, of the Stiftungen only FNS was involved in party assistance, while FES had a considerable presence but chose not
to engage in party assistance, and KAS had only one representative. USAID and the U.S. party institutes argue that the requirement of inclusiveness may be loosened in conditions with an uneven electoral playing field (Doherty 2002: 5; USAID 2003b: 10). When democratic parties are put at a disadvantage by a ‘strict authoritarian system’, providers of assistance may opt to engage in coalition-building of democratic forces or even work with only one party. Two other admonitions for assistance providers aimed at avoiding direct interference in domestic politics are to conclude programs one month before elections (USAID 1999b: 2) and not to make financial contributions to parties (BMZ 2002: §§ I to III; USAID 2000: 15).

A second key standard of good practice in party assistance concerns the selection of parties that receive assistance. Two criteria of eligibility stand out: parties need to be democratic and they need to be ‘viable’ or ‘significant’. For the Stiftungen, to the extent that these hold on to the traditional fraternal approach, do these criteria come on top of the obvious criterion of ideological or programmatic kinship. Parties need to be democratic both in terms of attitude and of actual behavior, and both with respect to their internal operation and with respect to their operation in the party system and in society. Attitudinally, parties are deemed democratic when they, among other things, embrace political and civil liberties and accept the holding of elections as the sole legitimate means of obtaining power (USAID 2003b: 9). Behaviorally, recipient parties, especially when they are in power, should respect competing parties (USAID 1999b: 1) and act responsibly and constructively in government and in parliament. Furthermore, parties, in their internal functioning, should maintain ‘an acceptable level of internal democracy or a stated aspiration to achieve this’ (Doherty 2002: 4; see also KAS 2008a: 76). Due to the typically large numbers of parties in environments where multipartism is a relatively new phenomenon, assistance providers are rarely able to offer assistance to all available democratic parties. Next to the core criterion of democratic attitudes and behavior, a second criterion of eligibility therefore is ‘viability’, or ‘significance’ of parties. Viability is almost invariably mentioned as a core criterion for eligibility to receive assistance (e.g. Doherty 2002: 4; USAID 2006b: 27). A party is considered viable either when it has a relatively large base of support and has been successful in previous elections (USAID 2003b: 10), when it has representation in parliament, \(^{21}\) when it is seen as having chances to win representation in parliament, \(^{22}\) or simply assessed qualitatively.
2.3. The Party Assistance Norm

Over the past decade and a half there has been an upswing in research that studies how norms travel across borders. Much of this research draws on insights from social constructivism, emphasizing ideational rather than merely rationalist sources of behavior. A substantial portion of the literature on transnational diffusion is concerned with how international norms acquire widespread acceptance (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), for instance with regard to grand issues such as democracy (Carothers 1992; McFaul 2004) and human rights (Risse-Kappen et al. 1999) and more specific issues such as the international monitoring of elections (Hyde 2007; Kelley 2008), whaling (Peterson 1992) or landmines (Price 1998). Whereas the unit of analysis in a majority of these studies is at the macro-level (nation-states), the approach can equally be applied to the sub-national level of organizations or institutions, such as political parties, or even to individuals.

As an increasing number of studies have demonstrated how norms shape behavior, it has become accepted that norms present an important object of study. Social constructivist accounts of norm diffusion have shed light on how norms are crafted, promoted, framed, and internalized in different contexts. The ‘mainstream’ constructivism that is a source of insights in this study for explanations of the non-compliance of recipient parties with the party assistance norm, is often contrasted with a different strand of constructivism that is sometimes called ‘critical’ or ‘radical’ and that is associated with postmodernism (Hopf 1998; Price and Reus-Smit 1998). Although mainstream constructivists are skeptical of exclusively rationalist accounts of norm diffusion, they do not, as critical constructivists do, reject a positivist research agenda and methodology (Checkel 1998: 327). Of great influence in theorizing about norm diffusion are two ideal-type ‘logics’ (Magen 2006; March and Olsen 1989). When norm diffusion follows a ‘logic of consequences’, the recipients adopt the norm because they assume that adoption brings in benefits which outweigh possible costs. When, on the other hand, norm diffusion follows a ‘logic of appropriateness’, the recipients have come to view compliance as intrinsically appropriate behavior, and are not necessarily driven by a cost-benefit analysis. Mechanisms and instruments which are employed by norm ‘entrepreneurs’ to induce recipients into complying with a certain norm include the provision of external incentives (e.g. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004), mostly in the form of conditionality; persuasion (Checkel 2002) and arguing (Risse 2003); and ‘social influence’, exerted by the norm entrepreneurs upon the recipient through ‘the distribution of social rewards and punishments’ (Johnston 2001).
It is argued here that the promotion of democratic, stable, and representative parties by international actors amounts to norm promotion. Providers of party assistance, correspondingly, are ‘norm entrepreneurs’ or ‘agents of change’, and political parties are ‘norm recipients’ or ‘norm-takers’. A norm is understood in this context as ‘a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity’ (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 891). The assumption throughout the following chapters is that, underlying political party assistance, a norm is implicit in party assistance that conveys a comprehensive idea of how parties should operate in the electorate, as organizations, and in government, and what functions they should fulfill. Although there is ‘no initial formalized process of norm setting’ in the case of party assistance, ‘international aid actors with similar points of view on the core issues all work to spread the core values and over time the values start to gain some traction as norms’ (Carothers 2006a: 188-9). In other words, despite the fact that party assistance is a multi-faceted effort involving a variety of actors and approaches, there is a remarkable degree of consensus among providers of party assistance on which issues are central in the assistance to political parties - reflecting the current flaws of parties and an idea of how they in fact should operate - such that we can speak of a shared norm. Naturally, it is persons rather than parties who are the actual recipients of the party assistance norm. Persons who are in the position to enact change within Georgian and Ukrainian parties typically are only in the higher echelons of their parties. When, in the following, reference is made to political parties as recipients, the implication is that it is really party representatives with leverage over their parties who are the direct recipients.

From strategy papers, statements of intentions, reports and evaluations, issued on an irregular basis by the funding and implementing organizations of party assistance, the core elements of the party assistance norm can be deduced. Three elements which feature in virtually every standard-setting document by NDI, IRI, USAID, KAS, FES, and NIMD on party assistance, stand out. First, instead of being the political vehicle for a narrow leadership, parties should be broad-based and have solid organizational structures. Most crucially, parties should strive to attract a considerable and active membership (e.g. NDI 2003, ch.V; Saxer 2006a: 7; USAID 1999b: 17), with, ideally, a strong role for women and youth, and have organizational capacity at the regional and local levels (e.g. NIMD 2004: 22; Saxer 2006b: 11; USAID 1999b: 12). In a 2008 publication, NDI even argues that ‘In all sustainable democracies, the party system must be deeply and durably entrenched in the fabric of society’ (NDI 2008b: ii). Second, instead of serving primarily the interests of the leadership, parties should be representative of the interests of identifiable societal groups (e.g. USAID
To this end, parties should advocate a coherent program, whether inspired by a traditional political ideology or not (e.g. NIMD 2004: 22; Saxer 2006b: 11; USAID 1999b: 8). Electoral competition, correspondingly, should be issue-based rather than revolve about personal reputation or clientelist linkage. Programmatic positioning by parties should decrease the impact of personalism in elections, provide voters with the opportunity to make informed choices, and enhance vertical accountability. Third, instead of being entirely at the discretion of the party leader(s), parties should uphold the principle of internal democracy, on different levels of the party, and in different areas of decision-making (e.g. NIMD 2004: 22; Saxer 2006b: 11; USAID 1999b: 37). For most donors, internal democracy within parties is a requisite to be eligible for assistance (Doherty 2002: 4; KAS 2007a: 374).

These three elements constitute the core of the party assistance norm. Not surprisingly, they are highly related: the absence of thick organizational structures often goes together with programmatic vagueness and a lack of internal democracy. Strong with regard to all three elements is especially the ‘mass integration’ party type which emerged in Western Europe before the Second World War and which is said to provide the blueprint for the party assistance norm (Carothers, 2006: 124; Erdmann, 2006: 6). Most educational party assistance seminars that are not election-related focus on one or several elements of the norm. In addition to the three core elements of the norm, a number of secondary elements of the norm that feature in most, but not all standard-setting documents by the funders and providers of assistance, can be identified. The importance of financial accountability and transparency is frequently emphasized (e.g. Doherty 2002: 7; Saxer 2006b: 7). On a party-systemic level, the party assistance norm wants parties to seek constructive relations with each other (e.g. NDI 2008b: 3; NIMD 2004: 21) and to act responsibly in parliament and government (e.g. Saxer 2006b: 11; USAID 1999b: 38). In its 1999 strategy paper on party assistance, USAID (1999: 30) captures almost all elements of what is understood here as the party assistance norm in one sentence:

“Implicit in this [NDI and IRI political party development programs] is the belief that parties should be broad-based and internally democratic and have the skills and organizational capacity to compete in elections, recruit and maintain members, communicate effectively, govern effectively, and serve as loyal opposition. In addition, they believe that party systems need to strike a balance between the need for representation of all major sectors [...]”
The party assistance norm relates to an image of political parties which is in decline in many Western democracies, and which is certainly absent in the United States. Far from all parties in the West are ‘internally democratic, financially transparent, managed in a rational, nonpersonalistic fashion, highly inclusive of women at all levels, ideologically coherent, committed to issue-based, grassroots work (rather than negative, personality-oriented television campaigning), and driven by ethical and policy principles rather than opportunism’, as Carothers (2006a: 123) summarizes what he calls the ‘mythic model’ of parties that informs the design of many party assistance programs. While U.S providers of assistance promote a model of parties that is not found at home, the Stiftungen implicitly, sometimes explicitly (KAS 2007a: 378) hold up the example of the post-war German political party system in their work. At the same time, German donors insist that they are not after ‘exporting’ one specific type of party organization (BMZ 2005: 5; KAS 2007a: 380).

Not all activities that are undertaken as an element in party assistance programs are exclusively informed by the party assistance norm. This applies particularly to most election-related training seminars that seek to teach campaign skills to parties, and that are not so much concerned with the long-term structural development of parties. Judging from the documents that are issued by the funding and implementing organizations of party assistance, however, these election-related seminars are secondary in importance to seminars on ‘operational and structural development’, as the overarching objective of party assistance is to contribute to the development of stable and democratic parties.

2.4. PROMOTION OF THE PARTY ASSISTANCE NORM

Considering the state of parties in Georgia and Ukraine, they have yet to start internalizing (elements of) the party assistance norm. This section provides an outline of tentative explanations of the limited extent of compliance with the party assistance norm by recipient parties in Georgia and Ukraine. The explanations draw on insights from literature on norm diffusion that have particular relevance to party assistance. The outline of these tentative explanations provides some hints regarding the inadequacy of party assistance in countries like Georgia and Ukraine with volatile party politics and an ambiguous or less-than-democratic political setting. The two case studies in chapters five and six subsequently provide empirical information that helps to assess the relative weight of these explanations for the cases of Georgia and Ukraine. Section 6.3 particularly will revisit the arguments made in the current section. Most of the literature on norm diffusion is influenced by social constructivist
insights, placing emphasis on explanations of norm diffusion that are non-rationalist. Much literature on norm diffusion, however, is also sensitive to more goal-oriented considerations by actors, and so is the discussion here, especially where the discussion looks at the incentives for compliance of norm recipients.

Theory and case-study work on norm diffusion posit that the likelihood of compliance increases, first, as the norm is more robust, with norm robustness hinging on intrinsic features of the norm (e.g. Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 906-8; Legro 1997: 34); second, as the ‘fit’ between the international norm and existing local norms is bigger, as well as the relation between the ‘norm entrepreneurs’ and norm recipients more empathic (e.g. Cortell and Davis 2000; Risse 1999: 534); and third, as the incentive structures of norm recipients, whether material or immaterial, are more reconcilable with adoption of the norm (e.g. Kelley 2006; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004: 663-7). Stated simply, the first explanation points attention to the input of the norm promotion; the third explanation, by contrast, looks exclusively at the recipient-side of the diffusion process; and the second explanation studies the specific interaction between the supply-side and the recipient-side in the process of norm diffusion. As should be expected for a complex phenomenon such as norm diffusion, the three strands of explanation, which are consecutively discussed below, are interrelated: only a combination of the different explanations can present a comprehensive explanation of why a given norm does or does not travel.

Norm robustness

Norm robustness refers to intrinsic features of the norm. Two such intrinsic features in particular contribute to undercut the robustness of the party assistance norm: its lack of determinacy and the absence of a clear moral dimension. Determinacy of a norm has an informational value in relation to recipients: without a clear understanding of what is expected of them, recipients may construe their own interpretation of the norm which diverges from the original norm (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004: 664). Notwithstanding a remarkable degree of correspondence between documents on party assistance by different funders and providers, and also between the actual strategies that are pursued in party assistance, there are few explicit references to the existence of a single norm that is advocated by providers of assistance. The attributes of the norm can be derived from documents without too much difficulty, but the sum of these attributes has not been recognized by practitioners as amounting to a uniform norm. Moreover, there are no joint statements, of the sort of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which spells out standards and principles regarding development aid, or the standard-setting Declaration of Principles for International Election
Observation, by providers of assistance from different countries on how party assistance should be conducted and what elements it should contain.

The party assistance norm lacks a particularly compelling ethical dimension, unlike, for instance, norms which advocate a ban on torture or landmines. Providers of party assistance do not so much make a moral appeal to party representatives to change their ways, as they seek to convince them of the instrumental value of reform. The norm fails to inspire a sense of moral ‘oughtness’ (Florini 1996) on parties, decreasing the odds that norm recipients will internalize the norm out of ‘a logic of appropriateness’. An important role is played here by group dynamic: parties are less embarrassed by their failure to comply with the norm as long as most other parties equally fail to comply. Another problem is the realization that compliance with elements of the party assistance is limited and possibly dwindling among political parties in the countries from which assistance is funded. In recent decades, parties in Western democracies have become more embedded in state structures at the expense of being representative of groups in society (Katz and Mair 2002; Van Biezen 2004); they have seen their membership figures drop (Mair and Van Biezen 2001); and they are not as programmatically distinct as before while having a stronger focus on elections (Scarrow et al. 2000). The parties with which the core providers of party assistance are associated, therefore, present questionable examples for emulation.

Not only is the norm not robust, implementation of the promotion of the norm also falls short of intensity. The major providers opt to work in a large number of countries. Standards of good practice in party assistance moreover prescribe that providers of assistance work with a representative, inclusive set of parties, so that the amount of assistance per party is further decreased. The amount of assistance individual parties receive, consequently, is small, and the relation between recipients and providers of assistance is a relatively loose one.

**Normative fit and cultural match**

Related to this last point, the second explanation of the ineffectiveness of party assistance that draws on insights from literature on norm diffusion suggests a limited ‘normative fit’ or ‘cultural match’ linking the supply-side and the recipient-side of the party assistance norm. Normative fit (e.g. Schimmelfennig 2005: 7) refers to the relation between the international norm and local norms, traditions, and practices. The degree of normative fit in party assistance is primarily compromised by the idealistic nature of the party assistance norm. The norm harks back to a ‘mythic model’ of parties that hardly exist, if they have ever existed at all, in Western democracies. On
the recipient-side, the local norm on party operation generally does not strongly condemn the absence of thick organizational structures, internal democracy, and a distinct and consistent program. The relatively young political parties in countries where party assistance is provided tend to be different types of organizations, driven by different incentive structures and ‘models of behavior’ (Strom 1990) than their older Western counterparts which have gone through consecutive stages of development. There is, in brief, a vast and seemingly insurmountable distance between on the one hand the realities of party development in countries where parties receive assistance, and on the other hand the image of parties that is conveyed by the party assistance norm.

Risse (2003: 10) finds that norm diffusion is more forthcoming when norm entrepreneurs and recipients can mutually empathize, which in turn is only possible when they to some degree share a ‘gemeinsame Lebenswelt’ (common lifeworld). Given that political cultures of recipients vis-à-vis providers are so different, understanding between the two sides is limited. Not only are recipients strange to the political culture of advanced democracies which underpins the party assistance norm, providers of assistance often also lack essential insight into the nature of party politics in the countries in which they work. In keeping with the widespread realization that democracy assistance suffers from a lack of insight into local conditions (e.g. Carothers 1999: 261), it has been frequently argued that party assistance programs should be informed by more thorough analysis of local conditions (CMI 2007: 15; Kumar 2005: 514).

Incentives

Considering the arguments above, it seems unlikely that norm compliance is achieved in party assistance merely through a logic of appropriateness. To make compliance feasible, norm recipients need some sort of incentive (cf. McDonagh 2008). The third explanation for the general ineffectiveness of party assistance points to incentives of political party actors. Literature on norm diffusion offers clues on why incentives, whether provided by party assistance or existing independent from party assistance, are unlikely to induce party actors into compliance with the party assistance norm.

The two incentives that can be expected to induce compliance are, first, the anticipation of electoral gain, and second, the elevation of social status. While the first incentive is tangible and only has domestic relevance, the second is immaterial and has relevance both domestically and in the interaction with the providers of assistance. If getting more votes would follow from adoption of the party assistance
norm, then this would be the most compelling argument for parties to comply with the norm. Diamond (2003: 45) argues that one incentive for parties to reform is that ‘parties that do modernize and reform themselves may gradually develop wider appeals and competitive advantages over those that do not’. An NDI publication (2008b: 4) says that the ‘overall goal [of party assistance] is to demonstrate that grassroots outreach, open accountability, and greater representation of the public – in short, democratic practice – have themselves given parties a competitive edge in countries around the world’. In most countries where party assistance is provided, however, it is far from evident that shedding off established practices will bring in electoral benefits. Party-citizen linkages based on personal reputation and clientelism, which are more common than programmatic linkage in many countries, can be as effective for winning votes. Likewise, limited organizational density does not preclude electoral success.

The elevation of social status for parties concerns their relationship with the providers of assistance as well as the way in which the parties are viewed domestically by other parties and by the public at large. Since full compliance with the party assistance norm is so rare, it is difficult to say whether there really is a relation with elevated social status. There is strong anecdotal evidence at least that participation in party assistance programs and having ties with providers of assistance are considered a feat of prestige for parties. It is not obvious that the possible additional social rewards which follow compliance with the party assistance norm, however, are a strong enough incentive for parties to be induced into compliance.

The principal mechanism through which providers of assistance can offer incentives for compliance is conditionality. The provision of external incentives through conditionality can be an important driver in domestic reforms, as especially the example of European Union enlargement demonstrates (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004). There is little, however, that norm entrepreneurs in party assistance can put on the table by way of ‘carrots’. One potential ‘carrot’ is assistance with the integration of parties into transnational party organizations, which is widely considered as prestigious by recipient parties. There hardly appears to exist a relation, though, between the degree of compliance with the norm and the chances of being integrated into transnational parties. The ‘party of power’ United National Movement in Georgia, for instance, has received observer status in the European People’s Party, despite its association with undemocratic practices (Mitchell 2008: 94).

Just as ‘carrots’, ‘sticks’ are not used credibly and consistently in party assistance. Exclusion from assistance programs, public shaming, or any other form of social
punishment is rarely taken as a measure by providers of assistance to discourage non-compliance. This helps create a situation in which ‘[t]he assistance goes on and on, uninformed by any strategic conception about how to produce change in the other party, as the counterpart party gradually learns that it can basically do anything it wants and still have access to the study tours, exchange visits, material aid, conferences, and all the rest (Carothers 2006a: 130). Overall, the impression emerges that political party assistance, in part also due to the limited intensity of the assistance effort, is rather toothless.

Positive incentives for compliance are partially offset by competing ‘negative’ incentives. Party leaders, for instance, may actively oppose the establishment of procedures of internal democracy because they are interested in maintaining their control over the party. Adoption costs indeed are in particular excessively high for leaders, who often ‘own’ their parties and would under no condition voluntarily cede control, something that is mostly well understood by the party’s supporters. Also, parties in many countries are intently set up as projects designed to fulfill only short-term objectives, and therefore do not take an interest in developing into stable, representative forces. The fact that providers of assistance have often been ‘naïve about the incentive structures that shaped political activity’ is seen as part of the explanation of the limited effectiveness of previous party assistance programs (Power 2008: i). Recent documents by the funders and providers of assistance implicitly acknowledge the failure to take parties’ incentives and interests into account. A USAID report (2007: iv) argues that providers of assistance should understand ‘the real incentives of parties and politicians’, while a NDI report (2008b: 3) acknowledges that ‘parties have a fundamental interest in winning or maintaining political power’ and that NDI should ‘build the incentives for internal reform by shaping its programs around these interests’.