Against all odds: aiding political parties in Georgia and Ukraine

Bader, M.

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Political party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine has been unsuccessful in achieving its primary objective - contributing to making parties more representative, viable, and democratic forces. This chapter makes insightful why this is so. The first section discusses the effects that party assistance, despite the overall failure of the effort, has generated, both on parties and outside parties. Starting from the premise that party assistance will be ineffectual when it does not deliver an adequate response to the domestic constraints on party development that have been identified in chapter four, the second section explores the relation between party assistance and these domestic constraints. The core argument about the failure of party assistance, concerning its inability to overcome the domestic constraints on the development of stable and democratic parties, is contained in this section. Sections three and four provide complementary insight on the failure of party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine, first, by looking at the reasons why parties have failed to comply with the party assistance norm, and second, by taking a quick tour of the shortcomings in the input of the assistance. Through a synthesis of the insights into the domestic constraints on party development (chapter four) and the diffusion of the party assistance norm (section four in chapter two), section three sums up the main reasons why recipients of assistance have failed to comply with the party assistance norm. Section four, finally, subjects the supply-side of assistance to a critical assessment. It takes note of a number of flaws in the input of assistance in Georgia and Ukraine that point to more general problems with the implementation of party assistance.

6.1. The Question of Effects

Statements and reports by the providers of assistance sometimes mention examples of concrete impact of their work. A quarterly report of NDI in Georgia from 2001, for instance, notes that, as a consequence of NDI’s work, several parties ‘are currently evaluating the effectiveness of their organizations and campaigns’ and have ‘undertaken activities in coordination with NDI to improve voter outreach through canvassing and to refine their messages to their constituents’ (NDI 2002b: 8). IRI in Ukraine claimed in 2005 that as a result of its work, parties ‘are more focused on critical economic, social and governmental issues’ (IRI 2005b: 9). NDI in Ukraine
reported in 2000 that, following cooperation with NDI, a few parties had ‘instituted regular office hours at regional offices where the public may meet with party officials and receive information about the party’s activities and positions’ (NDI 2002b: 7), while one party had ‘solidified its infrastructure across the regions’ and another had ‘opened a new regional branch’ (idem: 5). Most of what has been written by providers of assistance in Georgia and Ukraine, however, merely outlines past and future activities, while failing to explicate the effects from their work. The Stiftungen, in their very few writings on party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine, largely omit to report evidence of the effectiveness of their programs.

Apart from the effects of party assistance that are claimed by its providers, over half of representatives of political parties who have been consulted for this research were generally positive about the assistance that their parties have received. At the same time, most were unable to point to concrete positive effects of assistance on their parties, a finding echoed, among others, in an evaluation of the Matra Political Parties Program (Verheije et al.: 47). Likewise, a USAID assessment of party assistance in Kyrgyzstan has found that ‘[w]hile political party representatives told the assessment team that they found this assistance to be useful, the team felt that its impact on the development of a multi-party political system in the country was very limited’ (Roberts 2001: 20). Some informants from political parties have admitted that assistance has not led to any changes within their respective parties.\textsuperscript{124} Former employees of providers of assistance have equally indicated that the assistance programs in which they worked, were overwhelmingly ineffectual.\textsuperscript{125} Despite generally positive assessments of assistance by party activists that were interviewed for this research, there have been complaints, for instance with regard to the multi-party ODIHR-NIMD project in Georgia, that parties did not participate to the degree that was required by the organizers of the project.\textsuperscript{126} One former representative of KAS in Ukraine has bluntly noted that parties in Ukraine were ‘beratungsresistent’ (immune to counsel) during his tenure at KAS.\textsuperscript{127}

Effects of party assistance that are reported by providers and recipients of assistance are sometimes not as impressive as they may seem to be for two principal reasons. First, most obviously, effects on party organizations are lost as soon as those parties are dissolved. An evaluation of NDI’s work in Georgia between 1997 and 2000, for instance, details a score of instances of concrete effects on political parties, but none of the parties that these effects concerned is still active (NDI 2000a). The many small effects from assistance that NDI in Ukraine reported to USAID in 2000 likewise concern parties, such as the two successor parties of Rukh and the Reforms and order Party, which in subsequent years were no longer
found among the more relevant parties (NDI 2000b). It could be that activists from dissolved parties who go on to establish new parties implement what they have learnt while participating in educational seminars as activists of those previously existing parties, but this is not evident, especially since the shortcomings of parties in Georgia and Ukraine that are widely noted today are not unlike those of ten, fifteen years ago. Second, changes that are made in parties following participation in party assistance programs may be short-lived or not much more than merely cosmetic. The single most tangible effect from party assistance in Georgia that has been mentioned in interviews by informants from across parties and outside parties, is that the Conservative Party, upon training and counsel by IRI, introduced primaries to select candidates for elections, a novelty that attracted the attention of other parties, but was not imitated. When the primaries fuelled disagreements within the Conservative Party, however, the use of primaries was quietly abandoned. A representative of IRI in Georgia has acknowledged that the type and extent of impact that was reached with respect to the Conservative Party, was not reached with respect to any other party in Georgia. Rather than aiming for tangible and lasting effects, some representatives of the providers of assistance are resigned to the idea of contributing only indirectly to the development of more stable and more democratic parties. A NIMD representative has commented that instant and measurable results should not be expected from the ODIHR-NIMD project, since the emergence of viable parties in Georgia requires a process of ‘cultural change’. In a critical assessment of party assistance in general, a representative of CIPDD, NIMD’s partner organization in Georgia, has contended that external assistance to parties is not capable of inducing structural change, and that most effect from assistance in reality consists of ‘elite socialization’. A FES representative in Ukraine, roughly in the same vein, has opined that party assistance should not even aim for effects, since the adverse political culture which blocks the development of stable and democratic parties can only be overturned over the course of several decades. This view has been supported by a representative of the PRU party bureau, who deems cooperation with NDI and IRI merely ‘symbolic’, since it would take a sustained process of many years to really bring about change in his party.

The immediate, primary goal of party assistance is to contribute to the development of stable, democratic and responsive parties with the overarching intention to promote democracy. Through party assistance, however, its providers have an indirect impact on political processes beyond party politics. Occasionally, providers of assistance seek to directly influence a political outcome. There has been
considerable speculation about the role of especially the U.S. party institutes in the Rose and Orange Revolutions. The most significant form of impact on the occurrence of the Revolutions from the work of the providers of assistance consisted in their efforts to assist with the creation of coalitions ahead of the parliamentary election in Georgia in 2003 and the presidential election in Ukraine in 2004 around which the Revolutions took place. It is widely accepted that the creation of the Our Ukraine bloc, for which both NDI and KAS take credit (see section two of chapter five), has increased unity among the opposition, without which it would have been unlikely that a single candidate could be nominated to run for president on behalf of the opposition (Howard and Roessler 2006; McFaul 2005: 9-10). A representative of IRI moreover has claimed that when one of its opinion surveys showed that, of all opposition politicians, Yushchenko had the biggest chance to win the presidential elections, other opposition politicians withdrew their bid in favor of Yushchenko.\textsuperscript{135} Besides coalition-building, the role of the providers of assistance in the Orange Revolution is seen rather in the cumulative effect of many years of assistance. IRI states in its annual report for 2004: ‘The events that took place throughout Ukraine's 2004 presidential election showcased the Ukrainian people's willingness to fight for democracy and were a testament to the effectiveness of political party training conducted by IRI’ (IRI 2005a: 4). Regional Program Director for Eurasia of IRI Steven Nix has similarly remarked: 'The International Republican Institute contributed to the triumph of democracy in Ukraine by educating its people and political parties on the values and practices of democracy since 1992.' (Nix 2005: 1). According to a representative of IRI in Ukraine, his organization did not undertake activities that were any different from activities that had been undertaken around previous elections, and that if IRI had an impact on the occurrence of the Orange Revolution, it was through the cumulative effect of a decade of training party activists.\textsuperscript{136} NDI in Ukraine maintains that, by organizing hundreds of trainings to party activists over the years, it has contributed to the emergence of a class of politically active, and often young citizens many of whom helped form the vanguard of the protests against the regime in November 2004.\textsuperscript{137} KAS in Ukraine actively supported the Orange Revolution while it was unfolding, but, like FES, has not claimed to have played a considerable role in the Revolution.

Even though parties were more central in the Rose Revolution, which happened following parliamentary elections, than in the Orange Revolution, providers of assistance have not claimed to have significantly contributed to the Rose Revolution. Efforts by NDI in Georgia to help create a coalition of three prominent opposition parties demonstrated that NDI in Georgia was not shy of being partisan. The
coalition-building effort, however, fell through. A representative of IRI in Georgia, like his colleague in Ukraine, has commented that IRI did not undertake any extraordinary activities which particularly increased the likelihood of regime change.\textsuperscript{138} Other actors in party assistance have taken up work in Georgia only after the Rose Revolution.

On occasion, providers of assistance have sought to directly influence a political outcome, but not through political party assistance. NDI in Ukraine, for instance, convinced candidates of a number of opposition parties in 2002 not to run against each other in single-member districts.\textsuperscript{139} After the Rose Revolution, a representative of IRI in Georgia, in informal conversations with government officials, has advocated changes in electoral legislation.\textsuperscript{140} In addition to effects on the macro-level of political outcomes, party assistance has affected scores of individuals who, by participating in party assistance programs, have been exposed to elements of the party assistance norm. It could be assumed that exposure to the party assistance norm has had a positive impact on those individuals, even when it did not have an impact on their parties, and that this positive impact is more profound and lasting than the more immediate effects on existing parties that party assistance typically seeks to engender. Several party activists, most of them young, who have been interviewed have indicated that repeated participation in party assistance seminars has had a formative effect on them.\textsuperscript{141} By training thousands of party activists over the years, the bigger players in party assistance have a broad reach. IRI in Ukraine, for instance, has calculated that 85 out of the 450 MPs in the Verkhovna Rada have at one point participated in a party seminar that was organized by IRI.\textsuperscript{142}

In sum, the picture of effects from party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine is a mixed bag. Lasting effects on the operation of individual parties - the primary target of assistance - have been few; effects that were insignificant, isolated, short-lived, or merely cosmetic were many. Besides the limited receptivity of parties to assistance, effects have mostly not been durable because the parties that were affected have often subsequently broken up. Outside parties, assistance has been able to leave a footprint on different levels. On a micro-level, thousands of individuals, through participation in assistance programs, have been exposed to the party assistance norm. Moreover, there is ground - though little concrete evidence - to believe that party assistance has had an impact on political outcomes in Ukraine mainly through its contribution to the creation of electoral coalitions and of NSNU.
6.2. **THE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS**

Among the biggest constraints on the development of stable and democratic parties in Georgia and Ukraine are weak party institutionalization expressed primarily in a high turnover rate of parties, the impact of authoritarian practices on party building and operation, and the circumstance that the fate of parties is almost exclusively tied to their leaders (see chapter four). Providers of assistance are not mandated, and otherwise would not have the means, to counter two crucial enabling conditions of these constraints - the limited leverage of parties to the extent that this results from institutional arrangements, and the prevalence of an (semi-)authoritarian regime context in Ukraine (until 2005) and Georgia, leaving little optimism about the potential effectiveness of party assistance. Starting from the premise that party assistance must nonetheless provide an adequate response to the domestic constraints on party development if it is to be effective, this section reviews how party assistance has related to the three core constraints on party development identified in chapter four.

**Fluid party politics**

Providers of party assistance have employed two types of activities with the potential to work against volatility and instability of parties. First, educational seminars in the area of ‘operational and structural development’ were aimed at strengthening party organizations, which in turn should have prevented them from far-reaching internal overhaul or from disintegration. Typically, these seminars focused on topics such as membership recruitment, the development of regional branches, and cadre training. Next to seminars on election-related topics, seminars aimed at strengthening party organizations are the most common type of party assistance seminars. With seminars being a fixed component of party assistance, providers of assistance face the decision to direct their focus on either of these types, or to balance between the two types of seminars. It has been a frequent objection to party assistance in Georgia that a too large proportion of seminars has been about teaching campaign skills at the expense of seminars aimed at party strengthening.\(^{143}\) This observation applies in particular to party assistance by IRI in Georgia. IRI party assistance in both Georgia and Ukraine generally has been more often around election-related topics than assistance by other providers. There is a widespread perception that party representatives are more receptive to training in campaign skills than to training on structural and operational development. Former chief of party of NDI in Georgia Lincoln Mitchell, indeed, sees the effect from party assistance in acquired campaign skills rather than anything else (Mitchell 2008: 138...
Seminar organized within the framework of the ODIHR-NIMD project, on the other hand, have left out campaign-related issues, instead focusing entirely on internal organization and interparty dialogue. While it can be argued that gaining campaign skills by party activists is beneficial to overall party development, the objective of consolidating individual parties is probably better served by seminars which specifically address questions of party organization. It may even be argued that enhancing campaign skills within parties has contributed to an even stronger emphasis on elections, which is one element in the ‘standard lament’ about parties (Carothers 2006a: 3-21).

Second, efforts at coalition-building, understood here not as stimulating temporary electoral coalitions but rather as the pursuit of more far-reaching forms of cooperation between parties that ultimately may lead to formal mergers of several parties into one party, has the potential to reduce fractionalization of the party system. In Georgia, efforts at coalition-building have fallen through. As Mitchell (2008: 122) acknowledges, NDI was not able to halt fractionalization, despite a sustained effort. The large array of electoral coalitions that have been formed in Georgia, whether or not after NDI encouraged the concerned parties to join forces, have steadily disintegrated after elections. NDI and KAS take credit for the emergence of the Our Ukraine electoral bloc from a multitude of centre-right parties and, by extension, for the merger of six parties into People’s Union Our Ukraine (NSNU) on the basis of the Our Ukraine bloc. The eventual emergence of NSNU appears to be an unequivocal success of coalition-building, but as the end of the Yushchenko presidency seemed to come to a close in 2008 and 2009, the party entered a process of disintegration, with little prospect that the party could be preserved as a viable political force. Representatives of the providers of assistance who have been involved in coalition-building in Ukraine for many years rather than successes stress the difficulty of reaching results in coalition-building. An often-heard complaint in interviews has been that coalition-building has often been quite ineffectual in Ukraine, but equally in Georgia, due to the unwillingness of party elites to give up their party organizations and due to personal differences between party leaders. Party assistance could hardly manipulate the whims of these elites. The ODIHR-NIMD project, finally, has sought to stimulate coalition-building through interparty dialogue. Against assertions by the supply-side of the project (OSCE ODIHR 2006: 34), representatives of the participating parties in the project have indicated that not much constructive dialogue between the parties has taken place, and coalition-building, accordingly, has not been forthcoming. By contrast,
it may be argued that the position of the parties as autonomous forces has been affirmed through their participation in the project.

The impact of (semi-)authoritarianism

In the political context of post-communist Georgia and Ukraine (before the Orange Revolution), a number of highly relevant parties have been products of (semi-)authoritarian practices. This applies foremost to parties of power and spoiler parties that have been created at the behest of the regimes with the purpose of distorting the electoral playing field. In part flowing from regulations and in part by informal self-imposition, providers of assistance are barred from working with undemocratic parties. Nonetheless, especially parties of power have received ample assistance, and in the case of Georgian parties of power have received even more assistance than other parties. Shevardnadze’s party of power CUG was one of NDI’s three core partners until 1999, and remained a recipient after the fraudulent parliamentary elections of 1999. UNM has received a disproportionately large share of IRI party assistance, has been included in the ODIHR-NIMD project, and was perceived by FNS and VVD as a potential partner until the party started pursuing affiliation with the European People’s Party. NDP in Ukraine, a party which benefited extensively from state resources, was one of the core recipients of NDI assistance in the late 1990s. A former chief of party of NDI in Ukraine has remarked that NDI’s association with NDP was prompted by the objective to undercut KPU. To battle one evil, then, NDI engaged with what was seen as a lesser evil.

While providers of assistance may sometimes work with a party of power in the understanding that the concerned party does not fully meet democratic standards, in some cases they seem to be unable to detect the undemocratic elements in parties. It has been naïve of FNS and VVD, for instance, to believe that UNM was serious in its initial self-positioning as a liberal party ‘of the European type’. Similarly, even after the 2008 parliamentary elections, one representative of the NIMD-ODIHR project maintained that UNM was still a democratic force while by that time evidence pointed in the other direction. Considering that they were driven by incentives that were incompatible with the elements of the party assistance norm that providers of assistance sought to infuse, parties of power have been unlikely to prove compliant with the party assistance norm. In Georgia, the VoteMatch element in the ODIHR-NIMD program resulted in failure because the ruling UNM did not follow the stipulations of VoteMatch. The project, in the end, suffered directly from the participation of the party of power. Providers of assistance in Georgia have been right to refrain from working with the Revival party, which over the course of a...
number of years existed as a second party of power alongside CUG and which was an instrument of the highly repressive Abashidze regime in the autonomous region in Adjara. With good reason, however, could the arguments not to work with Revival have been extended to CUG. Two parties which received NDI assistance, the Traditionalist Party and the Socialist Party, entered into an electoral coalition with Revival in the 1999 parliamentary elections. Despite their association with an obviously undemocratic party, these two parties have continued to receive NDI assistance after the 1999 elections.

Providers of assistance who have chosen an inclusive approach in party selection, have inadvertently worked with less-than-democratic parties. IRI in Ukraine, most notably, ‘does not have stringent selection criteria for program participants’ (IRI 2002: 1), and therefore has sent out invitations to all parties that participated in a given parliamentary election, bar the most extremist or virulently anti-American parties. Given that, for example, out of the ten top contenders in the 2002 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, six were identified as ‘virtual projects pure and simple’, (Wilson 2002b: 96) among the invitees were different types of parties that were products of semi-authoritarianism.

**Elite ownership**

A widely recognized brake on the development of stable and representative parties in many countries is the excessive power of party leaders who often regard their parties as personal vehicles which can be controlled and disposed of at will. If party assistance seeks to help overcome this constraint, it will have to work towards breaking the dominance of party leaders. Since internal democracy, or at least the intention to install procedures of internal democracy in the not too distant future, is an eligibility criterion for inclusion in party assistance programs, assistance, in theory, is only provided to parties in which the power of leaders is constrained. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, however, providers of assistance barely enforce the criterion of internal democracy.

Party assistance is for a large part about strengthening and broadening the organizational structure of parties, which, if successful, multiplies the number of persons within parties who can exert influence over their party’s operations, and which consequently decreases the power of leaders. A still significant proportion of assistance, however, in effect affirms the role of leaders. This applies most directly to study and exchange visits that are organized for party leaders, and to consultations with party leaders. In the case of assistance to Georgian and Ukrainian parties, study and exchange visits came in two varieties: they were either for
(young) party activists or for party leaders. Consultations, a fixed component of party assistance, were always with party leaders or with confidants of party leaders. Providers of assistance would typically be reluctant to acknowledge that their activities involve party leaders, and rather stress how rank-and-file activists gain influence in their parties as a result of their work. An exception to some degree is the ODIHR-NIMD project, which contained a separate ‘leaders’ track’ aimed at stimulating dialogue and constructive relations between party leaders through informal dinners, collective study trips, and more.

One problem of the elite ownership of parties for party assistance is that potential effects from assistance are offset by leaders who sometimes have interests that run against the reforms proposed by party assistance, the simplest interest being the retention absolute power within the party. It has been frequently noted in interviews that while party activists were in favor of implementing a certain reform, nothing came of it because the party leadership resisted.148 In an independent assessment for USAID of civil society (including political parties) in Georgia in 2001, the authors, along the same lines, note that ‘party leaderships have to date taken few concrete actions that can be viewed as meaningful first steps towards building effective, internally democratic organizations, capable of presenting the voting public with credible, differentiated platforms’ (Black et al. 2001: iii), Mostly for this reason the report recommends that ‘USAID should consider a reorientation of party assistance to concentrate where possible on grassroots party structures’ (idem: 2). There is little, however, that indicates that providers of assistance, whether in Georgia or Ukraine, have given up engaging with party leaderships.

It has been said in interviews that at the many trainings for party activists that are organized, most participants are relatively low in the party hierarchy and in any case are not in the position to enforce change in their respective parties. The problem, so it seems, is that participants in assistance programs who may be receptive to the contents of assistance have too little leverage, while those with the leverage are not interested in reform. Even if party assistance would reorient to only work with grassroots party structures, the issue of all-powerful leaders is left untouched. Assistance programs often include an effort to enhance the role of two groups in parties who are thought of as being unduly kept out of influential positions: women and youth. Against the backdrop of more imminent problems in parties, such as the dominance of leaders, these efforts rarely have much effect. A 2007 assessment of USAID party assistance in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union therefore suggests that supporting women and youth should not be a priority for assistance (USAID 2007: vi-vii).
This section has shown that providers of assistance are largely powerless against domestic factors which impede the development of a mass of stable and democratic parties, and it has revealed some of the dilemmas that providers of assistance face in their work in countries like Georgia and Ukraine. Much party assistance is, directly or indirectly, concerned with increasing the sustainability of parties, but rarely has assistance been able to halt parties from disintegrating or to convince parties to coalesce into bigger, more viable forces. It is moreover doubtful whether assistance could have had much more impact when a larger share of assistance would have been specifically targeted at making parties more viable. Providers of assistance could have been more cautious regarding assistance to undemocratic parties. Being stricter in this respect, however, would have involved very difficult choices in the selection of parties, and have rendered the effort even more politically contentious. Finally, it is virtually impossible to circumvent excessively powerful party leaders in party assistance when the assistance is interested in yielding real effects. Providers of assistance can choose to direct the assistance to grassroots elements within parties, but these are typically blocked from wielding any real influence.

6.3. WHY NOT COMPLY?

The previous section has made clear that domestic constraints on the development of stable and democratic parties in Georgia and Ukraine have invalidated party assistance in the form in which it has been implemented. Providers of assistance have been unable to effectively counteract or mitigate the domestic constraints. The current section adds a perspective to the failure of party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine by shifting focus to the recipients of assistance. Specifically, this section asks why parties have not been more receptive to the core of assistance programs - the party assistance norm. Three arguments are presented. The first and most hefty argument draws, as the previous section, on the insights from chapter four, while the latter two arguments draw on the discussion on the promotion of the party assistance norm in section four of chapter two.

First, most of the more relevant parties do not comply with the party assistance norm because they are disinterested in reforming into the type of party that assistance programs promote. Most likely without admitting to it, these parties oppose greater internal democracy, the development of a coherent program to which they can be held accountable, or an expansive organizational structure. They are often led by incentives, such as vote maximization or reaping the benefits associated with holding office, that make them disinterested in reforming in
accordance with the tenets of the party assistance norm. They are, in sum, are a priori unsuitable recipients of party assistance. This applies most of all to consecutive parties of power in Georgia and to spoiler parties and office-seeking ‘oligarchic’ parties in Ukraine, but it also applies to the many parties that are essentially a vehicle for their leadership. While some party activists may be receptive to the message of assistance and would like to see change within their parties, it is especially party leaders who are disinterested in the type of reform that providers of assistance seek to help engender in parties, or who even may have explicit reasons to want to block reform. Installing procedures of intraparty democracy, for instance, could entail that the position of party leaders becomes subject to contestation. Carothers (2006b: 82) notes that ‘the leaders of parties in [recipient] countries tend to resist the reforms that outside aid providers advocate’. A 2001 assessment of civil society (including parties) in Georgia has it that ‘limited political will seems to exist within the parties to overcome their many institutional weaknesses, particularly among the national leadership who hold most of the authority within the party’ (Black et al. 2001: 2). The circumstance that many relevant parties are plainly disinterested in reform is a sufficient explanation for why these parties have failed to comply with the party assistance norm. For the sake of the argument it is assumed in the remainder of this section that parties generally are not disinterested in reform. When this is the case, however, the odds of compliance with the party assistance norm are still small, because other factors, related to the diffusion of the party assistance norm, contribute to make compliance unlikely.

The first of two major reasons for the failure to comply that draws on the discussion of the promotion of the party assistance norm in chapter two, finds that incentives which could compel parties to comply with the party assistance norm, are few and weak. The strongest incentive that may induce compliance is the anticipation of electoral gains, but despite claims by providers of assistance to the contrary (see page 48), there is no evidence that compliance indeed delivers electoral gains, and neither do parties expect that it does. Moreover, parties in Ukraine (at least until 2005) and Georgia, rather than planning long-term organizational development, were mainly involved in a struggle against the regime, and consequently rarely looked beyond next elections. Even if parties would in principle be interested in reform, their limited time horizon, which was dictated by more short-term concerns, put off reform. Compliance is also not strongly associated with higher social status, which under different conditions may present a real incentive to comply. Parties tend to be eager to participate in assistance programs in part because participation
is seen as a feat of prestige, but compliance does not have a similar working. Providers of assistance do not systematically reward parties for ‘good behavior’, nor are they systematically reprimanded when they, for instance, display undemocratic behavior. Providers of assistance do not employ ‘social influence’ (see section four of chapter two) on parties to the extent that may produce noticeable positive effects.

When compliance is difficult to achieve from a lack of intrinsic incentives, a policy of providing external incentives, whether or not in the form of conditionality, by the providers of assistance may still have the potential to bring about compliance. Providers of assistance, however, do not have the means at hand to credibly effectuate a policy of external incentives. A possible external incentive is the inclusion, as observer, associate, or full member, of parties from Georgia and Ukraine into party internationals. Providers of assistance can play a role in this process by facilitating contacts or lobby on behalf of their ‘partner’ parties. The relation between compliance with the party assistance norm and inclusion in party internationals, however, is minimal, as, for instance, is illustrated by the inclusion of Batkivshchyna and the United National Movement in the European People’s Party as observer members in recent years. As damaging as the inability to provide credible positive external incentives is that the providers of assistance neither take negative measures to retaliate a failure to comply. Since parties do not incur costs from non-compliance, many of them participate in assistance programs for years on end while remaining as unresponsive, unrepresentative, and leader-dominated as they were before participation.

A logic of consequentiality, in sum, has not applied to the diffusion of the party assistance norm in Georgia and Ukraine. A logic of appropriateness equally has not been at work in party assistance. The second major reason for the failure to comply that draws on the discussion of the promotion of the party assistance norm, accordingly, is that receiving assistance has not gotten Georgian and Ukrainian parties to see compliance with the party assistance norm as ‘the right thing to do’. This should in part be attributed to inherent characteristics of the norm (see section four of chapter two), including a missing ethical dimension to the norm, as well as to the limited intensity and consistency of the party assistance effort. Between the providers of assistance and its recipients, there is mostly only a loose relationship, which, as discussed above, does not involve binding agreements or the provision of meaningful external incentives. Moreover, there is often not much of an incremental learning process in assistance programs (Carothers 2006a: 126-7): different components of assistance programs are implemented without a coherent underlying plan and are sometimes recycled after some time. Personnel turnover in the
organizations of the providers of assistance and a turnover of party representatives who maintain contacts with foreign organizations (often called ‘international secretary’) contribute to undermine continuity in party assistance. Getting parties to see compliance with the party assistance norm as ‘the right thing to do’ is further complicated by limited degrees of normative fit and cultural match (see section four of chapter two) between the party assistance norm and existing local norms, and between the providers and recipients of assistance. Certain elements of the party assistance norm, such as internal democracy or increasing participation of women, are too divorced from the prevalent domestic political culture to make compliance attainable through party assistance alone. In the relationship between the providers and recipients of assistance, the providers have moreover been unable to persuade recipients to accept both the instrumental and the normative value of reform, in part due to a shortcoming in mutual understanding and the ability to empathize. Recipients were sometimes unsure of what was expected from them, while providers have often insufficiently grasped local settings of party development, including the incentives which drive the operation of parties.

6.4. SCRUTINIZING PROVIDERS OF ASSISTANCE

This section takes stock of the most glaring shortcomings in the input of assistance in Georgia and Ukraine in order to shed more light on the failure of party assistance in these two cases. While not a comprehensive assessment of the performance of donors and providers of assistance, this section takes them to task for a number of strategies and practices that should be considered as misguided in light of the challenges with which the party assistance effort was confronted in Georgia and Ukraine. A quick tour of the shortcomings of the input of assistance helps to understand why the assistance effort has been unsuccessful. The shortcomings have been grouped under four headings: obfuscation, fragmentation and contingency, feedback and accountability, and limited understanding and false judgment.

Obfuscation

The donors and providers of assistance have engaged in obfuscation regarding the effectiveness of their work, the degree to which they kept themselves to self-imposed standards of good practice, and in their assessments of parties and regimes in Georgia and Ukraine. First, party assistance has sometimes been depicted as a (modest) success, particularly in annual reports of donors and providers of assistance, when there were few facts to substantiate the claim of success with. A booklet outlining the USAID contribution to the wave of electoral
revolutions that occurred between 2003-2005 notes that as a result of assistance provided by U.S.-supported groups, ‘Georgian political parties learned how to organize and register their voters, train election observers, prepare party platforms and communicate their agendas to the public.’ (USAID 2005: 2) The 2006 annual report of ODIHR speaks, in relation to the NIMD-ODIHR program, of a ‘momentum based on an authentic commitment for further co-operation and multilateral dialogue between the parties involved in the program’ (OSCE ODIHR 2007: 34), while representatives from the political parties have indicated in interviews that relations between the participating parties in fact have been strained throughout.

Referring to the period before the Orange Revolution, a 2008 KAS publication notes: ‘It can be concluded in hindsight that, both with regard to the rudimentary programmatic contours of the partner parties, and with regard to the approximation to European partners and concepts, some successes were achieved at this stage’.149 It remains unclear, however, what these successes consist in. Official publications, unsurprisingly, keep silent about failures, which are more widely acknowledged in private conversations with providers of assistance and by former employees of these organizations. Overall, donors and providers present a picture of assistance in Georgia and Ukraine that does not reflect its inability to bring about real changes to party development. As Easterly (2008: 5) has described with respect to development aid, donors and providers prefer not to think much about past failures and instead express optimism about the opportunity to do it well this time around, even when current programs are not that different from previous ones.

Second, the latter two sections of chapter five have demonstrated how the core standards of good practice in party assistance, with regard to party selection and to maintaining a non-partisan position, have been commonly violated in Georgia and Ukraine. Providers of assistance have generally omitted to put forward the reasons behind these violations. The fact that they have not been scrutinized for these violations to any serious degree points to a gap in accountability.

Third, donors and providers have also often painted a brighter picture of political regimes and of parties than was warranted. In one example, USAID described Georgia around the turn of the century as a state that was still in a process of ‘democratic transition’ (USAID 1999b: passim). According to former chief of party of NDI in Georgia Lincoln Mitchell, however, ‘It was clear by the turn of the twenty-first century that Georgia under Shevardnadze and what remained of CUG was not moving toward democracy, but was a nondemocratic country with a fair amount of political and civic freedom and “essentially illiberal traits.”’ (Mitchell 2008: 41). Linguistic obfuscation through the use of euphemisms has been common. Instead of
acknowledging that the political party landscape was upset by a high degree of volatility and party turnover, IRI in Ukraine noted in its work plan for 2000 that ‘Ukrainian political parties are in a state of transition’ (IRI 1999: 1). Instead of pointing out the clear shortcomings in the political transformation of Georgia, NDI in 2001 had it that ‘Georgia’s government continues to face serious challenges in building a unified, democratic state’ (NDI 2000a: 2).

**Fragmentation and contingency**

The implementation of political party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine has lacked concentration and intensity. The limited resources that are available to donors are spread over a large number of different programs. Most donors have opted to work in all post-communist states of Central and Eastern Europe and of the former Soviet Union, unless they had specific reasons not to work in a particular country. Moreover, the standards of good practice prescribe that providers of assistance work with a representative, inclusive set of parties, so that the amount of assistance per party is further decreased. Because the amount of assistance individual parties receive is small, the relation between recipients and providers of assistance is a relatively loose one. In addition to fragmentation, the assistance effort has suffered from a large degree of contingency in Georgia and Ukraine. One representative of NDI in Ukraine, for instance, indicated that most of what NDI does in Ukraine depends on who heads the country office: under consecutive chiefs of party, programming had undergone substantial changes. The future of the ODIHR-NIMD project, similarly, has been said to depend largely on personnel changes at ODIHR. Interpersonal relations between representatives from different providers of assistance are often decisive for the degree and form of coordination between them. Generally, the different providers of assistance that are present in Georgia and Ukraine scarcely coordinate their activities; sometimes they are unaware of the activities of other providers in the same country. Taken together, the impression is created that party assistance is insufficiently sustained and is short on informed understanding of how to proceed.

**Feedback and accountability**

Next, party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine has been characterized by a lack of feedback and accountability. Measures are rarely taken when assistance programs do not bring in desired effects, as evidenced by the fact that most ineffectual assistance programs have gone on for years on end. A gap in accountability, as noted above, is also noticeable in the fact that parties do not explain why they divert from prevalent standards of good practice in party assistance. The providers
of assistance as a result are virtually immune to scrutiny. Most evaluation of party assistance is done internally: independent evaluations are conducted infrequently and on an irregular basis. The few independent assessments of party assistance programs in Georgia and Ukraine have either been largely ignored, or rebutted by the providers of assistance. In 2007-2008, there was no indication, for instance, that a large assessment in 2007 of assistance programs in four countries, including Georgia, of 2007 had been taken note of. A 2001 civil society assessment with respect to Georgia by USAID advised that ‘party development efforts not be given priority among the areas of D/G program emphasis’ and even more directly that ‘the political party program could be scaled down’ (Black et al. 2001: 17). An assessment of USAID’s DG program in Georgia, commissioned by USAID, one year later similarly advised that ‘USAID should reorient its party work away from attempting to build national party organizations to building or sustaining support for specific reforms or to blocking roll-backs of enacted reforms’ (ARD Inc. 2002: 48). Assessments of party assistance in Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, where the environment for party assistance has been comparable to that of Georgia and Ukraine, have in similar terms suggested that existing party assistance programs could be decreased (Nelson and Katulis 2005: vii; Roberts 2001: 30). In its work plan for 2001-2002, IRI in Georgia rebuts the suggestion that downsizing party assistance is due, arguing that scaling down party assistance ‘would hurt Georgia’s fledgling democracy’, and pointing out that ‘the Institute’s work with a range of democratic parties has begun to show results’ (NDI 2001c: 7).

In addition to the fact that providers of assistance are not often held accountable or let themselves be held accountable for their work, they receive little valuable feedback that could help improve their activities. The most natural source of feedback, recipient parties, tend to report positively on the assistance that they have received, even if they do not expect that the assistance will have much effect on their organizations. As in much of development aid, party assistance lacks a ‘market feedback’ that provides a potential check when assistance goes awry (cf. Easterly 2006). An obvious reason why such a market feedback is missing lies in the asymmetrical relation between providers and recipients of assistance and in the fact that the effect of assistance is not subject to measurement with clear indicators. Instead, as noted under the heading of ‘obfuscation’, effects from assistance can be spun to make the effort seem more successful.

Finally, it has been found in this research that the donors and providers of assistance are in part unable to present records of their past activities, making it more difficult for the public to scrutinize those activities. With a reference to the
Freedom of Information Act, a request was filed within the framework of this research project to USAID to receive all work plans from NDI and IRI in Georgia and Ukraine from the late 1990s until 2007-2008. USAID could only partially meet this request. The Stiftungen, for their part, keep very few systematized records of their activities that can be examined by the public.

Limited understanding and false judgment

The widely held contention that democracy promotion is compromised by a limited knowledge of local conditions (e.g. Carothers 1999: 261) applies in equal measure to political party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine. An evaluation of party assistance by the Dutch party institutes plainly notes that the party institutes have insufficient knowledge about the relations between different actors in party development in Georgia and about the complex political situation (Verheije et al. 2006: 60). Limited understanding of local conditions entails copying of programs from one recipient country to the next. Methods and strategies in party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine have in many instances not been unlike those used in a host of other countries, foremost other post-communist states, and conform to what can tentatively be called a ’standard method’ (Carothers 2006a: 112-41). An implication of this unreflective ‘one size fits all’ approach is that some topics in party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine were not directly relevant to the local context, while topics that were omitted would have been more required. Representatives from political parties and local organizations have sometimes voiced their frustration over the insensitivity of international actors in party assistance, for instance with regard to the frequent use of foreign trainers. Despite claims by providers that their assistance to parties is entirely demand-driven, there have been complaints by parties that assistance programs in which they participated were drawn up without their involvement and did not respond to their needs and wishes. Limited knowledge and insight of the local setting have been reflected in incorrect assessments of party development and of individual parties in Georgia and Ukraine. Among the issues that providers of assistance have sometimes insufficiently understood regarding party development in Georgia and Ukraine are the real incentives which drive the creation and operation of parties. Also, providers of assistance have often too easily assumed that adjustments that were made by parties in their organization were more than mere cosmetic. Concerning the setting in which assistance programs were implemented, providers of assistance, moreover, sometimes failed to grasp the undemocratic leanings of consecutive political regimes, and how this less-than-democratic regime context contributed to invalidate the party assistance intervention.