

Coming Closer to Europe: Transnational Cooperation between EPFs and Post-Soviet parties

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ABSTRACT

The present article aims at expanding the Europeanization research outside EU member and candidate states. It examines the transnational cooperation between EU-based parties and East European parties as a mode of direct EU influence on domestic transformations of its outsiders. The study reveals the weaker influence of EPFs on domestic changes of EEN parties than on CEE counterparts resulting from the limited EU level material and political incentives as well as the vaguely defined EPFs' accession criteria. However, the empirical evidence also shows that both EU-based parties and EEN political actors are more interested in transnational cooperation. This is merely due to the fact that EPFs are willing to expand and increase their popularity outside the EU borders, while EEN domestic parties perceive their affiliation to a EU-based party grouping as joining a prestigious club of parties devoted to EU norms and practices.

Key words: Europeanization, European Party Federations, post-communist parties, European integration

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Introduction

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the European party federations have strove for establishing like-minded parties in the post-soviet space. On the one hand, this was determined by desire to promote their ideological doctrines within the broader Europe. On the other hand, Eastward enlargement of EPFs' transnational linkages was motivated by the opportunity of increasing their influence within European legislature once post-soviet CEE countries would become EU members. In this respect, the EU-based parties have been competing in the region in recruiting new members in order to maximize their influence within EP and gain institutional and financial benefits.¹ (Delsoldato 2002; Hanley 2002; Öhlén 2008).

The present article aims at expanding the research on transnational cooperation of EPFs with post-communist sister parties by examining the case of East European Neighborhood (EEN), particularly Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Based on Europeanization literature the work investigates the compliance to EPFs' accession criteria as a mode of direct EU involvement in domestic transformation of EEN parties in line with European norms and practices. The theoretical framework is built on two major variables from the International Relations (IR) and Comparative Politics (CP) traditions: the degree and the nature of EU involvement, based on the clarity of EPFs' accession criteria and the size of rewards, as well as the degree of national political parties' engagement in transforming according to EPFs' requirements.

Two major arguments are advanced in the present research. On the one hand, limited financial assistance and absence of EU membership perspective, together with vaguely defined accession requirements, determine a weaker influence of Europarties on domestic changes of political actors in line with EU-based norms and practices. On the other hand, however, both EPFs and EEN parties are interested in transnational cooperation despite the limited size of

political and financial rewards, as compared to EU member or candidate states. EPFs' driving force is the expansion of its influence and membership in the region, while EEN parties perceive their affiliation to EU-based party groups as joining a prestigious club of parties devoted to EU norms and practices.

The paper starts with the presentation of the theoretical framework that derives from scholarly arguments on transnational links between EPFs and parties from EU member and candidate states. It then looks at the interconnection between norms and practices promoted by Europarties and those promoted by other European and international level actors, such as political foundations and International party networks. Next, the work focuses on the study case of European People's Party, the largest Europarty, and examines the compliance to EPP's accession criteria of EEN parties, the recruiting strategy and the mechanisms of EPP's influence on domestic transformation of parties from the region. The conclusion summarizes the major findings and stresses the similarities and the differences between EPFs' influence on domestic transformation of political organizations in CEE candidates and East European neighbors.

Theoretical framework

Europeanization literature has advanced two important factors that determine the extent of EU influence on domestic transformation in line with European norms and practices. First, the material and political incentives are the 'carrots' that EU can offer in order to stimulate domestic actors to follow its rules. (Grabbe 2003, 2005; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Vachudová 2005) However, as compared to CEE candidates, EU 'carrots' offered to political actors as a reward for successful liberal democratic transformation are much weaker in the case of its Eastern neighbors, such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Most importantly, the

strongest EU instrument in promoting domestic changes - full membership perspective – is missing from ENP framework. As a consequence, EU direct force is significantly diminished in determining successful democratic transformations within the political arenas of its post-Soviet outsiders. As this study focuses on EU-based party groupings, the examined ‘carrots’ from the EU level are EPF membership (observer or full member), financial assistance, as well as political incentives (internal legitimacy and international credibility).

The degree of clarity of requirements represents another important factor in determining direct EU impact on domestic transformations. In order to observe a high direct European level pressure on non-member states, EU policies should be determinate, that is unambiguously designed and holding a binding power. (Franck 1990: 52--83; Legro 1997: 34; Schimmelfennig and Schwellnus 2006) Some refer to it as the ‘density’ of the rules or the extent of EU demands (Jacoby 2004: 9--10). Scholars have stressed that a clear formulation of EU requirements is of significant importance for determining the effectiveness of their implementation and for avoiding a potential political distortion (Tocci 2008: 890) In this research the operationalization of the present variable is represented by the clarity of EPFs’ accession criteria.

Transnational cooperation between EU-based parties and EEN domestic political actors is regarded in this work as a mode of EU influence on internal political changes when there is a degree of direct pressure emanated from Brussels, yet the initiative to transform according to European standards comes from the domestic level. Post-communist parties engage in the compliance with affiliation requirements of different European Party Federations voluntarily, mostly driven by the perceived political legitimacy benefits they can obtain both at domestic and European/international levels. Once parties step on the path towards the status of an EPF

observer or full member, they come under a direct influence from the European level as they have to pass the final exam of the compliance to EPF requirements. Apart from the politico-intellectual and politico-material support that EPFs offer for domestic transformation of EEN parties, they also provide an important source of political legitimacy and international credibility regarding post-communist parties' commitment to the promotion of democratic reforms and their European aspirations. (Delsoldato 2002: 278; Pridham 1999: 1225; 2001: 184) For Left wing parties, for example, obtaining the status of PES observer is of major importance for proving the domestic public and EU that they reformed themselves and could get over the communist past.

The present mechanism refers to the mainstream EU-based parties, or the so-called stable “core” of the Euro-party system – the European People’s Party EPP,² the Party of European Socialists PES and the European Liberal, Democrat, and Reform Party ELDR. (Smith 1989) As these EPFs hold the majority seats within the European Parliament they are actively involved in EU policy making and in the promotion of European integration and of EU-based norms and values. Consequently, this mode of European influence does not apply to EPFs that are Euroskeptic and oppose the process of European integration and the nature of European Union.³

In the case of CEE candidate states transnational links between EPFs and post-communist parties have been regarded as one of the mechanisms of Europeanization during their EU accession process. European party federations were believed to have the role of “stimulant and support factor” in the process of democratization of Central and East European countries. (Pridham 1999: 1226) European level elections have proved to be of greater importance for national parties than in the case of old EU members (Schmitt 2005) The cooperation with EU-

based party groupings has benefited in several ways the development of parties and party systems in CEE candidates. First, it had a positive socialization impact on the emerging political actors that were looking for inspiration regarding their ideological doctrine towards the established parties from Western democracies. Transnational party cooperation helped to mould party identities in the initial stage of their development by familiarizing them with democratic principles and overcoming authoritarian tendencies in post-Soviet political spaces. (Pridham 1999: 1225; 2001: 184--185) Compliance to EPFs membership requirements helped CEE parties to consolidate their identities and to increase their electoral performance. Moreover, apart from ideological support, EPFs offered significant politico-material support by transferring organizational, managerial, and electoral know-how via joint activities (elite socialization, trainings, conferences, etc).

Second, the cooperation with EU-based parties and their potential membership were perceived as offering international credibility and internal political legitimacy. (Delsoldato 2002: 278; Pridham 1999: 1225; 2001: 184) For the newly emerging parties the association to EPFs helped them gain more political legitimacy within domestic politics by offering an image of parties committed to promote liberal-democratic reforms and European integration objective. (Vachudová 2005: 139) Concomitantly, the achievement of EPF observer or member status for Left wing parties was of a significant importance for proving at domestic and international levels their devotion to ideological reform according to Western political doctrines (mostly social-democracy). (Buras 2005; Hough 2005; Sloam 2005; Stoyanov 2006) It was an imperative step in proving the overcome of authoritarian past and their belonging “in real terms to a set of values which are also values of the EU.”⁴ Close contacts with EU party groupings helped post-communist parties to portray themselves as reliable partners for international institutions, particularly European Union, and to gain international credibility.

Finally, transnational cooperation between post-communist parties from aspiring EU members and EPFs was viewed as a mean of establishing contacts with European leaders and as non-official channels for networking in favor of EU adherence. (Pridham 2001: 192--193)

I hypothesize, however, that the European party federations would have a different influence on parties from non-candidate states, in this case from East European Neighborhood, based on the following reasoning. In the case of EU candidate countries, both European party groupings and national parties had more interest in transnational cooperation. The clear EU membership perspective motivated CEE parties to establish early contacts with EPFs and adapt to their ideological principles knowing that they will be able to achieve full membership and participate in EU decision-making once their country would join the Union. Apart from this long-term incentive, the adjustment of CEE national parties to EPF requirements was also encouraged by short-term material and political benefits, in the form of financial-material, ideological, or organizational support.

Compared to post-communist parties from non-candidate states, EU-based party groupings were more inclined to support the development of parties from associate countries. On the one hand, it was determined by the strong lobbying from domestic political actors from CEE that aspired for EPF membership. On the other hand, EU-based parties were motivated by the opportunity of spreading their ideological principles and obtaining more representation and political power in the enlarged European Union, as well as new party funding. European Peoples Party, the largest European party federation, has created a special working group on Central and Eastern Europe and even a special enlargement fund aimed at supporting their sister parties from post-communist candidate states. (Delsoldato 2002: 274) The rivalry between the two major EP party groupings, EPP and PES, spread outside EU countries in their contest to build and recruit like-minded political organizations within the newly opening post-

communist political arena.

The requirements of joining European party federations are argued to be the same for all aspiring parties. Yet, the high stakes of accepting sister-parties from associate countries, together with the pressure exerted by the fixed date of EU joining, determined some EPFs to relax their ideological requirements and to adopt a more strategic behavior regarding the granting of membership perspective. Europarties' decisions of recognition and affiliation of CEE sister-parties were determined by political rather than ideological reasoning (larger and successful parties were easier granted EPF membership) and inter-party competition (particularly between EPP and PES) rather than ideological cohesion. (Delsoldato 2002: 281)

By contrast to CEE candidate countries, the lack of a clear membership perspective and the absence of high political and material stakes are expected to shape a more principal-oriented rather than a strategic behavior of EPFs in EU's post-communist neighborhood. I speculate that Europarties would be stricter in the selection of EEN applicants, monitoring closely the fulfillment of association requirements by EEN parties, particularly the implementation of their ideological principles. Because EEN parties cannot offer more votes to EPFs within the European Parliament, I expect to find that the political strength of a party (particularly its governing potential) plays a secondary role in EEN party selection. As a consequence, I anticipate that EPFs have a narrower impact on EEN parties, directed merely towards the 'natural' sister-parties.

Concomitantly, the lack of a special budget for non-EU members and candidates makes the cooperation between EEN parties and EPFs harder and more limited, with political foundations playing a major role in supporting financially the transnational party cooperation. The limited financial support, together with the restricted membership rights that the biggest EPF's can

grant to EEN actors, determine the existence of a weaker conditionality policy that EPFs can apply to persuade the like-minded EEN actors to comply with their accession requirements. The degree of direct influence depends primarily on willingness and readiness of domestic political actors to cooperate with Europarties.

Internationals, political foundations, and Europarties

Before proceeding with the analysis of the adjustment to EPFs association requirements it needs to be stressed once again the interconnection between the principles and actions of Europarties with other actors from the European and international levels, primarily with political foundations from different EU member states and International party networks. The analysis of the fulfillment of EPFs membership requirements cannot be done in isolation from the influence of other transnational party networks, political foundations and bilateral cooperation with EU members' parties. However, as the EU is the major actor within the European continent in promoting European liberal-democratic norms and values, so the Europarties represent the major actor in determining the post-communist parties to come closer to Western ideology and party types. Compared to other European and international actors, EPFs have more persuasive power on reformation of parties from countries aspiring to join the EU because of expected benefits from the association to EPFs, such as political legitimacy and financial-material support, as well as the potential EU membership perspective.

In the first years of transition the activity of party Internationals in the region preceded the involvement of EPFs, influencing the adaptation of post-communist parties to Western party families. The achievement of party Internationals membership was a first exam for the emerging post-communist parties regarding their commitment to democratic principles and the overcoming of the authoritarian past. Also, the political foundations of parties from different

member states, primarily Germany, but also Alfred Mozer (The Netherlands), Jean Jaures and Robert Schuman (France) had played an important role in assisting post-communist EEN parties in their identity construction and in networking at the European level, helping them to socialize to European political principles. Until the moment when EEN parties officially applied for EPF affiliation political foundations represented informal channels of spreading European political norms within the post-communist space. The norm transfer was done either through the encouragement of general liberal-democratic principles, such as the acceptance of the democratic rules of political activity, tolerance, minority rights, or through the promotion of ideological principles of some specific parties from old EU members.

Once the EEN parties stepped on the path of EPF accession process, political foundations became a major intermediary in monitoring the transfer and implementation of Europarties membership requirements. Similar to the case of Central and Eastern Europe, German political foundations⁵ have been the major partner organizations of EPFs, as they had a large budget for promoting political projects in the region. (Dakowska 2002: 287--289) European political foundation represent important partners of EPFs in following the political developments in the post-communist space since the collapse of the USSR, as well as in providing informational support regarding the European Union and the process of European integration.

EPF affiliation requirements and EEN members

Common membership requirements of EU-based parties refer to the acceptance of their fundamental ideological principles, expressed in their statutes and political manifestos. Another important requirement, which sometimes is not stipulated in a written form in EPF statutes or manifestos, is the electoral representation of a candidate party, either within the parliament or local administration. The adjustment of candidate parties to EPF principles and

the type of membership that can be granted to non-EU members varies between the Europarties. The less influential party federations, such as the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party ELDR or the European Left EL, are more flexible on making the final judgment regarding the acceptance of Europarty principles. EL, for example, even allows candidate parties to suggest comments and amendments to its fundamental principles.⁶ In an interview with Daniel Tanahoe (February 2008), the political advisor of ELDR, he argued that the flexibility regarding post-communist parties' compliance to the requirements of his EPF is the result of ELDR's awareness of the big diversity in European political culture and traditions. Consequently, his Europarty tries to focus on the basic requirements and not “go too much into details” because of the difficulty to measure the programmatic and behavioral adjustment to EPF membership stipulations.

However, even EPP, the most influential Europarty within EP, proves to be flexible regarding the acceptance of its ideological principles by the post-communist parties, causing some further ideological dilution resulting from the Eastward expansion. So, the current EPP observer parties from EEN do not share a clear Christian democrat ideology. As it will be discussed later, some of them can even be placed on the other side of the ideological spectrum, being closer to social-democracy (e.g. *Batkivshchyna* from Ukraine). The Party of European Socialists, by contrast, has been more careful in its relations with EEN parties. A stricter compliance to socialist and social-democrat ideological principles and the conditions relating to the handling of party history by communist successor parties resulted in a weaker recruitment rate of EEN like-minded parties by PES.

Europarties also present different strategies regarding the electoral representativeness requirement. While for the European People's Party parliamentary representation and party

establishment as a national force is of a major importance, for ELDR and EL some form of electoral representation is enough, either parliamentary or regional.

Finally, EPFs' approaches vary regarding the granting of membership status to EEN parties. EPP and PES offer only 'observer membership' to non-EU parties, while ELDR and EL allow the candidates from the region to obtain a full membership of their party grouping.

The most popular and the most successful EPF in recruiting new members from East European Neighborhood has been European People's Party. The majority of post-communist center-right parties, most of whom are also governing parties, hold EPP observer membership. Surprisingly enough, PES, the second largest EP party grouping, is not represented in the region. On the one hand, this is determined by PES strategy of granting membership, particularly stricter selection criteria towards communist successor parties. On the other hand, compared to Central and Eastern Europe (particularly Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland) where Left wing parties managed to adapt to West European type of social democracy and represent successful political actors, (Delwit 2005: 74) there have been few well-established social-democrat parties in EEN. First of all, the existence of strong communist successor parties that dominated the Left wing spectrum in countries like Ukraine and Moldova represented a serious obstacle for the creation of strong social-democrat parties. Second of all, the antipathy to socialist principles among the emerging post-communist parties and the wide-spread belief that being Left wing is wrong was another cause of the weak social-democrat parties in the region. Despite the lack of PES membership, there are several parties that are interested in cooperation with this party federation, particularly Democratic Party PDM and PSDM from Moldova, as well as SPU from Ukraine. PDM, for example, was nominated as the strategic partner of PES in the Republic of Moldova during PES congress from December 2006.⁷ PDM considers this to be a

great achievement for its European recognition as a modern social-democrat party of European type and it is interpreted as a proof of PDM's devotion to the promotion of European integration objective. (PDM 2008)

The poor ELDR representation in the region is explained largely by the lack of well-established liberal parties. The two EEN full members joined ELDR relatively recently: Alianța Moldova Noastră AMN⁸ joined in April 2007 and Republican Party RP from Georgia joined in October 2007.

Last, but not least, European Left has one full member in Eastern Neighborhood, represented by the Communist Party of Moldova, who joined it in 2005. The affiliation to EPP, PES, or ELDR is interpreted as giving internal and external credibility regarding party commitment to European liberal-democratic values and to European integration perspective. Yet, the opposite is true about EL membership. As the ideological principles shared by member parties are based on radical Marxism, anti-capitalism, including Euroskeptic and anti-American feelings, the pro-European image that PCRM has started to build from 2003 onwards has been severely damaged. Some of opposition forces consider that the affiliation to the EL reconfirms PCRM's devotion to Marxist-Leninist thinking and anti-EU stance and brings a bad image for the whole country, as PCRM is the sole governing party between 2001-2009. (Serebrian 2005)

TABLE 2 NER HERE

Transnational links between EPP and EEN sister-parties. Case study of EPP

European People's Party has been the most popular EU-based party grouping for EEN political organization. Therefore, the next part of the present work will focus on the analysis of its activity in the region and the type and nature of EPP influence on EEN party and party system developments.

Because of the lack of some specific membership requirements that could be easily operationalized and measured, I focus on several important EPP provisions that represent the main points in taking the decision on adherence to this party federation. First of all, the straightforward acceptance of and the programmatic behavior according to Christian democrat ideological principles (listed in EPP statute and manifesto) is examined as the major condition for a potential member. Also, I investigate the role played by the EPP clause on the commitment to the European integration of a federal model.⁹ The establishment as a national force and parliamentary representation of a party is another unwritten requirement that EPP seeks from the applicant parties, which played an important role in recruiting like-minded parties from CEEC. (Dakowska 2002: 284)

Compliance to Christian democrat ideology. Before examining EPP's policies towards applicant parties regarding the programmatic and behavioral adjustment to Christian democrat principles it is worth mentioning the role played by Center-Right Internationals in bringing EEN parties closer to Western type ideology. The membership in International Democratic Union IDU or Centrist Democratic International CDI of aspiring EPP members helped EEN parties to familiarize at an earlier stage to Western ideology and sometimes even to change their programmatic principles as a result of their accession to party Internationals. For example, PPCD's accession to Christian Democrat International (currently the Centrist

Democrat International) in 1999 was followed by changes in party statute and manifesto. Its name changed from Christian Democrat People's Front to Christian Democrat People's Party and the organization declared its commitment to Christian democrat ideology. In order to stress its belonging to the CDI, PPCD adopted a new party symbol that comprised the image of Middle Ages Moldovan ruler, Stefan the Great, with a cross in his hand, framed into the flag of the Council of Europe. As a result of these adjustments, PPCD did not undergo other considerable programmatic changes before its accession to EPP in 2005.

Compared to PPCD, the adherence of other EEN Center-Right organizations to party Internationals and EPP did not exercise a significant influence on their ideological adjustment to Christian democracy. On the one hand, I argue that this is determined by their relatively recent establishment, which allowed parties to look for ideological inspiration and engage into policy-learning from West European counterparts since their official founding. For example, the New Rights Party AMA from Georgia argues that at the time it was established in 2001 the party already gathered around the ideological principles of the International Democratic Union.¹⁰

On the other hand, it is important to stress that in the political programs of current EPP observers, such as ENM, NU, or Batkivshchyna there is no clear reference to Christian democracy. Moreover, in the case of Batkivshchina, most of its programmatic principles resemble more social democracy¹¹ than Christian democracy, fact that is highlighted also by its ex-Orange coalition partner, Our Ukraine, as an obstacle in the way of a potential merge of the two political forces. ("Yekhanurov Doubts Possibility of Forming United Party" 2007) Also, its major partner within BYuT is Ukrainian Social democrat Party. New Rights Party, a candidate to EPP observer status, stresses its belonging to the neo-conservative doctrine, positioning

itself on market economy issue between EPP and British Conservatives.¹² ENM, the governing Georgian party, was founded on a liberal-democratic doctrine, fact that determined it to apply initially for ELDR membership.¹³ Therefore, the acceptance of few natural Christian democrat EEN parties shows that ideology did not represent the key criteria in EPP candidate selection, similar to the case of Central and Eastern Europe. (Hanley 2002: 472--473)

Federal Europe. The commitment to a federal model of European integration represents another important provision of EPP statutes and manifesto. During the accession of CEE parties EPP expected them to endorse European integration through the federal model. (*EPP Yearbook '99 2000*) This was one of the major criteria for associate status listed by EPP Political Bureau in July 1996 in Luxemburg. Moreover, EPP had 'pursued' CEE candidate parties that expressed their commitment to European integration and federalism. The compliance to these ideational commitments was more important for candidate selection than the meeting of other formal criteria, such as the granting of observer status prior to a full member status, or the requirement regarding the affiliation to EPP group at the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe.¹⁴

Yet, the lack of a clear EU membership perspective in the case of EEN countries lowered the importance of this EPP requirement for parties from the region. While European integration is declared as a major foreign policy objective in EEN party programs none of them makes reference to a federal model of European integration. Despite that, the candidate Center-Right parties were granted EPP observer status.

Establishment as a national force. As it was presented earlier, during European integration process of CEE countries EPP had to lower its accession requirements because of the need to

speed up the adherence of aspiring parties from countries that obtained EU associate status. The Europarty was granting the associate membership to political organizations if they affirmed themselves as a national force within their national political arena. (Öhlén 2008: 14) Thus, EPP strategy of recruiting powerful post-communist parties had been more important than ideological compliance to EPP principles because it allowed EPP to increase its EP representation after the EU accession of CEEC.

Surprisingly enough, in the case of East European Neighborhood, in the absence of high political and material stakes from the accession of like-minded parties, EPP still favors the inclusion of strong parties over a rigorous selection based on ideological affinity. Most of EPP observers from the region (NU, Batkivshchyna, ENM) have been governing parties and represented powerful national actors at the moment when they applied for EPP membership.

The establishment as a national force and parliamentary representation is one of criteria that the Europarty asks from its aspiring members. In some cases EPP would require from its applicant parties their representation in national parliaments more than on one occasion. This was one of the conditions set to the New Rights Party from Georgia. EPP declared that it will take the final decision on AMA's accession after it would get into the new 2008 legislature, although the party was largely fulfilling EPP membership requirements.¹⁵

Party interaction. Because of the short time span between the establishment of EEN parties and their accession to EPP it is hard to examine the role played by EPP in the coalition choices of aspiring parties. Yet, it is worth mentioning EPP's influence on the creation of a 'national equipe' of Center-Right forces in Ukrainian case by declaring its support for the coalition of Orange revolution forces, NU and ByuT, immediately after 2004 elections and during the recent political crises that followed the revolution. (EPP 2007a, 2008c) For example, EPP's

President Wilfried Martens congratulated Tymoshenko with her election as a prime-minister in 2007 and declared that this represents the end of the “*painstaking process of coalition-building,*” proving “*the strong unity of the democratic “orange” forces.*” Concomitantly, he believed that Tymoshenko would give “*new impetus to Ukraine’s European drive*” and that EPP “*will be ready to assist her in this process.*”(EPP 2007b) Later, during EPP’s summit from March 2008, Martens stressed that his party “has always supported and will support consolidated steps of the democratic coalition for realization of Ukraine's European vocation.” (The Government's Portal 2008) EPP continued to express its support for “the revival and strengthening of coalition of democratic pro-European forces in Ukraine” during the political crisis from the fall of 2008, criticizing the idea of new parliamentary elections. (KMU Press Service 2008)

However, it is also owing to EPP membership that the two Orange forces have been competing at domestic and international levels in their contest for the ‘true’ liberal-democratic and pro-European force. This is particularly visible in BYuT’s case. Tymoshenko has been intensively using EPP’s framework to build herself the image of promoter and defender of Orange revolution’s ideals and the leader of the democratic coalition. As a result, Ukrainian prime-minister managed to achieve EPP’s support of her governmental policies and criticism of Yushchenko for the blocking of Tymoshenko’s course of reforms. (EPP 2008b; Kuzio 2008c) At the same time, EPP’s backing of Tymoshenko as the leader of democratic coalition determined a deterioration of Yushchenko’s relations with EPP whose party has stayed out of EPP meetings since 2007 as a sign of protest to Europarty's support for BYuT’s policies.(Kuzio 2008b)

Mechanisms of EPP influence. During the application process EPP has been using a series of

mechanisms for influencing the aspiring EEN parties in order to come closer and comply with its membership requirements. Fact-finding missions represented an important method of gaining information about party activity. During these trips EPP members could meet party leaders and attend party congresses, which provided valuable insights into the political culture of the aspiring members and allowed the examination of party compliance to EPP requirements not only on paper but also during its political activity. An important partner of EPP's monitoring of its candidate parties was Konrad Adenauer Stiftung KAS, which offered valuable information regarding the readiness and the liability of political actors from the region to join the Europarty. Also, during the fact-finding missions EPP officials were meeting other political forces and were collecting their opinion on the candidate countries. After the political crisis in Georgia from the autumn of 2007, opposition parties' opinion had a considerable influence on the postponing of ENM's accession.¹⁶ Meeting local NGOs and think tanks, as well as individual experts, represented another important element of EPP party monitoring. Apart from the fact-finding missions, EPP has been sending its observers during the parliamentary elections, which allowed the Europarty to eyewitness electoral behavior and success of its potential party members.

After listing the mechanisms that are used by EPP in the adoption of its decision on membership granting, the work turns now to analyze how exactly the Europarty exercises its influence on EEN parties. First of all, aspiring parties are socialized to West European ideology and party organization thanks to EPP's politico-intellectual and politico-material support. Transnational relations with European People's party represent important socializing channels for post-communist parties that are exposed to informational flows and political dialogue at the European level. EPP promotes its policies via trainings, seminars, and other education activities involving EEN party officials. In conditions when a special budget for cooperation

with EEN parties was missing, as compared to the case of CEEC, the organizational and financial support of political foundations, primarily KAS and Robert Schuman,¹⁷ has been crucial for building close contacts between EPP and EEN political actors. Shuman foundation, for example, offers monthly EP internships and trainings from which young EEN party leaders can benefit. In its turn, KAS plays an important role in providing information and education on EU and its institutions for EEN parties, as well as in facilitating the implementation of EU level policies. In partnership with local NGOs and individual experts KAS is also involved in monitoring the fulfillment of EU Action Plans by EEN countries. Together with KAS, EPP organizes joint meetings in the EEN states, one of the largest events being its pan-European forum in Kiev in 1999 (*EPP Yearbook '99 2000*, 327). Finally, KAS is a valuable EPP partner in providing national expert analyses and in-depth reports on aspiring parties activities and electoral performance, which have a considerable weight in EPP' final decision on granting membership.

The ideational and material support offered by EPP and its partner organizations provided the applicant EEN parties the opportunity to strengthen their role within domestic politics and European arena. Similar to the case of CEE countries, EPP affiliation represents an important source of internal and external legitimacy. The post-communist parties use it as a proof of their commitment to the promotion of liberal-democratic reforms and European integration, as well as of their recognition at the European and international levels as a modern, pro-European political organization.

The affiliation to EPP has also a symbolic importance for EEN parties. Joining EPP, although with limited observer rights, means joining a prestigious club of European politicians. Even if some of the well-established, governing EEN parties are closer from ideological point of view

to other EU-based parties, such as European Democrats, ELDR or even PES,¹⁸ they still choose to affiliate to EPP. For example, the liberal-democrat ENM initially applied for ELDR membership. Later, however, following the recommendation of Saakashvili's economic counselor, Maart Laar (ex-prime minister of Estonia), ENM withdrew its application from ELDR and applied for EPP membership because it represented the largest and most influential Europarty.¹⁹

Although the EEN applicants' status and their membership rights are significantly lower than those of their CEE counterparts, the framework provided by EPP is intensively used by pro-European EEN forces for lobbying at the European level for their European aspirations and for obtaining the backing of European officials. PPCD, for example, has been using EPP's backing with numerous occasions for criticizing the governing policies of the Communist party, particularly during the mass protests organized by the party in the winter-spring 2002 against PCRM. PPCD's leader, Iurie Roșca, even argued that it was thanks to the strong support of its European Christian democrat colleagues, together with that of Washington authorities, that PPCD remained legal and its leaders escaped the arrest despite PCRM's actions to annihilate PPCD as a political force. (PPCD 2007)

The Westward-leaning Yushchenko, Tymoshenko, and Saakashvili have been particularly active in using EPP congresses and other formal and informal meetings to stress their party achievements regarding the promotion of liberal-democratic reforms and demanding a more enhanced EU approach towards their countries. The most they could achieve has been the verbal support of EPP party leaders and these statements have had no significant weight on EU decisions on bringing EEN countries closer to EU entry. Yet, because most of EPP member parties are governing parties and their representatives are also high-ranked officials in their

home countries, the achievement of their verbal support has been interpreted by EEN parties as a significant success of their leaders and it has been used to persuade domestic electorate of their pro-European policies. (Lobjakas 2007; Ukrainian Government's Portal 2008a, 2008b) As Ukrainian analyst Taras Kuzio argues, the alignment of Batkivshchyna and its eponymous bloc, BYuT, to the largest Europarty “was a statement of direction for her [Tymoshenko] political force which assured governments and businesses alike.” (Kuzio 2008a)

Conditionality policy that EPP applies for influencing directly its applicant sister-parties from EEN is much weaker than in Central and Eastern Europe. The Europarty offered only a restricted membership to non-EU candidate parties, with the right of attending EPP meetings and expressing its opinion, but with no right of initiative or voting. As a result, the EU party grouping could not play hard with its EEN applicants during the implementation of its membership requirements. The only ‘stick’ that the European People’s Party has used in relation to its EEN candidates is putting the parties on a long waiting list. This policy applies mostly to parties whose general commitment to democratic rules of political game is questioned or to those who are perceived as not desirable EPP members.

EPP used the postponing of Saakashvili’s party accession because ENM restricted the rights of opposition and mass-media during the autumn of 2007. EU officials and experts from the CoE, OSCE, as well as from the USA, criticized openly Saakashvili’s policies, describing them as undemocratic and representing a “disappointment.”²⁰ (Collin 2007) Also, the OSCE and other international observers had criticized the preparation and the conduct of Georgian presidential and parliamentary elections from 2008, (International Election Observation Mission 2008; ODIHR 2008a) stressing particularly the blurred distinction between the state and the ruling party and the unequal playing field in favor of ENM resulting from the last moment changes of

Constitution and Election Code. (ODIHR 2008b)

Because of the political crisis from the fall of 2007 and the way in which presidential elections from January 2008 were conducted the procedure of ENM's affiliation to EPP was temporarily halted. The parliamentary elections from May 2008 were regarded as an exam for ENM for proving its commitment to democratic principles and the respect of opposition's rights.²¹ However, EPP leaders avoided an official criticism of ENM's policies on their web page and were mild in their remarks regarding the conduct of presidential and parliamentary elections from 2008. The President Martens described the presidential elections as very positive and expressed his hope that Georgia will continue to improve the independence of media, judiciary, and state institutions. (EPP 2008d) Similarly, despite the mentions about the general reference of EPP Vice-President to severe shortcomings during the legislative elections, EPP observers were very positive in their official statements. (EPP 2008a) Although May 2008 legislative elections were not considered by European and international observers to be completely free and fair, EPP still wanted to have ENM as one of its members, mostly because it meant including another powerful, governing party from the region and increasing EPP's representation within European Neighborhood.

Another example of the use of long waiting list during EPP accession process is represented by New Rights Party from Georgia. Since 2003, when it officially applied for EPP membership, the Europarty has been postponing AMA's accession process despite its general fulfillment of EPP membership requirements. AMA's officials believe that this is the result of their party's criticism of the authoritarian governing policy of ENM, another Georgian EPP applicant. AMA's International Secretary, George Mosidze, argues that before the use of force against opposition in the fall of 2007 the stereotype of Saakashvili as the "apotheosis of

democracy” in the post-communist region dominated the impression that the European politicians had about his party, ENM. As a result, they could not accept AMA’s criticism of the governing party and tried to avoid the inclusion in their club of two opposing forces from Georgia by postponing AMA’s accession with the promise that it would become an EPP member if it obtains again parliamentary representation in the new 2008 parliament.²²

Conclusion

The investigation of the compliance to EPFs’ accession criteria, with the case study of EPP, reveals that this direct mechanism of Europeanization is weaker in the case of EU outsiders than in the case of CEE candidates, as it was hypothesized in the theoretical part of this article. This is merely the outcome of a more limited financial assistance and membership offer within largest Europarties, EPP and PES. As a consequence, EPFs could use a weaker conditionality policy to determine the candidate parties from the region to undergo significant changes in order to comply with their accession requirements. The only ‘stick’ that EPFs have available is the placement on long waiting list of ENN parties that do not fulfill the accession requirements.

By contrast to the theoretical expectation of this article the case study of EPP shows that the accession criteria are not well-defined and strictly implemented with regard to the aspiring ENN party members. Following a rationalist behavior, EPP favors the inclusion of well-established, usually governing parties, in order to increase its pan-European influence despite the Europarty’s ideological dilution. In this respect, EPP uses the recruiting strategy of lowering down the accession requirement of ideological compliance in the case of parties that affirmed themselves as major actors on the EEN political arenas, similar to the case of CEE candidates. (Delsoldato 2002).

The analysis of the domestic level variables reveals that despite limited financial and membership incentives, EEN parties have been motivated to affiliate to different Europarties because of the politico-intellectual and politico-material support, but mostly because of the domestic and international legitimacy they could achieve in return, as in the case of CEE countries. (Delsoldato 2002; Pridham 1999, 2001) Also, the study confirms that the European party federations have had a larger prestige in the post-communist space, including East European Neighborhood, than in the old EU members. (Schmitt 2005) For EEN parties joining a European party network, particularly the largest one - EPP, means joining a prestigious club of European politicians that recognize their commitment to liberal-democratic principles and European integration.

Table 1. Transnational Party Links

	Broad Ideology ^{23a}	Party International	Parliamentary Representation	European Party Federation
Georgia:				
United National Movement ENM	5,80	International Democratic Union IDU (full member)	Governing: · 2004 – 2008 · 2008 – present	EP (observer member since 2008)
New Rights Party AMA	5,80	International Democratic Union IDU (associate member)	Opposition: · 2001- present ^a	EP (applicant for observer member)
Republican Party RP	7,30	Liberal International LI (observer member)	Governing: · March – June 2004 ^b Opposition: · June 2004 – 2008	ELDR (full member since 2007)
Moldova:				
Christian Democrat People's Party PPCD	7,70	Centrist Democratic Union CDI (full member)	Opposition: · 1994 – present	EP (observer member since 2005)
Our Moldova Alliance AMN	5,20 ^c	Liberal International LI (observer member)	Opposition: · 1998 – present	ELDR (full member since 2007)
Communist Party of Moldova PCRM	2,35	.	Opposition: · 1998 – 2001 Governing: · 2001 – 2005 · 2005 – 2009	EL (full member since 2005)
Ukraine				
Our Ukraine-People's Self-Defense NU-NS	5,80 ^d	.	Opposition: · 2002 – 2004 · December 2006 – December 2007 Government: · 2005 – 2006 · December 2007 – October 2008	EP (observer member since 2005)
Batkivshchyna (major BYuT party)	4,15 ^e	.	Opposition: · 1999 – 2004 · September 2005 – December 2007 Governing: · January – September 2005 · December 2007- present	EP (observer since 2008)

Notes:

^a Source: 2006 Timuş expert survey

^b AMA refused their parliamentary mandates as a protest to 2008 elections, which they consider were falsified, and to Saakashvili's authoritarian policy

^c Member of National Movement-Democrats

^d Score for BDM

^e Score for NU

^f Score for BYuT

Notes

¹ Article 138a of Maastricht Treaty (1992) provided constitutional recognition for European level parties, while the Treaty of Nice (amendment to Article 191 of Amsterdam Treaty) stipulated the procedure of European party financing, one of them being that a party is “reasonably” representative either in the EP (at least 5% of votes) or in a number of EU members (at least five).

2 Currently the Parliamentary Group of the European People’s Party – European Democrats.

3 Particularly the case of the European Left, which gathers most of the anti-establishment Marxist-Leninist parties that oppose the capitalist nature of the EU and its liberal-democratic values and are the most anti-European party network from the continent.

4 Interview of G.Pridham with E.Poptodorova, National Deputy of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, Sofia, September 1995.

5 The major foundations are Friedrich Erbert Stiftung, closely linked to German Social Democratic Party, and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, linked to Christian democrat Union.

6 Interview with Giorgos Karatsioubanis, Neolaia Synaspismou (Greece), European Left, Brussels, March 2008.

7 Interview with Oleg Țulea, International Secretary, PDM, Chisinau, May 2007.

8 AMN was the major political force within Democratic Moldova Bloc during 2005 elections

9 The commitment to a federal Europe represents a key clause of EPP’s “Basic Programme” adopted by the IXth Congress, Athenes, in November 1992.

10 Interview with George Mosidze, International Secretary, AMA, Tbilisi, August 2007.

11 Batkivshchina argues the promotion of a “new type of social ideology that combines social solidarity with individual freedoms and rights.” (Batkivshchyna 1999)

12 Interview with George Mosidze.

13 A similar case can be found in Hungary, when Fidesz was firstly a Member of ELDR and later it was pursued by EPP to join the Europarty. (Dakowska 2002: 284)

14 These two formal requirements were bypassed during the accession of the Polish Freedom Union UW, which complied however to EPP normative criteria, including the endorsement of the European integration of a federal model. (Dakowska 2002: 282)

15 Interview with George Mosidze.

16 Interview with Urszula Gacek, Civic Platform, Poland, EPP MEP, Brussels, March 2007.

17 The Robert Schuman Foundation for Cooperation among Christian Democrats in Europe, founded in 1989, is

an entity of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats).

18 Here I refer to Batkivshchyna's affinity to social democracy.

19 Correspondence with George Mosidze, International Secretary, AMA.

20 This was the expression used by the US State Department to describe Saakashvili's actions against opposition in the fall of 2007.

21 Interview with Urszula Gacek.

22 Correspondence with George Mosidze.

23 The concept of 'broad ideology' refers to the economic Left-Right and the cultural Left-Right dimensions of EEN party profiles.

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