

GOVERNING THE GREY ZONE

Why Hybrid Regimes in Europe's Eastern Neighborhood Pursue Partial
Governance Reforms

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Cover photo: “Jos Oligarhia” – *Down with the Oligarchy*, mass protests against corruption in Moldova’s capital Chisinau, September 2015.

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To Mako / დედაობ

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Abstract

Every year the European Union, as well as numerous other international organizations, states, and transnational networks wield ample resources to promote democratic governance in the developing countries. However, the impact of these reform promotion efforts varies widely. Many scholars have blamed structural conditions, or the inadequate rewards offered by the donors, as the reasons behind the partial impact of external actors. However, such approach portrays recipient governments as passive objects of the external influence, and overlooks the fact that domestic actors can, themselves, actively subvert or facilitate the reforms. In this dissertation, Ketevan Bolkvadze addresses this gap, by departing from the literature on hybrid regimes, and by placing incumbents and their incentives structures at the forefront of the analysis. The three different studies in this thesis zero in on the hybrid regimes in Moldova and Georgia, and examine how political fragmentation and incumbent's time-horizons shaped their response to the EU-promoted reforms.

The findings from this dissertation show that the external actors are often caught between a rock and a hard place. When they provide assistance for reforms in dominant-party hybrid regimes, incumbents might use this to bolster their popular support, while, in parallel, side-lining their opponents. Thus, donor assistance might help them perpetuate their political tenure. By contrast, while in fragmented hybrid regimes authoritarian tendencies are not an immediate risk, incumbent politicians often use the existing malfunctioning state institutions – and even donor assistance - for reaping personal monetary benefits. In the first case, donor assistance ends up being used for partisan purposes; in the second case, it risks being used for private ends. Both are troubling outcomes.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Internationella organisationer, stater, och transnationella aktörer avsätter årligen stora resurser för att främja demokrati och förbättra samhällsstyrningen i utvecklingsländer. Forskningen visar dock att dessa reformansträngningar genererar vitt skilda resultat. En viktig förklaring, hävdar Ketevan Bolkvadze i sin avhandling, är mottagarländernas regeringars intresse av att sitta kvar vid makten. Bolkvadze granskar så kallade hybridregimer i Georgien och Moldavien, och hur politisk fragmentering och regeringarnas tidshorisonter påverkar deras vilja att anamma EU-reformer. Undersökningen visar på de dilemman som EU och andra bidragsgivare konfronterar i sitt reformarbete. När EU ger resurser till regimer där ett parti dominerar så tenderar regeringen i det landet att prioritera reformer som antingen är populära i opinionen eller marginaliserar oppositionen. Externa bidrag hjälper dem på det viset att förlänga sin tid vid makten. I regimer där den politiska makten är fragmenterad, och risken för auktoritär dominans är mindre, tenderar sittande politiker istället att missbruka statens institutioner – och omvärldens utvecklingsstöd – för sin egen personliga vinning. Avhandlingen visar därmed hur försök ifrån utomstående aktörer att förbättra demokrati och samhällsstyrning kan misslyckas och ibland leda till djupt problematiska utfall.

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Moving to a place, which, according to the expat surveys is the “worst country to make friends”, can be terrifying at first.¹ Luckily, the friendships that you forge, end up all the more meaningful. Generation ‘No Name’ – Anders, Karin, Marina, Petrus – admittedly we failed at choosing a name for our cohort, but we certainly succeeded in color-coordinating our outfits, and – more importantly – in creating great companionship. Marina, I look forward to going on many more fieldworks with you; thank you for opening my eyes to the fascinating world of environmental research. Aiysha, I am so happy you finally moved to the fourth floor in 2014 – thank you for all the laughter! For the bubbly spirit and afterworks that made me enjoy being part of this department I am grateful to: Maciek Sychowiec, Mikael Holmgren, Fredrik D. Hjorthen, Niels Markwat, Moa Frödin Gruneau, Felix Hartmann, Elin Bergman, Dali Sabanic, Alice Johansson, Natasha Stepanova, Elina Lindgren, Sara Birgeron, Olof Larsson, Erik Vestin, Aksel Sundström, Rasmus Broms, Sofia Jonsson, Anne-Kathrin Kreft, Valeriya Mechkova.

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¹ No, I did not make this up: <https://www.thelocal.se/20150923/sweden-worst-country-for-making-friends>

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Bolkvadze, K. (2016) Cherry Picking EU Conditionality: Selective Compliance in Georgia's Hybrid Regime, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68:3, 409-440,
DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2016.1154138

Bolkvadze, K. (2017) Hitting the Saturation Point: Unpacking the Politics of Bureaucratic Reforms in Hybrid Regimes, *Democratization*, 24:4, 751-769,
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1

Introduction

“In these villages, many kids are left alone and they haven’t seen their parents for five, ten years. The lucky ones are raised by their grandparents. This is because of the ongoing poverty, unemployment and a general mess in this country [...] The EU provides a lot of funding for reforms, but the politicians in the government [...] they rarely implement them properly. They go to Brussels, shake hands, tell the EU we’re doing everything necessary [...] but in reality, things only change on the surface. These are superficial reforms”. – Viorica (name altered), a young, Chisinau-based journalist, told me this while we were driving through the villages of Orhei, Moldova. Just a few years earlier EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Stefan Füle, announced Moldova as the “front-runner” and the poster-child of the EU’s reform promotion efforts in the Eastern neighborhood (European Commission 2013). So why was the government undertaking only “superficial reforms”, if, on the one hand, financial assistance was available, and, on the other hand, poverty was so severe that parents had to leave their children behind to find jobs abroad?

Today numerous international organizations, states, NGOs, and transnational networks wield substantial resources to promote democracy, good governance and rule of law in the third countries, through the use of sanctions, positive incentives, and various socialization techniques (Pevehouse 2005; Magen & Morlino 2009; Burnell 2005; Youngs 2004; Cornell 2013). The European Union is one of the most prominent actors in the international community and the largest aid provider worldwide – spending 56.2 billion Euros only in 2013 (European Commission 2014, 3). The EU’s attempts at transforming domestic political and economic institutions of recipient countries are particularly pronounced in its neighborhood, where negative developments can have a direct spillover effect in the EU’s internal affairs. As the EU’s Global Strategy states:

“My neighbour’s and my partner’s weaknesses are my own weaknesses. (...) Internal and external security are ever more intertwined: our security at home entails a parallel interest in peace in our neighbouring and surrounding regions. It implies a broader interest in preventing conflict, promoting human security, addressing the root causes of instability and working towards a safer world.” (European Union 2016, 4-14)

The EU came to this realization almost immediately after its Eastern enlargement and in 2004 launched the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) to transform its new neighborhood – beset by frozen conflicts, authoritarian tendencies, and economic stagnation – into a stable, democratic, and well-governed ring of friends. It offers ENP countries¹ extensive financial and technical assistance and integration without membership perspective, in return for their adaptation to the EU’s principles of democratic governance. As the former External Relations Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner (2005) described, the ENP is “a novel, comprehensive and forward-looking framework by which to promote political and economic reform, development and modernization”. But has it worked in reality?

There is a wide consensus among scholars that the EU had a major transformative effect over its member and candidate countries. For evidence, we need to look no further than the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where Brussels helped facilitate democratization and improved quality of governance (Vachudova 2005; Hughes, Sasse & Gordon 2005; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier 2005). By contrast, the scholarly consensus is nowhere to be found when it comes to predicting the success or failure of the EU in its broader neighborhood. This academic debate is particularly intensive insofar as the ENP-countries in the EU’s Eastern Neighborhood are concerned.

On the one hand, pessimists deemed the EU unlikely to promote substantive reforms in the region. They point to the presence of Russia and its implicit and explicit actions to decrease the transformative power of the West in its near abroad (Lebanidze 2014). They also note that the EU’s Eastern neighborhood is dominated by post-Soviet hybrid regimes, characterized by extensive corruption, clientelism, and institutions of poor quality (Kelley 2006; Börzel & Pamuk 2012). Hence, there is a large discrepancy between the domestic status quo and the EU rules laid down in bilaterally agreed ENP Action Plans, which the recipient countries are asked to adopt. This discrepancy is deemed as too difficult to narrow down without a credible membership carrot – which was the major driver of reforms in Central and Eastern Europe.

¹ These countries include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in the East, and Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Palestinian Authority, Tunisia in the South.

“In the absence of a (consistent and credible) membership perspective, the EU seems *unlikely* to improve democracy and governance effectiveness in non-members by inducing domestic reforms (Schimmelfennig & Börzel 2017, 280; Casier 2011; Magen 2006)

On the other hand, optimists highlighted circumstances favorable to reform promotion. Firstly, even though EU accession has never been included among the ENP carrots, some of the Eastern neighbors – such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia – consider themselves European and harbor membership aspirations. Such aspirations or ‘subjective perceptions of accession prospects’ have been widely recognized as a factor increasing the likelihood of convergence with EU rules (Sasse 2008; Wolczuk 2009; Casier 2011). Membership ambitions increase the EU’s leverage to manipulate cost-benefit calculations in the recipient states, since it creates an element of asymmetric interdependence in favor of the Union (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier 2005). Secondly, as argued by the ‘geographic diffusion’ proponents, territorial proximity to the West has been a strong predictor of the spread of democracy and market economy in post-communist countries (Kopstein & Reilly 2000, p.12; McFaul 2002; cf. Brinks & Coppedge 2006; Teorell 2010). Hence, the EU should have higher chances of transforming domestic institutions of its adjacent Eastern neighborhood than, say, the countries in the sub-Saharan Africa.

The convergence record of the Eastern neighbors with the EU Action Plans lends credence both to the pessimists and the optimists. Unlike the expectations that the EU’s transformative power would fail - the ENP progress reports show that some countries, and not others, selectively comply with the EU requirements (Casier 2011). In fact, this “mixed”, “selective” and “partial” reforms have become the key outcome of the EU’s attempts to transform domestic institutions of its neighbors (Noutcheva 2009). Yet we still know little about the logic driving these partial reforms. A key argument of this dissertation is that instead of focusing on the structural conditions conducive to the EU’s success or failure, we need to accept the partial reforms for what they are, and instead redirect our attention to unpacking the logic of the governments’ response. Domestic actors are not the mere objects of external influence, “but rather gatekeepers that actively facilitate or constrain” the reform processes (Tolstrup 2013, 716). More recently growing number of EU scholars have called for increased focus on the domestic actors and their incentives structures. As Gross and Grimm (2014; 914) note: “there has been no systematic integration of an “inside-out” perspective in terms of an exploration of how domestic actors perceive and handle external reform demands”. In this dissertation, I aim to address this gap in knowledge, by placing the incumbents at the forefront of my analysis and examining how their incentive structures shape their response to various institutional reforms, promoted by the external actors, such as the EU.

Hybrid regimes are the most wide-spread regime type in the region. These are the regimes where formal democratic institutions exist, but the politicians continue to utilize non-democratic governance practices, rendering democratic institutions fragile. Currently four out of six countries in the EU's eastern neighborhood – Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia – are classified as hybrid regimes. In order to deepen our understanding of the reform dilemmas in the EU's eastern neighborhood, this study, therefore, departs from the established literature on the incentive structures of hybrid regimes and extends its logic in three domains. The first article examines how the incumbents' survival incentives shape their compliance with EU conditionality, and develops a theoretical framework to capture this relationship. The second and the third papers further dissect this relationship in relation to two central state institutions – the public administration and the judiciary. As the following articles reveal, anchoring our explanations in the incentives structures has important implications for understanding reform outcomes in these countries that previous accounts have overlooked.

The contribution of this dissertation is threefold. First and foremost, it contributes to the scholarship on EU's external influence, by bringing in insight from the literature on democratization, public administration, and judiciary. Secondly, it advances the scholarship on hybrid regimes by explicating their incumbents power-seeking strategies, which are often difficult to gauge through large-n studies. Finally, despite its focus on the EU and its Eastern neighborhood, findings of this dissertation also have broader implications for the activities of many other donors (USAID, World Bank, IMF, SIDA, etc.), since hybrid regimes currently represent one of the most prevalent regime types worldwide. Often it is the aid-dependent countries that fall within this category, because maintaining bone-crushing authoritarianism would cost these poor and middle-income countries valuable donor assistance. Therefore, insights from the hybrid regimes examined in this dissertation can also cast light on more general reform dilemmas that many donors face in the grey zone countries, stuck between democracy and dictatorship.

2

Theory

2.1 Previous Research: partial domestic influence of the external actors

In this section, I review how EU scholars have tried to explain partial reforms by drawing on three different theoretical traditions: rational choice-, sociological-, and historical institutionalism. In addition to providing an overview of existing studies, this section also points to the lingering research gaps and suggests ways to overcome them. Epistemologically the project remains within the rational institutionalist paradigm, but its novelty lies in bridging insights from the comparative politics literature with that on Europeanization, and examining reform dilemmas from the perspective of hybrid regime incumbents.

Proponents of the rational choice institutionalism, expanding on the logic of consequences, argue that the external actors can facilitate domestic change by resorting to conditionality – or by conditional use of threats and rewards in exchange for compliance. This perspective views the interaction between external democracy promoters and local governments as the bargaining model where the actors are assumed to be strategic utility-maximizers, interested in augmenting their power and welfare (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier 2004; Fearon 1998). Scholars distinguish between two categories of conditionality: positive and negative. Positive conditionality is thought to function as reinforcement by rewards. Among others, these rewards include trade and aid benefits, or membership of an organization, such as the EU. The negative conditionality – or reinforcement by punishment – on the other hand, denotes the use sanctions, withdrawal of aid and various political and economic measures designed to respond to non-compliance or violation of norms by the target governments. In short, according to the logic of conditionality, external reform promoters can manipulate threats of punitive measures, or promises of rewards, to alter the costs and benefits of domestic decision-makers (Pollack 2007; Tsebelis 2002).

While proponents of conditionality emphasize the superior leverage that external actors wield, the social learning model is premised on the logic of appropriateness.

Here external democracy promoters are expected to exert an influence through socialization and persuasion. Intensifying linkages between liberal international fora and state actors in transitional countries are seen as pre-conditions for internalization of democratic governance norms (Magen & Morlino 2009, 34). According to this logic, the actors involved in negotiation are motivated by internalized identities, values, and norms, and, among alternative courses of action, they choose the most appropriate one. Politically relevant audiences in the target state do not only have to accept external efforts of reforming institutions. These efforts have to resonate with the prevalent social norms to be effective (Börzel & van Hüllen 2014). The process of rule transfer occurs through deliberative, communicative processes of habituation, argumentation, and persuasion (Checkel 2005). A state adopts externally driven reforms if it is persuaded of the appropriateness and legitimacy of these reforms.ⁱ

Many scholars have explicitly juxtaposed the explanatory power of these two approaches in the EU's eastern neighborhood. The vast majority of the studies point to the superiority of the conditionality-model, and argue that the incumbents only adopted rules when the rewards for compliance exceeded the costs, and that the socialization-based models have "hitherto failed to produce tangible outcomes" (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig 2011, 885; Kelley 2006). Following the rationalist logic, these scholars have, thus, blamed the slow pace of the reforms on the EU's 'vague', 'intangible' rewards and its 'one-size-fits-all' approach (Batt *et al.* 2003; Haukkala & Moshes 2004). As Wolczuk (2009, 190) argues:

"[E]ffectiveness of the ENP has been questioned in academic literature, mainly on the grounds that the *incentives offered by the EU are too weak to entice* its neighbouring countries into domestic reforms[...] The leverage of the EU is weak not only because of a lack of membership perspective (even for European 'partner countries') but because it is ultimately unclear what the actual award for enacting EU conditionality is."

The early literature on the neighborhood Europeanization has thus largely focused on the inadequacy of rewards offered by the external actors. I argue in this dissertation that an important downside with an excessive focus on external rewards is that it overlooks the domestic obstacles to the reforms. Domestic actors often have their own incentives and grasping them is the key to untangling important reform dilemmas. Here I agree with Vachudova (2015, 524), who asserts that

"when faced with stalled or shoddy reform in a prospective or new EU member, it is easier for scholars to point to the shortcomings of EU policy *than to untangle the complicated domestic factors* that have allowed contented power holders to perpetuate the status quo. It is ultimately *domestic actors* that respond to EU incentives—or not—as they make choices about the pace and quality of reform." (Emphasis added)

Finally, to zoom out and return to the larger debates, alternative explanations of selective compliance have also been pointing to the ‘degrees of misfit’ as yet another cause behind the EU’s partial domestic impact. This approach is largely embedded in the *historical institutionalist* school of thought, which underscores the path dependency of institutional change. Authors such as Katzenstein (1977), Hall (1986) and Skocpol (1979) – to name but a few - have documented policy continuities and resilience over time within different countries and domains. From the Europeanization viewpoint, the argument has evolved around the concept of ‘fit’, “that is whether a country’s longstanding policies and policymaking institutions are compatible with the new” European ones (Gwiazda 2002; Schmidt 2001). Building on the notions of ‘goodness of fit’ and ‘mismatch’, these scholars argue that the varying compliance patterns among countries could be explained by varying degrees of misfit between European and domestic policies and institutions (Cowles, et al. 2001). Hence, to extrapolate in the Eastern neighbourhood context, the worse off a country in terms of democracy and governance quality, the higher levels of incompatibility, and thus, the lower chances of inducing reforms (Langbein 2011).

Nonetheless, in the more recent accounts dealing specifically with the Eastern neighbourhood, even the former exponents of the ‘misfit’ argument increasingly challenged this hypothesis and instead started to claim that ultimately what matters is the domestic preferences of the incumbent. Despite high levels of policy incompatibility and adaptation costs governments might still comply, given that the rule-adoption fits well into their political agenda. According to Ademmer and Börzel (2013, 583): “While we do not deny the importance of policy misfit, it is an institution-focused category that measures the compatibility of EU policies with domestic structures, but largely ignores domestic agency and its preferences for change”. In their analysis of migration, energy and corruption reforms in the south Caucasus, the authors found that preferential fit with the governments’ agenda was the main driver of compliance. This led them to conclude that the “high level of policy misfit does not necessarily result in non-compliance, even in the absence of the prospect of EU membership, if there is an overall fit between the EU-policy approach and the political *agenda* of the domestic government” (Ibid, emphasis added). In a similar vein, Hagemann (2013, 780, emphasis added), who tested the influence of the EU and Russia on the adoption of ENP norms in Moldova, found that “...rule transfer only took place when it was compatible with the *interest* of the government”.

In short, if the early literature has been pointing to the rewards offered by the external actors, in the more recent accounts scholars have increasingly started to point to the domestic actors and their agendas as the key drivers of the reforms. While this is a timely and welcome shift of focus, the current studies still suffer from one major weakness – many of them treat incumbent’s agendas and interests as an idiosyncratic phenomenon and do not carefully conceptualize their underpinnings. Such approach

provides no guidance about what reforms stand the chance of succeeding. I recognize that at the everyday policy-making level political agendas of governments differ vastly across countries. However, I also believe that it is possible to go one step further and identify certain preferences, or the patterns of analogous behavior, that at least similar regime types are sharing. With this assumption in mind, my dissertation places the incumbent incentives at the center stage of its analysis and hence helps explain what reforms stand a chance of appealing to incumbents in hybrid regime settings.

2.2. Way Forward: Centrality of Incumbents and Incentives

In this section, I present the overarching theoretical framework and point to the centrality of incumbents and their incentives for understanding reform dilemmas in hybrid political regimes. The majority of countries in the EU's eastern neighborhood are classified as hybrid regimes (apart from Belarus and Azerbaijan, which are fully consolidated autocracies). Generally, hybrid regimes also represent the most widespread category of regimes worldwide. Since the dawn of democratization's third wave, in 1974, the former autocrats widely adopted electoral institutions. This, however, did not lead to an equal surge in the number of consolidated democracies. Instead, what ensued was a dramatic rise of countries in the 'grey zone' combining formal democratic institutions with non-democratic governance practices.

Scholars distinguish between two power configurations in hybrid regimes: dominant² and competing pyramid systems (Hale 2015; Carothers 2002).³ I show that these distinct power configurations have implications for how the incumbents view public resources, which in turn guides their rationale for how they adopt reforms. More concretely, by departing from the previous accounts of hybrid regime dynamics, I argue that while incumbents in dominant-pyramid systems utilize state resources for *partisan/political* ends, those in competing-pyramid systems prefer to divert public funds for *private* enrichment. The following section first explains this logic and subsequently discusses its consequences for the externally promoted reforms.

Dominant pyramid systems denote those hybrid regimes where political power is concentrated under a one party, which dominates the political scene and marginalizes

² In his original work, Hale (2015) uses single-pyramid system, however the word 'single' also has a connotation of a more autocratic polity, where no opposition party is allowed to meaningfully challenge the ruling party. This is not the case in hybrid regimes - I, therefore, use the term 'dominant', which captures the nature of a ruling party in such settings more accurately.

³ Carothers (2002) refers to these power-configurations as *dominant power politics* and *feckless pluralism*.

opposition parties. But unlike autocracies, they allow real electoral contestation. Outcome-changing fraud or banning opposition is not a viable strategy here since such blatant abuse would undermine their international standing and could cost them valuable donor assistance. Instead, incumbents resort to subtler tools for winning elections: they politicize public resources, and use it for partisan ends, thus reducing opponents' chances of competing on an equal footing. This lack of a level political playing field is usually more difficult to detect for international election monitors, than outright fraud, since the bulk of the manipulation happens before the election day, or even before the electoral campaign starts. Incumbents can politicize public resources and institutions in a variety of ways.⁴ They transform "public agencies into campaign headquarters by using office supplies, phones, postage, vehicles, and public employees themselves to inform and mobilize voters" (Greene 2010, 812; Magaloni 2006). They deploy politicized administration to reward public tenders to 'friendly' businessmen, who then provide campaign finance to the ruling party. Resource asymmetries between incumbent and opposition exist also in established democracies, but they are not so extreme as to systematically disadvantage the opposition candidates (Levitsky & Way 2010; see also Ekman 2009).

Nonetheless, in dominant pyramid systems, unlike autocracies, votes do matter. As Schedler (2009, 388) argues, by opening the peaks of state power to multiparty elections, incumbents "institute the *principle* of popular consent, even as they subvert it in *practice*" (emphasis in the original). Although unfair, elections here are considered meaningful. Meaningful elections are, in fact, what distinguishes them from outright autocracies, which "do not hold elections, ban opposition parties, or routinely disregard elections results" (Greene 2010, 811). Incumbents might tilt the political playing field, but they do not "eliminate the contest or destroy the field altogether as a true dictatorship does" (Hale 2010, 34). If autocrats can rely on a smaller winning coalition and invest in the welfare of their backers, hybrid regime incumbents cannot follow suit (Buono de Mesquita et al. 2003). Hybrid regimes are dependent on a larger number of supporters – a larger electorate. Consequently, meeting popular demands and gaining electoral legitimacy acquires increased importance for dominant party leaders. They might try to tilt the playing field and politicize public resources, but if the voters are completely dissatisfied with the incumbents, they can still vote against them. And since hybrid regimes try to avoid outright fraud it becomes more difficult to cover up the electoral failure, and thus, more important to retain some level of public approval. In short, by introducing meaningful elections dominant parties in hybrid regimes try to "reap the benefits of electoral legitimacy". But by politicizing public resources, they also try to avoid the

⁴ Article 1 in this dissertation provides a more detailed overview of the ways in which dominant party abuses state resources, and, thus, tilts the playing field in its favor.

risks of “democratic uncertainty” (Schedler 2002a, 105). Electoral turnovers might be infrequent, because of the incumbent’s misuse of public resources, but it is, nonetheless, possible if the public opinion turns against the ruling party (Hale 2010, 35).

While electoral turnover is possible but infrequent in dominant pyramid systems, it is frequent in competing pyramid systems (Hale 2015). Scholars have also dubbed such polities as ‘pluralism by default’, ‘feckless pluralism’, or ‘liberal oligarchy’ (Way 2015; Carothers 2002; Wigell 2008). As Hale (2015, 64) describes, “here a country’s patronal networks arrange themselves in multiple distinct pyramids where no one clearly dominates the other and where each has a strong incentive to compete for power and resources”. Hence, unlike dominant pyramid systems, political power here is fragmented between several powerful groups. But pluralism persists not because of the democratic institutions but because of the inability of each group to monopolize power. As Way remarks, competition is an “outgrowth - not of strong democratic institutions, institutionalized civil society or strong opposition - but of the fragmented and polarized elites, and weak state unable to monopolize political control” (Way 2003, 463). They might resemble democracies by virtue of vigorous competition and frequent electoral turnovers, but “the competition is typically fought by patronalistic means” and the power alternation rarely leads to democratization (Hale 2015, 81).

The major problem undergirding competing pyramid systems is the lack of party institutionalization. Parties here are not anchored in the usual societal cleavages, but, instead, revolve around ‘big men’ rather than issues. They represent “little more than vehicles for their leaders to participate in parliamentary elections” (Popova 2012; Tavits 2008). The primary motive driving these powerful actors - who often happen to be oligarchs – to become party entrepreneurs is to reap economic benefits that are associated with holding political office. As a result, these systems are plagued by a high electoral volatility since actors regard parties as “disposable projects that can be abandoned” (Bader 2009, 100; Roper 2008). Thus the paradox is that even though these parties are often almost indistinguishable in terms of their ideology or platforms, from election to election voters are presented often with completely new sets of parties. Some scholars even question whether we can use term party systems in relation to these entities because the conventional understanding of this term implies certain continuity in the supply of parties over the course of several elections. Bader, therefore, suggests: “such cases with a significant rate of party replacement should not be referred to as ‘inchoate’ or ‘weakly institutionalized’ party systems, but rather as party *nonsystems*” (Bader 2009, 102, emphasis in the original).

	<i>Dominant pyramid system</i>	<i>Competing pyramid system</i>
<i>Electoral turnover</i>	Infrequent	Frequent
<i>Time-horizons</i>	Longer	Shorter
<i>Concern for societal standing/legitimacy</i>	Higher	Lower
<i>Use public resources for</i>	Partisan ends	Private ends

Table 1: Summary of the key distinctions between dominant- and competing-pyramid systems.

I argue that these distinct internal dynamics in different types of hybrid regimes have important implications for the elites' incentives for pursuing reforms. Since power-alternation is rare in dominant pyramid systems, incumbents here have longer time horizons than their counterparts in competing pyramid systems. Consequently, they should have more interests in using external assistance to pursue reforms that would improve the capacity of state institutions. Since they expect to stay around longer, they can benefit more from strong state institutions and from investing in public goods, as they need to retain long-term legitimacy (See Wright 2008 for a related argument in the context of autocracies). There is a growing body of scholarship, which shows that even in highly clientelistic societies “incumbents who wish to get reelected should seek to meet voter demands including delivering collective goods” (Weghorst & Lindberg 2013, 730). Wahman (2011, 646) also suggests that in dominant pyramid systems “strong economic performance tends to favor the status quo and reduce the chance of oppositional victories” (see also Howard & Roessler 2006, 373). Therefore, these incumbents are more likely to utilize external assistance and invest in reforms that boost state capacity, but only as far as it does not curb their partisan control over state institutions. While popular standing indeed matters for the incumbents, so does their resource advantage vis-à-vis their rivals. The ruling clique, therefore, also has an intrinsic interest in shunning reforms that could hinder their ability of using administrative resources and state institutions for partisan ends. The first and the second articles in this dissertation dissect this logic more systematically, and show how incumbents' efforts to gain popularity, while also stacking the deck against their competitors, unfolds in various policy areas.

By contrast, incumbents in competing-pyramid systems have shorter time horizons, given the political instability and recurrent power alternations. In this context, parties

have stronger incentives to use the external assistance and state institutions for short-term political and economic gains (in order to maximize the welfare of their own backers'), instead of investing in the long-term capacity of state institutions. After all, their own competitors could use these institutions against them 'the next day'. Proponents of democracy promotion have often presumed political competition and power alternation to create positive incentives for politicians to carry out programs for development and change. "Over successive contests, governing parties more capable of managing the economy can be expected to return to power, while incompetent leaders are relegated to the opposition" (Norris 2012, 19). However, this assumes that party systems are stable, which is rarely the case in hybrid regimes. Frequent power alternation here means that these parties might find themselves not just out of power, but also out of the political scene. As paper three in this dissertation demonstrates, these loosely institutionalized, oligarchic parties are more likely to plunder state institutions for private enrichment rather than engaging in reforms that might earn them popular support in the long run, since they might no longer be in power or part of the political landscape.⁵

2.3 Use of Conditionality for Reform Promotion

This section illustrates how some of the most influential accounts of EU conditionality fall short when applied to the context of hybrid regimes. It further argues that to remedy this problem we need to anchor our explanations in the knowledge about inner workings of these regimes. This and the subsequent two sections also introduce the main themes explored in the three articles of the dissertation.

In one of the most prominent studies of EU's transformative power in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2004) found that the effectiveness of conditionality significantly varied across issue areas. In democratically laggard countries, incumbents put up little to no resistance to EU demands in technical domains, while defying reforms targeting political institutions and their democratic transformation. This variation across issue areas prompted the authors to distinguish between two contexts of rule transfer: *democratic conditionality*

⁵ It should, however, be noted that these dominant- and competing-pyramid systems are not static arrangements and there is a possibility of movement between the two (Hale 2015 describes these shifts in more detail). For instance, in competing-pyramid systems, one of the groups might eventually gain dominance over other parties; and, by contrast, in dominant party systems alternative power center might emerge, either due to internal split, or by opposition parties attracting backing from exceptionally wealthy actors, thereby counterbalancing the extreme resource disparity. These shifts, however, are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

and *acquis conditionality*. In the context of the former, the EU ties its rewards to respect for the fundamental political principles of the Union: liberal democracy, rule of law, human rights and minority protection. In the context of the latter, the EU ties its rewards to the technical rules of the ‘*acquis communautaire*’: such as, alignment with the rules of the internal market. The authors contend that ‘democratic conditionality’ is particularly challenging when it comes to defective democracies and autocracies, whereas such regimes might adopt rules from the domain of ‘*acquis conditionality*’ even without a strong outside push. The gist of the argument is that conditionality in technical areas does not affect the incumbent’s power base and “governments do not feel threatened by rule adoption” (Ibid, 680).

Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier’s model is appealing due to its parsimonious distinction between compliance in democratic and technical domains. But when we try to utilize this model for understanding patterns of compliance among the countries in Europe’s neighborhood, dominated by hybrid regimes, we run into problems. Contrary to their expectations, governments in these countries are sometimes hesitant to comply in technical areas, but willing to adopt EU-rules in democracy-related domains. For instance, Georgia’s pro-Western government steadfastly refused to pursue ‘technical’ labor code reforms intended to regulate the labor market. On the other hand, Azerbaijan’s entrenched ruler proved interested in implementing the EU’s anti-corruption strategy – an instrument believed to nurture democratic accountability.

In the first case, we would expect Georgia’s pro-Western Saakashvili administration to accept EU-regulations, since the labor code falls under the domain of *acquis conditionality*. Yet, the EU instead voiced mounting criticism against the Georgian authorities over its failure to accept the recommendations of the International Labor Organization (ILO) (European Commission 2012, p.3). How can we make sense of this anomaly? The lax labor code was, in fact, of pivotal importance to the ruling party, since it enabled incumbents to arbitrarily fire state employees and engage in partisan interference in connection to appointment and promotion decisions. By so doing, the ruling party could repress opposition affiliation in public institutions and maintain clientelistic networks (Berglund 2013; Engvall 2012; Timm 2014). Despite its supposedly technical character, the labor code was critical for bolstering the ruling party’s power base, and incumbents hence refused to bow down to external demands.

By contrast, in the second case, we would expect Azerbaijan’s authorities to resist compliance with anti-corruption policies, since these promote accountability and thus fall under the domain of *democratic conditionality*. Yet, the Azerbaijani government – which otherwise has been reluctant to endorse the EU’s good governance agenda – endeavored to implement the EU-recommended anti-corruption strategy. As it turns out, the ruling clique exploited the anti-corruption agenda to shore up its own

dominance by using corruption allegations against the opposition as well as against representatives of civil society and the media, who had become too critical of the authorities (Börzel & Pamuk 2012). Consequently, the Aliyev government had strong incentives to be responsive to the EU's democratic conditionality push in this domain.

These instances reveal the limitations of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier's formalistic distinction between *acquis* and democratic conditionality. As noted in the literature on hybrid regimes, it is often the informal function of these institutions that shape incumbents' political behavior, and by extension, their decisions to comply or not to comply with external conditionality (Hale 2011). "Scholars who fail to consider these informal rules of the game risk missing many of the most important incentives and constraints that underlie political behaviour" (Helmke & Levitsky 2004, 725). Moreover, excessive focus on formal institutions diverts attention from the regime's authoritarian features, which are rarely written down or made explicit (Way 2005, p. 134). A vivid illustration comes from the Kuchma-era in Ukraine, where the President's grip on power was sustained by a largely informal set of institutions, inducements, and penalties:

'Public institutions such as the tax administration, the police, schools, and hospitals had – in addition to their *formal* tasks of collecting taxes, preventing crime and providing education and health services – a set of *informal* functions associated with keeping the incumbent regime in power' (Ibid, emphasis added).

This small example shows how formally technical policy domains, such as education and healthcare, informally can serve highly politicized functions for the ruling clique. Various election-monitoring organizations continue to report how incumbents often mobilize teachers, doctors, and even sportsmen to work for the ruling party in the pre-election period (Open Society Institute 2005, 100; OSCE 2008; Nikuradze 2012). Although the formally technical role of schools and hospitals would have led us to expect compliance with EU reforms targeting these domains, knowledge of the informal function they served for President Kuchma helps us understand why he might not have complied.

Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier's distinction between the *acquis* and democratic policy domains does not capture the compliance dynamics prevalent in many hybrid regimes. Incumbents here act according to a more intricate – and intriguing – logic. As reflected in the examples above, it is essential to factor in the implications that policy areas have for the incumbent's power base. This highlights the gap in the literature on external conditionality and the need to refine existing explanations in light of the incentive structures of incumbents in such regimes.

Article one in this dissertation fills this lacuna by bringing insights from the literature on hybrid regimes into the field of external conditionality. I argue that incumbents here are resistant to conditionality not in every democracy-related domain, but in domains used for skewing the playing field. Moreover, hybrid regime incumbents are not necessarily willing to comply in every technical area, but rather in those that generate votes. Since these regimes have devised creative ways of manipulating the playing field, the distinction between democratic- and *acquis* settings becomes obsolete.

2.4 Promoting Public Administrative Reforms

The European Union, similar to other international developmental actors, places public administration reform at the heart of its reform promotion agenda in the neighborhood. There are several reasons explaining this. Firstly, from the Europeanization perspective approximation with the Union's regulatory framework - that the neighboring countries are invited to pursue - cannot be undertaken without a well-functioning bureaucracy. Even if countries might adopt legislation to align with the EU *acquis*, weak state capacity to implement and enforce these laws can significantly hamper the approximation process. It is therefore not surprising that only throughout 2007-2013, the EU's Directorate General for Development and Cooperation allocated EUR 17.7 million for public administration reforms in the neighbouring countries through its SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and management) program (EuropeAid 2014).

Secondly, from a more general perspective, a large body of scholarly literature views state administrative capacity as crucial for achieving various developmental goals. Scholars often emphasize different mechanisms, but there is largely a consensus about the positive impact of high quality bureaucracy on poverty reduction, prosperity, welfare, and peace. In their renowned study, Evans and Rauch (1999) found that state bureaucracies characterized by meritocratic recruitment generated higher rates of economic growth, which, in turn, can help aid-dependent countries reduce poverty levels. In a more recent analysis Dahlström, Lapuente, and Teorell (2012) show that bureaucracies based on meritocratic recruitment do much better when it comes to deterring corruption, than those based on political appointments. Cornell (2014) also demonstrates that high personnel turnover, characterizing politicized administrations, hampers the implementation of aid programs because the new bureaucrats are reluctant to engage in 'old' projects. Finally, merit-based bureaucracy is also viewed to have a stabilizing impact during the political turmoil, because professional bureaucrats avoid engaging in political conflicts and taking sides (Lapuente &

Rothstein 2014). This aspect is particularly pertinent to the EU's eastern neighborhood – a region with the recent history of civil wars and the still unresolved frozen conflicts.

In short, states with well-functioning administrative structures are viewed as crucial for promoting other developmental goals. As Easterly notes, “in weak states aid resources allocated for development are too often simply wasted, or end up lining the pockets of kleptocratic elites and corrupt public officials, rather than improving the lives of those most in need” (as quoted in Norris 2012, 140)”. But how can the external actors, like the European Union, promote high quality bureaucracies – that would improve the lives of those most in need – in the recipient countries?

One strand of the literature holds that external actors should promote democracy and competitive elections, because the risk of being voted out of the office will incentivize politicians to arrange their administrations in a way that would meet popular demands and deliver public goods. The advocates of the democracy promotion thesis point to the superiority of democracies, compared to other political regimes, when it comes to welfare spending, social equality and human development (Haggard & Kaufman 2008; Carothers 2007). The key argument revolves around retrospective voting, which allows citizens to get rid of incompetent, corrupt, and ineffective leaders – or to ‘throw the rascals out’. This should encourage vote-seeking politicians to pay closer attention to public concerns and to deliver services and programs meeting societal needs. By contrast, the absence of such mechanisms in autocracies makes it difficult for the populace to rid the state of self-serving rulers (Norris 2012, 19; McFaul 2010; see also Sen 1981). Several studies have documented how the introduction of democracy improved delivery of public services – because of higher freedom of information, accountability, and transparency (Lake & Baum 2001; Avelino, Brown & Hunter 2005). Kosack (2003) found that the development aid improved the quality of life *only* when combined with democratization, but it failed when this background condition was missing. This even led some scholars to urge the international actors, such as USAID, EU, and IMF, to “tilt aid to democracies” because this “would not only enhance the effectiveness of that aid, it would give clear, powerful incentives to non-representative [non-democratic] governments to shift course” (Siegle, et al. 2004, 67; McFaul 2010).

The second strand of literature, however, has challenged this proposition, and contends that international actors should first strengthen the administrative *capacity* of the recipient state, and only after that promote democracy and its properties. The proponents of ‘capacity-building first’ argument contend that leaders in developing countries might well be willing to deliver better services to their citizens, but often are not able to do so because of being confronted with poor, disorganized state apparatus,

plagued by corruption, malfeasance, poor technical skills, lack of human capital and access to technology. As a result, they suggest that donors should discriminate between essential and merely 'desirable' aspects of administrative reforms and initially invest in effectiveness and technical capacity of bureaucracy (Grindle 2004, 533; See also Fukuyama 2004). Looking at the historical examples, many of the developmental economists assert that most of the today's affluent nations achieved considerable development long before they had fully institutionalized democracy, and that democratic aspects of public administration, such as accountability and transparency, were not necessary conditions for industrial development (Chang 2000; Goldsmith 2004; Grindle 2004; Rodrik 2003). Consequently, these scholars hold that international community should first strengthen the capacity of a state to collect taxes, control corruption, secure property rights, and generally effectively develop, legislate and implement policies. And only after that, donors can focus on aspects such as "transparent budgeting and accounting processes", the autonomy of civil service from politicians, or other more democratic attributes of governance (Grindle 2004, 537).

The limitation of this approach, however, is that it views the ruling elites as passive recipients of aid. It almost assumes that once the external actors – like the EU, USAID or IMF – promote functioning and efficient bureaucracy, it will be easier to switch to promoting more democratic elements of governance. Yet it overlooks the fact that incumbents – alongside with having interests in improving state effectiveness – might also have interests in resisting some aspects of public sector reforms. This particularly concerns autonomy of civil service, transparency of public tenders, and other aspects that would jeopardize incumbent's ability to use administrative resources for partisan ends. The democratization literature reveals why portraying rulers in aid-dependent hybrid regimes as merely weak is mistaken, as they have devised "menu of both formal and informal institutions, and legal and illegal tools" to maintain their hold on power (Radnitz 2010, 200; Schedler 2002b; Levitsky & Way 2010; Greene 2007). The second study in this dissertation explains why governments in dominant pyramid systems might proactively promote the efficiency of public administration, but, with an equal zeal, block those reforms, that would enhance bureaucratic autonomy. This would deprive ruler of the crucial survival instrument – maintaining resources advantage vis-à-vis the opposition. As a result, public sector reforms risk reaching a 'saturation point', beyond which donors will face particular difficulties promoting substantial changes.

This should not be taken to mean that donors ought to deprioritize administrative effectiveness and efficiency. External actors should, however, bear in mind the intrinsic interest of dominant parties to resist some bureaucratic reforms, even as they embrace others.

2.5 Promoting Judicial Reforms

Strengthening rule of law through judicial reforms is the key priority of the ENP Action plans. Brussels, therefore, has afforded significant financial and technical assistance to the recipient countries in support of this area. Rule of law is the lynchpin of democratic governance and key to protecting civil and political rights. But besides its political virtues, rule of law is also believed to facilitate economic development, international investment and social stability (Norris 2012). As North and Weingast (1989) argue independent courts may increase investment and economic growth by increasing confidence that disputes will be handled impartially. Academics and policy-makers, therefore, agree that the rule of law is instrumental for democratization, development, and economic growth. However, in non-democratic regimes, courts also happen to be instrumental for incumbents' hold on power. Since ENP countries are unconsolidated democracies at best and outright autocracies at worst, efforts to promote judicial independence have encountered resistance from incumbents keen on retaining their influence over the courts. This is nothing less than a tug-of-war between reformers advocating the "rule of law" and incumbents favoring the "law of the ruler". How then, in such challenging settings can external actors like the EU promote judicial reforms?

Currently, there are two broad perspectives on how to achieve judicial independence. One perspective holds that the solution lies in institutional design: structurally insulating courts from the other branches of the government. Some of the key factors for institutionally insulating judges include the security of tenure and control over the budget. For instance, the U.S. Constitution insulates courts through guarantees for lifetime appointment and salaries that may not be reduced. The security of tenure means that judiciary itself decides on the aspects of appointing, promoting, remunerating, disciplining and removing judges (Popova 2012, 27; Tate & Vallinder 1995; Brutus 1788). These factors should make it difficult for the politicians to get involved in judicial affairs and impose their will. The job security allows appointed judges to do what is right under the law, without the fear of retribution. Consequently, to facilitate judicial independence in the recipient countries, the external actors should promote institutional design that would structurally insulate judges from politicians.

More recently, however, scholars have increasingly cast doubt over the sufficiency of formal insulation for achieving judicial independence, because incumbents can use informal tools to interfere in courts' decision-making. Helmke (2002, 292), on the example of Argentina, shows that even though formally Supreme Court justices were appointed for life, in reality, their average length of tenure merely lasted for 5.6 years. Every incoming regime used the combination of threats and inducements to get rid of

unwanted judges and to pack the bench with their supporters. Solomon and Foglesong (2000; see also Ledanova 2008; Hendley 2009) also illustrate how in post-Soviet countries, the wide-spread informal custom of “telephone justice” – political leaders calling judges to instruct them on their desired rulings – rendered the newly established formal insulation mechanisms useless.

This second view, thus, argues that without ensuring democratic competition between the parties, or fragmentation between different branches of government, it would be very difficult to reap the benefits of formal insulation. From this perspective, courts gain real power as a form of insurance between the rival political groups, and maintain power because political fragmentation hinders court-curbing attempts (Landau 2015). Studies have documented how electoral competition and the threat of losing office can induce incumbent politicians to empower courts. Incumbents need to think about the protection of their interests when out of power; thus they depoliticize courts as a form of insurance ‘today’, to avoid facing politicized courts when in opposition ‘tomorrow’ (Ramseyer 1994; Ginsburg 2003; Stephenson 2003). Scholars also emphasize how fragmentation of power between different government institutions enables the judiciary to retain genuine independence. Attacking courts requires coordinated actions between actors, which is particularly difficult under conditions of divided governments. As Ferejohn et al. (2004, 6) assert:

“political fragmentation gives courts space to take more independent action. Elected politicians have a variety of tools they can use to influence the actions of courts, such as appointing justices to their liking, passing legislation that overrides court rulings, or possibly even amending the constitution. But politicians are only able to undertake those measures to the extent that they are sufficiently coherent as a group to amass the legislative votes needed in each case.”

In short, departing from this perspective, the external actors – alongside with institutional design – should also promote a genuinely competitive political environment and separation of powers in the recipient countries, in order to achieve truly independent courts, free from politicization.

Politicization is certainly a big threat to the judiciary. But it is not the only threat. In the EU’s eastern neighborhood, and more generally in the developing countries, corruption poses another critical challenge to the courts’ impartiality. In its 2011 Annual Report, Transparency International found that, globally, almost half of those surveyed (46 percent) perceived their judiciary as corrupt. Rule of law can be thwarted not only by the politicians attacking courts, but also by the judges extracting bribes for favorable courts outcomes. Insulation of courts from politicians is, therefore, necessary for an impartial judiciary, but not sufficient, since judges themselves might be biased toward those who make payoffs. As a Kenyan saying

elaborates: ‘Why hire a lawyer when you can buy a judge?’ (Transparency International 2007, 4). The EU and other external actors promoting judicial reforms thus need to cast their conceptual net wider and pay attention not only to the problem of politicization but also to the problem of bribery in courts.

This is particularly important because solutions to each of these maladies often involve a trade-off in institutional design: if curbing politicization involves making judges *less accountable* (and increasing their immunity), curbing bribery involves making judges *more accountable* (and decreasing their immunity). For instance, judges with life tenure are more insulated from political incursions than judges with fixed terms who face reelection, and are “more likely to be sensitive to the political interests of current majorities” (Vanberg 2008, 2). Yet judges with life-tenure or disproportionate power might also abuse their immunity and contempt protections, and “foment a culture of impunity for corruption crimes” (Transparency International 2007: 170; Gloppen 2013; Rose-Ackerman 2007).

Debates about this trade-off are not new. In fact, it was the bone of contention between the Federalists and Anti-federalists during debates over the U.S. Constitution:

“[T]hey have made the judges independent, in the fullest sense of the word. There is no power above them, to controul any of their decisions. There is no authority that can remove them, and they cannot be controuled by the laws of the legislature. In short, they are independent of the people, of the legislature, and of every power under heaven. Men placed in this situation will generally soon feel themselves independent of heaven itself.” (Ketcham 1986: 305)

This trade-off does not mean the two are incompatible: in many consolidated democracies, courts are free of both, *political interference* by executive and legislative branches, and of *corruption*. However, in the context of transitional regimes where judiciary frequently suffers from both problems, the trade-off deserves renewed scholarly attention. Should international reform promoters recommend more accountability-boosting measures, and thus increase the risk of political intrusions? Or, should they suggest disregarding accountability, hence leaving the corrupt practices intact? The answer might be clear in countries where only one of these maladies is a problem, but in countries suffering from both, the solution is less straightforward. The third study in this dissertation further problematizes this issue and illustrates how incumbents in hybrid regimes, depending on the level of political fragmentation, might face very different incentives for whether or not to fight judicial corruption. While incumbents in less fragmented regimes might prefer the use anti-corruption measures as it enables them to establish long-term political control over

the judiciary, in more fragmented regimes politicians might instead prioritize maintaining corruption and using it for short-term private gains. Empirical findings from the paper three further suggest which side of this trade-off should the external actors prioritize, depending on the level of fragmentation in the country.

3

Research Methods

Case selection. Before delving into the methods employed in this dissertation, I first explain what an in-depth examination of the EU’s Eastern neighborhood can tell us about the potential of external actors to reform target states. This neighborhood can for several reasons be viewed as a *most likely* region for external reform promotion.

Not only is the EU the largest aid provider⁶ worldwide (Figure 1), it also spends the largest portion of its aid budget on its neighborhood (in terms of the regional breakdown). For instance, in 2015 Brussels allocated EUR 2026 million only to the ENP countries (through the European Neighborhood Instrument), while the budget allotted to the Development Cooperation Instrument – which covers all other regions – made EUR 2446 million. The EU has particularly high stakes in the success of reforms in the region, given the territorial proximity and the risk of negative developments on the ground to spill into the EU’s internal affairs. Moreover, according to some scholars, successful democratic reforms are more likely in regions with a higher density of economic and social linkages with the West (Levitsky & Way 2010 highlight Post-Communist Europe and Latin America). From this perspective, the EU-promoted reforms stand a higher chance of succeeding in the ENP’s Eastern dimension than in the countries across the Mediterranean. When it comes to economic and social linkages, three countries of the Eastern neighborhood (Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia) are part of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU and their citizens enjoy visa-free access to the EU countries.

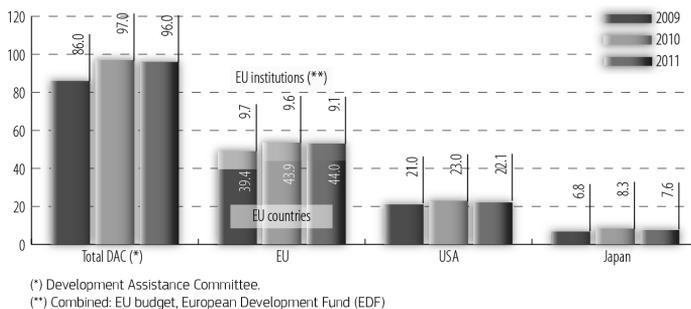


Figure 1: Net official development assistance (ODA) (billion EUR). Source: European Commission 2011.

⁶ Shared competence between the EU institutions and the member states;

In this wider context of the Eastern neighborhood, I have decided to zero in on two of the most pro-European countries: Moldova and Georgia. This case selection rationale was motivated by three factors. *Firstly*, their similar geographic size, levels of economic development, and shared post-Soviet institutional legacies make them useful for comparative purposes. *Secondly*, they are both cases of hybrid regimes. Various democracy indices, such as Freedom House's Nations in Transit and Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, have been classifying Moldova and Georgia as partly free or hybrid regimes, due to the combination of democratic institutions with non-democratic governance practices. Throughout the time-period examined in this dissertation, Georgia emerged as a dominant pyramid hybrid regime (2004-2012), while Moldova turned into a competing pyramid system (2009-2016). This difference allows us to study how incumbents' incentives for reforms differ in hybrid regimes, depending on the level of political fragmentation. *Thirdly*, both Moldova and Georgia have been pursuing a vocally Western-oriented foreign policy and have been placing integration with European Union institutions as one of their top priorities. They both score rather low on various economic development indices, which makes them dependent on EU financial support. Moreover, Russia views these countries as its backyard and the 'sphere of influence', as a result of which, both Moldova and Georgia have been keeping distance from Moscow. It is this similar set of factors that enable us to trace how the incumbent's incentives shape their response to the EU's reform promotion efforts. In countries with strong counter-conditionality, such as the presence of Russian influence in Armenia, it would be very difficult to disentangle the impact of domestic actors' incentives from other extraneous factors. For instance, why did the Armenian authorities renege on signing the EU Association Agreement in 2013 – because of the government's unwillingness or because of Russian pressure? It was, therefore, crucial to select cases that would enable us to examine reform hurdles stemming – not from third actors, but – specifically from incumbent's incentives.

In short, the EU's high prioritization of the ENP's Eastern dimension, coupled with the European orientation of Moldova and Georgia, make these countries particularly malleable to external reform promotion. Thus, if the EU's reforms face strong challenges on the ground here, then even stronger challenges can be expected in other settings where the EU spends less money, social and economic linkages are less dense, and the recipient countries are richer and thus less dependent on external aid.

Methods and data. The research question guiding this dissertation is fundamentally process oriented. Therefore, to answer how the incentive structures of hybrid regime incumbents shape their response to EU promoted institutional reforms, I employ *process tracing* as the main method of inquiry. As Laitin (2002, 5) argues, "if statistical work addresses questions of propensities, narratives address the questions of process." The perennial problem with researching the impact of incentives or

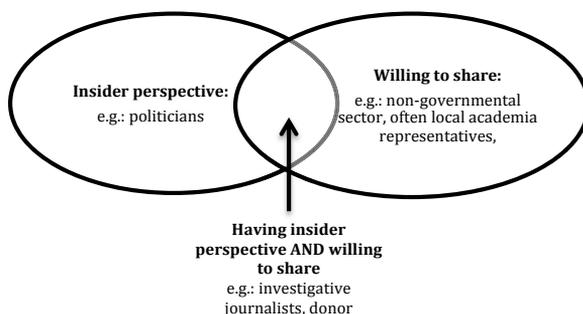
strategies is that they are very difficult to gauge, both because of their abstract nature, as well as actors' potential interests in concealing them. As remarked by Kay and Baker (2015, 2): "Almost invariably in policy studies, we focus on the contemporary or near past, and key variables are often hidden from view, by official decree or political imperatives, and data are fragmented and not conveniently additive." I have thus opted for causal process tracing, which enables us to dissect the entire reform process into smaller micro-mechanisms, examine what are the observable manifestations of incumbents' incentive structures, and how, in turn, they translate into various smaller decisions, actions, or the absence thereof, that subsequently produce the reform outcome. It allows us to hold various details of the process under a microscope and identify how exactly incumbents fine-tune their response or actions. For instance, using this method, the second study details how the authorities in Georgia raised salaries of civil servants, but created an opaque bonus system; granted agencies managerial autonomy, but kept those agencies under the oversight of political appointees instead of CEOs – in order to both improve efficiency of service delivery, but to also keep bureaucrats on a short leash. It is in this sense that the process tracing is a particularly powerful tool to "peer into the box of causality to locate the intermediate factors lying between some cause and its purported outcome" (Gerring 2007, 45; Bennett & Checkel 2015; Collier, 2011). Beach and Pedersen (2013, 2) even go as far as to argue that process tracing is "arguably the only method that allows us to study causal mechanisms."

Another dilemma with studying incentives is how to distinguish willingness from capacity. For instance, did an incumbent abstain from pursuing a certain reform because of his unwillingness or inability? Process tracing is especially useful for dealing with this problem, since, at its core, it requires excluding alternative explanations. Van Evera (1997), following the logic of Bayesian updating, offers a series of diagnostic tests, which the empirical evidence has to pass in order for us to update (or downgrade) our confidence in a given mechanism in relation to its plausible alternatives (see also Mahoney 2012; Collier 2011). At various occasions, the papers make use of these tests to exclude alternative accounts. For instance, the article on bureaucratic reforms examines four different alternative explanations against the collected evidence, and shows that partial reform could not be linked to the ruling party's declining executive or legislative powers (i.e. inability), since the executive apparatus only grew stronger under super-presidential system, while the ruling party also retained a constitutional majority in parliament. Moreover, neither the ideology, nor the donor's neglect could account for the incumbent's resistance to bureaucratic autonomy, as none of these accounts received evidential support. Excluding these plausible explanations help us update our confidence in the incentive structures (i.e. incumbent's interests in maintaining access to public resources and, by extension, upholding resource advantage vis-à-vis the opposition) as the primary causal factor behind the stalled reform.

As noted earlier, the data necessary for causal process-tracing often tends to be sensitive, fragmented, and not conveniently additive, which required me to look for material from different sources to reconstruct the most plausible accounts of the reforms. This included in-depth semi-structured interviews as well as content analysis of various official documents and decrees, reports from local and international organizations, formal agreements between the EU and the recipient countries, statistics from local research centers, as well as the secondary sources. Four rounds of fieldwork conducted in Moldova (1 round - 37 interviews) and Georgia (3 rounds – 7, 31 and 19 interviews) resulted in a total of 94 anonymous semi-structured interviews with actors either directly involved in or monitoring the implementation of reforms. These included interviews with representatives from the ruling elites (MPs, ministers, heads of agencies), opposition parties, the diplomatic and donor communities, civil servants trade unions, judges, investigative journalists, policy experts from local watchdog NGOs as well as from academic circles. At the outset of the first round of fieldwork in Tbilisi, I found it challenging to get the insights of the former ruling UNM, since several of their decision-makers declined, or never replied to my interview requests. However, I managed to overcome this hurdle with the help of my host organization in Tbilisi (GFSIS – Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies), which put me in touch with some of the key UNM decision-makers, including former ministers and MPs. These interviewees then referred me to other relevant figures. Similarly, in Moldova, the help of my host organization (IPP - Institute for Public Policy), as well as of the Swedish and the EU delegations were instrumental for getting in touch with some of the most important actors involved in the judicial reforms. Given the politically sensitive nature of information, all interviewees were promised anonymity. Some were comfortable with having our conversation recorded on tape, and on other occasions I took notes. Being cognizant of the fact that some actors might have had interest in concealing – or even misrepresenting – certain facts, all the important details were triangulated with other sources to confirm their accuracy. For instance, in anonymous interviews, few of the former ruling elite (UNM) representatives in Georgia acknowledged that bureaucrats under their tenure enjoyed very little job security, but justified this with the need to retain competitiveness in the public sector. By contrast, diverse sources such as informants from donor communities, watchdog organizations, and trade unions all unilaterally argued that the reason behind the job insecurity was the ruling elite's need to politicize bureaucracy, and, as evidence, they pointed to the continuous practice of civil servants campaigning for the incumbent party in the pre-election periods. This instance illustrates the importance of triangulating data with multiple streams of evidence when dealing with the politically sensitive material.

Reflections on the use of process tracing. As noted earlier the major advantage of process tracing is that it allows us to peer into the box of causality like no other

method. However, it also comes at some costs: PT requires using both diverse and deep evidence, and gathering it is resource- and time consuming (Bennett & Checkel 2015). It necessitates consulting different written sources, talking with diverse stakeholders, and also extracting deep insights from them, which is not easily attainable. At the outset of my fieldwork, I discovered that often the interviewees with insider perspectives (usually politicians) were reluctant to share detailed information. On the other hand, people who were willing to share information (often academics and sometimes NGO representatives) often lacked direct insights from the corridors of power. I could thus acquire diverse views by talking to different sources, but seldom attained deep insights. In the course of my fieldwork, I soon came to realize that the most valuable informants were those, who had insider perspectives *and* were willing to share them, because they lacked incentives for hiding the ‘smoking gun’. In my case, these were primarily investigative journalists and donor community representatives. The Venn diagram below summarizes my experience:



Talking to *diverse* sources is certainly necessary, but it is insufficient to gain deep knowledge into the problem. I would thus strongly recommend researchers to potentially seek out informants located in the overlapping circles of this Venn diagram. In light of the limited resources available to scholars, this is a small but crucial consideration for attaining the most discerning process tracing data possible.

Research Design. The three papers use diverse research designs, varying from within-country studies to controlled comparisons. *The first study* uses a within-country comparison of two ideal-typical cases. Following the hybrid regime literature, I first hypothesize that incumbents in dominant pyramid systems are likely to oppose reforms in those areas that are instrumental for retaining uneven political playing field. By contrast, they are more likely to embrace reforms in those areas, capable of generating votes. The key challenge here was to select policy domains that would enable us to tease out the impact of each of these two mechanisms separately. Consequently, I selected two policy domains – electoral and migration reforms – where only one of these hypothesized factors was present. The methodological

section in article one explains the time frame and case selection rationale in greater depth.

The research design of the *second article* builds on the findings of the first paper. While article one aimed at examining the theorized mechanisms separately, using two different policy areas, the second article examines the joint impact of the two mechanisms on a single policy domain. For this reason, I decided to delve in the public administrative reform. On the one hand, bureaucracy is crucial for the incumbent's ability to use administrative resources for partisan ends and, thus, to maintain resource advantage against the opposition. On the other hand, bureaucracy is also crucial for delivering basic public goods and, hence, for bolstering dominant party's ability to gain votes. By selecting a policy domain, where both of the hypothesized mechanisms were activated, the second article further examined the relevance of these two factors and their role in shaping politicians response to reforms.

The first two articles provide an in-depth analysis of reform challenges specifically in the context of dominant-pyramid systems. The *third*, and the final, paper then offers a comparative perspective and contrasts how incumbents undertake reforms in dominant- and competing pyramid systems. This study uses a most similar systems design and relies on a structured, paired comparison of judicial reforms across Moldova and Georgia (George & Bennett 2005, 67). These two countries provide a context similar to a natural experiment to systematically monitor how political fragmentation shaped ruling elites' incentives to fight judicial corruption. These states are highly similar on a number of relevant variables – including institutional legacy, GDP, and prior corruption levels – apart from one: level of political fragmentation. In both countries, widespread public discontent with the dysfunctional state culminated in popular uprisings, which swept to power new ruling elites, pledging to undertake comprehensive reforms. A crucial difference, however, lied in the fact that in Georgia one party took the reins of power, and won a constitutional majority in parliament, while Moldova wound up with a coalition of three parties. This strategy of structured paired comparison enables us to isolate and trace the effect of our hypothesized explanation on judicial corruption, while keeping extraneous factors constant.

In short, even though I have opted for a process-tracing approach in all three articles, the research question under investigation in each of them is tackled using a different design tailor-made for this purpose. Selecting a method always involves a trade-off. Going for an in-depth approach meant that I have sacrificed generalization potential for a more detailed understanding of the causal processes. Future studies will, therefore, need to test the mechanisms identified here using different methodological techniques, to see how far the findings of this dissertation travel to other regions and contexts.

4

Article Summaries

The overarching aim of this dissertation was to understand the impact of incumbent incentive structures on externally promoted reforms. The following section summarizes how the three articles in this manuscript contribute to answering this puzzle, as well as the empirical investigations and main findings.

Article 1: Cherry Picking EU Conditionality: Selective Compliance in Georgia's Hybrid Regime

The first paper examines how the incentive structures of incumbents in dominant-pyramid systems impact their compliance with EU conditionality. It demonstrates how the existing studies fall short of accounting for the selective compliance logic, and offers a more refined approach to capture this relationship. Following the literature on hybrid regimes, I posit that it is too costly for dominant parties to comply with conditionality that erodes their ability to tilt the political playing field against their opponents. By contrast, the same regimes might well be eager to comply with conditionality in domains capable of generating votes. The article then explicates this logic in the case of Georgia's electoral reform and visa facilitation negotiations.

The empirical investigation of the electoral dynamics revealed that the incumbent's misuse of administrative resources, media, and legislation remained a steady practice throughout four consecutive electoral cycles, even despite the EU's criticism. Conversely, the analysis of Georgia's visa simplification reforms exposed the government's exceptional willingness to implement far-reaching demands, in spite of large initial discrepancies between EU preconditions and local rules. Visa simplification had a strong domestic resonance in Georgian society, which turned this domain into a potential wellspring for winning votes. This empirical investigation illustrates how governments in hybrid regimes are cherry-picking conditionality: to retain popular legitimacy but also to "make sure they always win democracy's contest" (Petrov et al.).

Article 2: Hitting the Saturation Point: Unpacking the Politics of Bureaucratic Reforms in Hybrid Regimes

The second paper further examines how the incentive structures of incumbents in dominant-party systems impact their engineering of bureaucratic reforms. It, therefore, follows the logic of the first paper, but instead of isolating the theorised mechanisms in two different domains, it focuses on a single domain with implications for both mechanisms.

In light of the incentive structures outlined in the first paper, this article asserts that a ruling elite (in dominant-pyramid systems) might indeed have interest in improving bureaucratic efficiency and the delivery of public goods since this would improve their popular standing. However, they also have intrinsic stakes in keeping bureaucrats under control, given the crucial importance of administrative resources for tilting the political playing field against the opposition. The second article thus argues that the need to maintain a fine balance between these dual desires manifests itself in a mixed record – or what I term a saturation point – of bureaucratic reforms.

From the empirical analysis of Georgia's bureaucratic reforms, we learnt that the ruling elite, despite its intense efforts to boost public service efficiency, still deprived bureaucrats of full autonomy. By decentralizing service delivery, recruiting professional cadres, harnessing technology and private sector managerial principles, the UNM party significantly strengthened the state's capacity to provide public goods and services. However, the ruling elite also created an insecure job environment for bureaucrats and politicized the appointment of public servants. I argue that this partial bureaucratic reform is explained by the ruling party's attempts to, on the one hand, quickly and tangibly improve the delivery of public goods and, thus, attain legitimacy; but, on the other hand, to also secure access to administrative resources and tilt the political playing field in its favor. The fine balance between these two survival incentives led to the saturation point of bureaucratic reforms: a point beyond which no more reforms could be tolerated.

Paper 3: To Reform, or to Resist? Political Fragmentation and Judicial Corruption in Hybrid Regimes

Having investigated reform obstacles in dominant pyramid systems in the first two articles, the third paper broadens the conceptual net and brings in the competing

pyramid systems into the equation. It examines how incumbents' incentives to fight judicial corruption differ across hybrid regimes, depending on their level of political fragmentation.

Empirical analysis of the Moldovan and the Georgian judicial reforms provided two starkly different accounts. After coming to power and gaining a constitutional majority in parliament, the dominant UNM (United National Movement) in Georgia embarked on an anti-corruption campaign. The ruling party used restrictive disciplinary measures and corruption allegations to get rid of the old-guard of judges. Subsequently, by raising salaries, improving material conditions and recruiting young, qualified - but reliable - judges, the authorities nurtured loyalty on the bench. This meant that in ordinary cases the citizens could now get impartial rulings, which significantly improved the ruling party's popular standing. However, in politically sensitive cases judges resorted to self-censorship and all three branches of government "acted in concert in preventing justice from being done" (ECHR 2011, 59). In short, the dominant UNM *instrumentalized anti-corruption* measures to cement and legitimize its exclusive political control over the courts. By contrast, in Moldova, the power fragmentation prompted politicians in the governing AEI (Alliance for European Integration) coalition to instead *instrumentalize corruption* in courts for amassing personal wealth. While none of three parties of the governing alliance gained full control over the judiciary, they also showed no political will to fight corruption, blocked the EU-funded judicial reforms, and thus preserved a corrupt equilibrium on the bench. This allowed them to plunder state institutions thanks to financial money laundering schemes involving corrupt judges.

The key finding is that while in the case of Georgia, justice was obstructed in a fewer numbers of cases, the politicization of courts remained the major problem. By contrast, in Moldova, the courts retained higher levels of structural independence, but the number of cases in which justice was obstructed – due to thriving corruption – remained exceedingly high.

5

Conclusions and Policy Implications

What are the obstacles to the EU's reform promotion efforts in its Eastern neighborhood? Why do countries sometimes adopt the reforms, resist the reforms, or undertake only superficial changes? To answer these questions, the dominant explanations in the Europeanization literature have been underscoring structural conditions, such as territorial proximity to the West or Russia, or the size of the external reward. While these are important factors, they only tell a part of the story. More recently, scholars have increasingly shifted focus towards domestic actors. They contend that externally promoted democratic governance reforms can only be effective if these 'resonate with domestic context' and 'fit the agenda' of the incumbents (Wolczuk 2009, 208; Ademmer & Börzel 2013). While this is a timely turn in the Europeanization literature, these studies still do not offer much guidance about what drives incumbent's rationale and what reforms stand a chance of appealing to them. This dissertation has aimed to overcome this shortcoming. I first asked how the incentive structures of incumbents in hybrid regimes shape their response to various institutional reforms. I then went on to provide a more theoretically grounded answer, by departing from the literature on hybrid regimes and expanding its logic in policy domains where the EU is particularly active: electoral reforms and migration (study 1); public administration (study 2); judicial reforms (study 3).

The major lesson of this dissertation is that incumbents' incentives for reforms differ according to the degree of political power fragmentation, because it impacts their time-horizons and their view of public resources. If incumbents in dominant pyramid systems utilize state resources for *partisan* ends, those in competing pyramid systems often prefer to divert it for *private* enrichment. This situation has important consequences for their response to externally promoted reforms. In dominant pyramid systems, where incumbents have longer time-horizons, rulers are more willing to adopt reforms in those areas that could generate popular support. However, they are also likely to proactively block reforms in areas that are instrumental for tilting the political playing field in their own favor. By contrast, in those hybrid regimes where power is divided between competing political factions, elites are less likely to

undertake substantial reforms, given their short-time horizons. They are content with the institutional *status quo* and prefer to use state resources for private ends. Ruling elites in Moldova, despite their vocal pro-EU orientation, thus undertook superficial reforms and, as they were unsure about their tenure in office, prioritized amassing personal wealth over gaining political support. Unsurprisingly, given the scale of the theft, EU-assistance never reached those most in need, like the ‘abandoned kids’ of Moldova. These empirical findings tie back to the conclusions of those scholars who highlight the importance of time-horizons for the success of external aid, and governance reforms more broadly (Wright 2008; Olson 1993; Charron and Lapuente 2011).

Taken together, these findings alert us to the fact that the EU and other external actors are often caught between a rock and a hard place. When they provide assistance for reforms in the dominant party hybrid regimes, incumbents might use this to prop up their popular support, while, in parallel, sidelining their opponents. Thus, donor assistance might help them perpetuate their political tenure. By contrast, while in more fragmented hybrid regimes authoritarian tendencies are not an immediate risk, the incumbent politicians might use the existing malfunctioning state institutions - and even donor assistance - for reaping personal monetary benefits. If in the first case, donor assistance ends up being used for partisan purposes, in the second case, it risks being used for private ends. Both are troubling outcomes.

These findings have important *policy implications*. They suggest that the counter-strategies that the donors can use to overcome this stalemate, first and foremost, require understanding the incumbents’ incentives in the recipient countries and adjusting conditionality accordingly. International actors have a myriad of tools to impact political institutions in their neighborhoods or other aid-recipient countries, but it is essential to tailor those tools by taking into account the domestic power configurations and political elites’ preferences. In more dominant party hybrid regimes incumbents often have a self-interest in strengthening the capacity of state institutions. When state capacity is high – or when a state looks more like “a fine jaguar than a jalopy” – regimes that run them are their most immediate beneficiaries (Slater & Fenner 2011, 16). Dominant parties often use capacity-building assistance for stabilizing and sustaining their rule. In such settings, as a counter-strategy, donors need to push for more political competitiveness and leveling the playing field, rather than investing in more capacity-building reforms. Some studies have shown that strengthening state-capacity in non-democratic settings is not only negligible for democratization but can actually hinder it by stalling electoral turnovers (Van Hamm & Seim 2017, 13). To be sure, state capacity is crucial for achieving various developmental goals and for improving citizens’ well being, more broadly. However,

donors embarking on this path will need to make state-capacity building assistance strictly conditional upon incumbents opening more political space and creating a fair competing environment for opposition parties.

The counter-strategies in more fragmented hybrid regimes are almost inverse of those described above. When the political power is divided between several competing groups, donors might want to push for more capacity building reforms, given the fact that often it is the defunct state institutions that the elites exploit for accumulating private wealth. While authoritarian tendencies are not an immediate risk in such fragmented settings, state capture and kleptocratic behavior - are. When public sector is weak, lacks technical capacity, and is underfunded, public officials are unable to restrain the politicians' predatory behavior. If judges or bureaucrats are afforded poor working conditions, inadequate training, and meager salaries, they are more likely to become corrupt themselves, and less likely to oppose illicit actions of the elites. For instance, in Moldova, the OSCE experts revealed that an exceptionally high percentage of court hearings were held in the judges' offices due to an inadequate number of courtrooms, lack of facilities and "problems with heating in winter" (OSCE 2009, 7; see also USAID 2015). This lack of transparency of court hearings, and the possibility to easily bribe underpaid judges, 'freezing in their courtrooms', offered a fertile ground to oligarchs-turned-politicians to extract favorable rulings that enabled them to engage in money laundering and to divert tax-revenues from state coffers to their companies, and eventually overseas (OCCRP 2016(a); OCCRP 2016(b); Cafus 2015). The donors, therefore, need to bolster state effectiveness and invest more heavily in salaries, infrastructure, and professional training in state institutions. This is certainly not a panacea to all the problems in competing-pyramid systems. However, with strong professional role conceptions and better salaries, bureaucrats, judges, and other public officials, are more likely to be willing and capable of withstanding pressures from rapacious elites (see Hilbink 2012; Cornell & Sundell 2015). Donors need to acknowledge that when competing elites do not possess *political strength*, it is often the *weakness of state institutions* that they employ for enriching themselves.

While these are the lessons and policy implications distilled from in-depth analysis and comparative case studies undertaken within this dissertation, future research should test the relevance of the identified mechanisms on a larger set of hybrid regimes. We need to learn more if the power fragmentation in other hybrid regimes incites politicians to engage in a similar kleptocratic behavior. By the same token, we still lack solid evidence on the aggregate effect of dominant parties' power preservation strategies on externally promoted reforms, and human welfare more broadly. The inherent tension between the dominant parties' attempts to retain

popular legitimacy, while sidelining opposition, also deserves a closer scholarly scrutiny.

Even though this dissertation has primarily focused on the EU's norm promotion efforts, the lessons from these studies can be relevant to *other external actors* - such as the US, Sweden, the UK, and many others - promoting democratic governance in various parts of the world. To be sure, donors often differ in terms of what types of 'carrots and sticks' they utilize, or the policy areas they prioritize (see Magen, Risse & McFaul 2009). However, as Cornell remarks, even despite these "subtle differences", there is a "common threshold" for democratic governance that all (at least Western) donors agree upon (Cornell 2013, 24). For instance, Crawford shows that although external actors often differ in their definitions of democracy, they all underscore "free and fair elections within a multi-party system as a minimal, necessary condition for democracy" (Crawford 2001, 72). Future research should examine more carefully how much findings from this dissertation capture the reform dilemmas faced by other donors as well.

Another critical aspect that this dissertation draws our attention to is that the self-preservation tactics used by the hybrid regimes are often much more *subtle* - and difficult to detect - than those traditionally employed by the autocrats. In dominant-pyramid systems, incumbents might not jail the opposition activists, but deny them important campaign funds. They might not engage in outright fraud, and even invite international election monitors, but the bulk of the manipulations has already occurred during the campaign period and slipped the international radar. Yet the literature on external reform promotion is still guided by the experiences from the autocratic states. As this dissertation revealed, there has been an assumption among some EU scholars that in the so-called 'technical' or - non-democracy related - areas external actors would face no challenges promoting reforms. But another important lesson from this study is that in hybrid regimes distinction between technical and democracy-related areas becomes obscure, and even obsolete, since formally technical areas often have an informal function of keeping incumbents in power. The EU and other foreign actors, thus, need to be cognizant of these more intricate differences: they might expect unproblematic reforms in areas deemed as technical, but, if these are utilized for tilting the political playing field - like the labor code in Georgia - donors should not expect much compliance. Future research should concentrate more on how to better conceptualize and measure these subtle tools, which are often informal, and hence hard to gauge, yet allow incumbents to stay in power without blatant election-rigging or major civil rights violations.

Finally, the findings of this dissertation also underscore that apart from promoting specific policy reforms, external actors, first and foremost, need to support party system institutionalization – i.e. the general environment in which politics is conducted. Party system volatility in hybrid regimes usually implies that in case of losing elections, parties often vanish from the political landscape. It is this fear and insecurity of being out of office, which makes the dominant parties desperately cling to power (and politicize public resources), and the competing parties to engage in predatory behavior (and plunder the state for private enrichment). Currently, politicians' time-horizons in hybrid regimes stretch only as far as their time in power. External actors need to engage more in 'civilizing' this insecure political environment by stabilizing party systems, and by making sure that even when out of power, parties remain on the political scene. Otherwise, in the conditions of such unbounded uncertainty, even seemingly positive factors, such as increased competition, can lead to the rapacious behavior and subverted reforms. As suggested earlier, it is important to adjust conditionality according to the incumbents' incentives; but it is all the more important to change the environment, which shapes the incumbents' incentives in the first place. Ultimately, this is the only irreversible way out of the stalemate, which the external reform promoters often find themselves in.

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