Comparative Party System Analysis in Central and Eastern Europe: the Case of the Baltic States

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Abstract

The nature of the party systems in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has puzzled many scholars. High instability of the party systems and their specific evolution makes the application of theoretical models designed predominately for Western European party politics problematic. The paper puts forward the argument that we should further elaborate and specify the models for a small N comparative party system analysis in CEE countries and to incorporate some region specific components into the framework. The essential dimensions included into proposed comparative framework are as follows: (1) the stability of the party system, (2) party system fragmentation, (3) parties' penetration into society, (4) the ideology and origins of the major parties, (5) the dominant cleavage constellations framing the party competition (6) the strength of the party organizations. The above-mentioned dimensions are expected to capture the most important aspects that make the difference between the party systems in general, and each dimension is complemented with the specific additional variables suitable for party system analysis in CEE in particular. The framework will be tested on the Baltic States, which party systems are often regarded to be very similar to each other. However, the analysis will demonstrate that based on the above-mentioned framework, very significant and noteworthy differences will be revealed.

Keywords: political parties, party systems, the Baltic States, Central and Eastern Europe, comparative analysis.

Introduction

Apart from classical frameworks for party system analysis proposed by Sartori (1976) and Blondel (1969), there haven't been many innovations in the field (Bardi & Mair, 2008; Wolinetz, 2006). However, the studies on emerging party systems in the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Latin America have brought up new challenges. It appears that classical models, designed predominately for party system analysis in stable Western democracies, are not working so well if we study less consolidated and less institutionalised party systems. The most fruitful innovation on the field has been a new concept – party system institutionalisation, introduced by Mainwaring (1999) and Mainwaring and Scully (1995), which captures several important parameters functional for party system analysis in new democracies (party's penetration into society, regularity and stability of the patterns of party competition, etc.).

The examination of party system institutionalisation and its various aspects provides a good ground for an intra-regional analysis, in which various countries' party systems are compared within the region (e.g. within CEE). However, it is often done in very broad-looking manner in which quantitative data and indices allow researchers to reach tentative conclusions on the overall level of party system institutionalisation, but more indepth comparative analysis is often neglected (Bielasiak, 2002; Lewis, 2008). It is not only a shortcoming for studies focused on party system institutionalisation. Most

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of the studies on party systems in CEE tend to seek general tendencies characterising the region as a whole or to contrast party systems in new democracies to Western Europe (e.g. Bakke & Sitter, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Mair, 1998b; Olson, 1998; Rose & Munro, 2009). Although there have been some prominent analyses focused on single cases or studies which put forward a more case-sensitive comparative analysis (Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006; Kitschelt, 1999; Kostelecký, 2002; Kulik & Pshizova, 2005; Meleshevich, 2007; Spirova, 2007; Tworzecki, 1996,etc.), small N deep-going comparative studies, combining both qualitative and quantitative parameters, are relatively rare in the field.

As it was noted earlier, classical models like Sartori's are not able to capture some significant and specific aspects relevant in the context of new democracies, where not only the number of parties and their ideological distance matter, but rather the overall stability of the party systems and parties' penetration into society, etc. Unfortunately, the analyses on party system institutionalisation have often only scratched the surface. Thus, a framework is absent, which would be suitable for small N comparative analysis and would allow us to compare party systems in CEE countries in a more indepth and systematic way, while taking into account some region-specific aspects, combining both quantitative and qualitative data, and going beyond mere parameters of party system institutionalisation.

In brief, the research objective of the paper is to propose a comparative framework suitable for a small N comparative analysis on party systems in CEE countries, incorporating previous theoretical contributions in the field, but supplementing them with several region-specific variables. The applicability of the proposed framework will be tested on the three Baltic States, which party systems are often considered to be very similar to each other, but the paper will demonstrate that the extended framework enables us to point out several substantial differences between the cases.

The structure of the paper will be as follows: in the theoretical section we will give a short overview of the specific features of the party systems in CEE and introduce previous theoretical contributions made on party systems' comparative analysis (both in new and old democracies); in the main section of the paper, we will outline the major parameters of the proposed comparative framework, and in the following sub-sections we will offer a theoretical justification for every component of the framework and demonstrate how it would work empirically through comparing party systems in the Baltic States.

Specific features of Central and Eastern European party systems

There is a growing amount of literature where the parties and party systems in Western Europe are juxtaposed with those in post-communist countries (Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006; Lewis, 2000; Mair, 1998b; Rose & Munro, 2009). Most of the authors point out the following aspects:

- **Party systems are more fragmented than in Western Europe**. For example, the number of effective parliamentary and electoral parties is higher than in the West (Bakke & Sitter, 2005; Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006; Lewis, 2006). The picture is changing constantly: new parties are emerging, older ones are splitting or merging, parties are changing names, etc. The party systems in post-communist countries are in constant flux.
- **The linkage between the voters and parties is quite weak**. Because there were no multi-party systems before the transition in CEE, voters don't have previous party affiliation and, thus, they have only a vague sense of group belonging or political identities (Lewis, 2000; Mair, 1998b). This is why volatility is remarkably higher in CEE than in Western Europe (Gallagher, Laver, & Mair, 2005; Lane & Ersson, 2007; Lewis, 2000; Sikk, 2005; Tavits, 2008).
- **Ideological stances of the parties are not so well-defined, like in Western Europe**. It is sometimes difficult to classify parties on the political spectrum and to distinguish between different ideological party families in post-communist countries (Lewis, 2000).

- **Cleavages are absent or very weakly manifested**. The question of cleavages in the party politics of CEE has puzzled many authors (Evans & Whitefield, 2000; Kitschelt, 1999; Lawson, Römmele, & Karasimeonov, 1999; Tavits, 2005; Whitefield, 2002). It has been argued that linkage between social cleavages and party support has been quite blurry and not very well accentuated, compared with the West.
- **Party organizations are less institutionalised and more dependent on the state**. Although in some countries party organizations are already quite strong and their geographical scope is remarkable, they are still in the developing phase and not as institutionalised as in Western Europe (Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006; Lewis, 1996). Additionally, parties in CEE are often more connected with the state and dependant on the state resources than in the West (Kopecký, 2006; van Biezen, 2000, 2003, 2005).
- **Party membership is lower than in Western Europe**. In Western Europe, approximately 5% of the electorate belongs to political parties. In CEE countries, the corresponding number is below 3% (Mair & van Biezen, 2001).
- **Trust in parties is lower compared with Western Europe**. Trust in parties is also decreasing in Western Europe (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000), but it is even lower in CEE (Lewis, 2000, 2008).

All above-mentioned aspects are rather relevant regarding the party systems in the Baltic States. However, some scholars have pointed out that electoral volatility and party system fragmentation (effective number of parties) is slightly higher in the Baltic States than in other CEE countries (Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006; Sikk, 2005; Tavits, 2005). Moreover,, the splits and mergers of the parties are slightly more common in the region than in some other post-communist new EU member states (Caramani & Biezen, 2007). However, concerning the party organizations, there are remarkable discrepancies between the Baltic countries: while party membership in Estonia is one of the highest in CEE, it is the lowest in Latvia (Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2009).

Therefore, party systems in the Baltic States are not very divergent from the CEE's mainstream if we take some general and commonly referred parameters, but our subsequent comparative analysis will reveal a more nuanced picture and remarkable differences between the cases.

Existing theoretical frameworks in comparing party systems

Before we proceed with the introduction of the proposed framework, we will provide a short overview of the party systems' comparative analysis and the theoretical contributions made in the field.

Party system is a concept defined in various ways in theoretical literature (e.g. Sartori, 1976; Sartori & Mair, 2005; Ware, 1996; Wolinetz, 1988). Most of the authors suggest that there has to be more than one party within the system and a party system is, consequently, a system of interactions between several parties. Shortly, party system analysis is expected to show which parties are represented in the system and how they compete and cooperate with each other.

Comparative analysis of party systems has predominately focused on the number of parties, their strength and balances within the system (Mair, 2002; Wolinetz, 2006, 1997). On this subject, the most widely cited works belong to Blondel (1969) and Sartori (1976).

Blondel took into account not only the number of parties, but also their relative size and strength and, consequently, he distinguished between four major party system types: (1) two-party system, (2) two-and-a-half party system, (3) multiparty system with a dominant party and (4) multiparty system without a dominant party.

Sartori proposed a more elaborated framework. He argued that it is very important to make a difference between relevant and non-relevant parties in the party system. According to Sartori, relevant parties have either coalition or blackmail potential, non-relevant parties have neither. Besides, Sartori concentrates on the direction or nature of the party competition – whether it is centripetal

or centrifugal. In other words, whether parties try to occupy the ideological centre of the party system or assume radical ideological positions and move towards the extremes. Sartori ended up with the following typology: (1) predominate party system (one party takes over 50% of seats), (2) two-party system, (3) moderate pluralism (moderately fragmented multiparty system with centripetal tendencies) and (4) polarised pluralism (fragmented multiparty system with centrifugal tendencies).

Sartori's typology was highly applicable to Western European party systems in the 1960s and in the 1970s, but nowadays some scholars are doubtful whether it really allows us to make the distinction between several multiparty systems in Europe. According to Mair (2002), polarised pluralism has emptied as an analytical category, because moderate pluralism is so widely distributed in modern Europe – the majority of Western European party systems are moderate multiparty systems. The situation is not very different in CEE, where party systems are indeed more fragmented, but it is also difficult to find impeccably suitable candidates for polarised multipartism – at least among the new EU member states (Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006; Lewis, 2006; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004). If the overwhelming majority of the party systems in CEE lump together under the category 'moderate multi party systems', Sartori's typology has little value in the CEE context.

More recent and contemporary typology has been introduced by Siaroff (2000), who attempted to break up an overcrowded category of multiparty systems. Taking into consideration relative size/strength of the parties, the balance between them, and the number of relevant parties, Siaroff built up an eight-fold typology: (1) pure two-party system (two parties obtain 95% seats), (2) two-and-a-half party system, (3) moderate multi party system with one dominant party, (4) moderate multi party system with two main parties, (5) moderate multiparty system with a balance among parties, (6) extreme multiparty system with one dominant party, (7) extreme multiparty system with two main parties, (8) extreme multiparty system with a balance among parties.

The typology above seems to be more useful in the CEE context, because it makes distinctions between multiple multiparty systems that are so dominant in the region. Siaroff is not calling the proposed types party systems, but referring to them as patterns of party strengths, which can change from elections to elections. Considering the symptomatic instability of the party systems in CEE, 'patterns of party strengths' would be quite a useful concept for examining the party systems in the region.

However, party system analysis in a comparative manner is not expected to be limited only to the number and strength of the parties. Various other dimensions ought to be considered as well. A more comprehensive analytical scheme has been recommended by Ware (1996), who suggested that for analysing and comparing different party systems we have to take into account four major dimensions:

- The extent to which parties penetrate society (whether parties are trusted in the given society and whether they are able to mobilise the voters).
- The ideologies of the parties (dominant ideological party families in the country).
- The stance of the parties towards the legitimacy of the regime (whether there are anti-system parties represented in the system and what is their position).
- The number of parties in the system. At this point, Ware distinguishes between: (1) predominant party system, (2) two-party system, (3) two-and-a-half party system, (4) system with one large party and several smaller ones (one large party usually wins at least 45%, but not 50%), (5) system with two large parties (two larger parties usually obtain more than 65% of seats, but no other party obtains more than 14%), (6) even party system (the larger party obtains less than 45% of seats and the two larger parties obtain less than 65% of seats).

Although the analytical framework proposed by Ware allows employing a more nuanced comparative analysis of the cases, scholars often neglect it (probably because the poor theoretical justifications behind the analytical dimensions chosen). However, Ware's framework possesses hidden potential for small N comparative analysis, because it enables us to look behind the mere numbers of parties and points out several qualitatively important variables for the party systems.

A widely accepted and fruitful contribution to party system comparative analysis came from scholars stressing the significance of party system institutionalisation (Mainwaring, 1999; Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006). As it was mentioned earlier, party system institutionalisation is a concept that is first and foremost applicable to new democracies. The institutionalised party system is a party system in which: (1) there is notable stability and regularity manifested in inter-party competition, (2) parties have strong roots in society, (3) they enjoy a relatively high level of legitimacy among political actors and voters, (4) party organisations are quite strong and independent – have a value on their own and they are not subordinated to the ambitions of few personalistic leaders.

There is no consensus among authors on how to operationalise the dimensions outlined above, particularly if we apply them to quantitative measures (see: Lewis, 2008; Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006; Markowski, 2001, etc.)

However, as it was pointed out earlier, most of the studies on party system institutionalisation (at least on CEE) tend to be rather medium or large N quantitative comparative analyses, which often neglect a more profound and qualitative insight.

The proposed framework for party system comparative analysis in CEE

Employing the theoretical contributions made by the authors introduced in the previous section and taking into consideration specific features of the party politics in CEE, we are able to sketch a framework for comparative party system analysis in CEE countries. Almost each dimension outlined below has two components: a more general or universal component, which could be applied to party systems analysis in Western Europe as well, and CEE specific additional indicators.

I. Stability of the party system:

a. general indicator: electoral volatility;
b. CEE specific additional indicator: the average support for the parties represented in the parliament more than once.

II. Fragmentation of the party system:

a. general indicator: effective number of electoral parties – ENEP;
b. CEE specific additional indicator: dominant party system type according to Siaroff.

III. Parties' penetration into society:

a. CEE specific indicator: trust in parties.

IV. Origin of the main parties in the party system and their ideology:

a. general indicator: historical parties; ideological party families in Europe outlined by Beyme (1985);
b. CEE specific additional indicator: historical roots of the parties with regard to transition by Kostelecky (2002).

V. Dominant cleavage constellations:

a. general indicator: classical Lipset-Rokkan model for cleavages in Western Europe
b. CEE specific additional indicator: Lipset-Rokkan model supplemented by specific post-communist cleavages outlined by Kitschelt (1999)

VI. Strength of the party organizations:

a. general indicator: party membership;
b. CEE specific additional indicator: general strength and scope of the party organizations.

The suggested framework encompasses both quantitative and qualitative indicators and includes dimensions considered to be significant by several students of the party systems (Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006; Kitschelt, 1999; Kostelecký, 2002; Lewis, 2006; Mair, 1998a; Meleshevich, 2007, etc.). The theoretical basis of selection of the dimensions will be justified in the subsequent sections of the paper.

Stability of the party system

Stability of the party system and its consolidation has been the major concern of the authors examining party systems in CEE. Various indicators have been used to measure the stability of party systems: electoral volatility, the number of effective parties, the proportion of votes taken by parliamentary parties presented on more than one occasion in the legislatures, the number of new parties represented in the parliament and their average yield of votes in elections, Party Vote Share Concentration Index, changes in the patterns of bloc competition and dynamics of government–opposition relationships, etc. (see: Bakke & Sitter, 2005; Horowitz & Browne, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Meleshevich, 2007; Rose & Munro, 2009; Tavits, 2005, 2007, 2008). Yet the most widely used measure for party system stability both in Western and Eastern Europe has been electoral volatility (Bartolini & Mair, 1990). However, in the CEE context, where parties are often merging, splitting and new parties are emerging, it is often very complicated to assess the exact level of electoral volatility (see: Sikk, 2005), thus, different authors come up with very different scores. However, there is no doubt that electoral volatility is one of the key measures for the stability of the party systems.

We apply the Pedersen index, which is often considered to be the most widely applied index in the studies of electoral volatility. Electoral volatility in the Baltic States has been relatively high and remarkably fluctuating from election to elections (see: Table 1). However, the average electoral volatility has been much lower in Estonia than in other Baltic States. Calculations made by other authors have also pointed out similar tendencies and highlighted the 'positive' exceptionality of Estonia (Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006; Lane & Ersson, 2007; Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007; Sikk, 2005; Tavits, 2008).

Although the Lithuanian party system has been considered to be more stable than party systems in Latvia and Estonia in the 1990s, high volatility scores were mainly produced by extreme fluctuations of votes between two major parties: the conservative Homeland Union and the Social Democratic Party (Jurkynas, 2004; Krupavičius, 2005a; Novagrockien 2001; Ramonaite, 2006). Volatility was increasing even more after the 'earthquake elections' in 2000, when several new parties entered the political arena.

Electoral volatility in Latvia has been very high almost for every election. Only elections in 2006 (5^{th} elections) brought about a positive change, which turned out to be temporary, because most of the parties successful in 2006 lost the confidence of voters in the 2010 elections and, therefore, the volatility scores were rising dramatically again. Only recent elections (2011) produced a small positive change. Volatility in Estonia has been declining since the 1990s, regardless of some fluctuations.

The Lithuanian case in the 1990s reveals a shortcoming of electoral volatility as a major indicator of party system stability in CEE. Consequently, there could be a case in which electoral volatility was high, but the supply side of the parties stayed quite stable (there were no new relevant parties entering the system), and voters were swinging rather between two relatively stable blocks. Although the scores on volatility in Lithuania were comparable with Latvia in the 1990s, the Latvian model was very different. In Latvia, there were no ideologically anchored stable parties or party blocks – rather for every election new parties were established and the newcomers usually won elections (Pabriks & Stokenberga, 2006).

Therefore, the author of this paper suggests using an additional indicator that not only demonstrates the stability/instability of voter behaviour, but indicates how stable the party system is, particularly its composition. The indicator is highly relevant in the CEE context where new parties are constantly invading the system and general scores of electoral volatility are not always sufficient to provide full evidence. In other words, it is important to point out how many votes were obtained by 'more established' parties (in the CEE context), which have been presented in the legislature on more than one occasion. It was also an indicator applied by Lewis (2006) in his updated and sophisticated

Table 1: Electoral volatility in the Baltic States 1992-2011

	2nd elections	3rd elections	4th elections	5th elections	6th elections	7th elections	**Mean**
Estonia	27,3	34,2	27,3	21,6	11,6	-	**24,4**
Latvia	42,9	42,1	43,4	13,4	36,0	28,7	**34,4**
Lithuania	37,4	47,5	49,7	37,6	–	–	**43,1**

Source: Caramani & Biezen, 2007 and author's calculations.
Note: Figures indicate total volatility without others (TVWO), including parties that obtained at least two percent of the vote. Volatility is calculated using the 'Pedersen index' (1979): Total Volatility = Σ|Pi…n t – Pi…n t+1 | / 2, where P is the percentage of votes for parties 'i' to 'n' in elections 't' and 't+1'.

Table 2: Proportion of votes taken by the parties represented in the legislatures on more than one occasion ('more established parties')

	2nd elections	3rd elections	4th elections	5th elections	6th elections	7th elections	**Average**
Estonia	61%	100%	75%	93%	100%	–	**86%**
Latvia	37%	47%	50%	100%	54%	73%	**60%**
Lithuania	91%	40%	45%	60%	–		**59%**

Source: author's calculations, based on data provided by University of Essex database: *Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe*, http://www.essex.ac.uk/elections/

comparative analysis on party systems in CEE. Recently Pettai and his Baltic colleagues (Pettai, Auers, & Ramonaitė, 2011) used a similar indicator for measuring the internal stability of the party systems in the Baltic states.

The results presented in Table 2 are slightly different from Lewis and Pettai, primarily because in our calculations we considered a party to be presented more than once also if it changed its name and was formed by a merger, but the core parties merged were both presented in the former parliament, therefore, there wasn't really a substantial change. We also excluded the founding elections in the early 1990s, because in that case all parties were new and it would distort the final results.

The data provided demonstrates that the picture is not very different: the party system in Estonia has been the most stable and voters have preferred to vote for 'more established' parliamentary parties (except in 2nd and 4th elections, in 1995 and 2003 correspondingly), while in Latvia and Lithuania new parties (or parties not presented in the legislature before) have been more successful. The Lithuanian case is striking, because its remarkable stability in the 1990s (2nd elections in 1996) and sharp decay after the 3rd elections (2000) and beyond. However, we have to recall that electoral volatility in Lithuania was high even in the 1990s, when the party system was internally quite stable indeed – so on certain occasions, volatility scores are not always an excellent indicator to measure the stability of the party system in CEE, thus in some cases we must examine the internal dynamics of the system more profoundly.

The picture is more or less the same if we take the alternative measure – the proportion of votes obtained by the new parties (Table 3)[1]

1 Because in theoretical literature there is no full consensus on how to define the 'new party' (see: Hug, 2001; Tavits, 2006) and it is a very complicated task especially in CEE, where parties often split and merge and form electoral alliances (Krupavicius, 1998; Tavits, 2007), we recommend to use rather the previous indicator - the vote share of 'more established' parliamentary parties.

Table 3: Proportion of votes taken by relevant new parties[2] represented in the legislatures

	2nd elections	3rd elections	4th elections	5th elections	6th elections	7th elections	Average
Estonia	29%	0%	25%	7%	0%		12%
Latvia	49%	28%	33%	0%	39%	21%	28%
Lithuania	9%	38%	45%	21%			28%

Source: author's calculations, based on the data provided by University of Essex database: *Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe*, http://www.essex.ac.uk/elections

Consequently, we can argue that there are notable differences between the party systems in the Baltic States in terms of stability. The Estonian party system was quite unstable in the 1990s, but ultimately turned out to be the most consolidated in the region in the 2000s. The Lithuanian party system followed a different trajectory: it was fairly consolidated in the 1990s, but fell into disarray in the next decade. The party system in Latvia has been the least stable – an almost constant incursion of the new parties, (usually very triumphant in elections), has undermined the legitimacy of more established parties and very remarkable instability has been the major problem of Latvian party politics since the 1990s.

Fragmentation of the party system

There are two major ways of how to analyse the fragmentation of the party system: (1) to use statistical indices like the effective number of electoral or parliamentary parties (ENEP/ENPP), (2) to classify the party systems according to the strength and numbers of parties and study the patterns of party competition like did Blondel (1969) and Sartori (1976), or (3) to combine both approaches.

However, the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) is often regarded to be a major parameter for measuring the fragmentation of the party system (Bielasiak, 2002; Lane & Ersson, 2007; Lane & Ersson, 1999; Rose & Munro, 2009; Tóka & Henjak, 2005, etc.), based on the Laakso and Taagepera index (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979).

The data on the Baltic countries (table 4) indicates that party systems are highly fragmented and the patterns of party competition are rather based on small parties, not on big parties like in some other CEE countries, e.g. in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland (Enyedi, 2006; Kopecký, 2007; Szczerbiak, 2006). There are even no significant variations manifested between the Baltic countries. Only in the Estonian case it is evident that party system fragmentation has constantly fallen after the 1990s, but not on a very notable scale. The Latvian party system tends to be the most fragmented in the region, and only recent elections (2010 and 2011) brought about a remarkable reduction in the number of electoral parties. The fragmentation in Lithuania has increased by a large extent since 1992, and the scores reached their maximum level in the last elections.

Hence, the Estonian case reveals an important point that is worth taking into consideration: a relatively high-level fragmentation and instability of the party system are not always compatible. Lewis (2006) notes that there are two distinct models of party system consolidation evident in CEE: in

2 According to Satrori (1976) and Ware (1995), a party is considered to be relevant if it obtains more than 3% of seats in the legislature. Therefore, a "relevant new party" is a new party that is presented in the parliament and obtains at least 3% of seats (so it has at least some impact on party politics in the given country). In our calculations, the new party was considered to be a new party in the cases when it was either: (1) genuinely a new party in the sense that it emerges without any help from members of existing parties, (2) a party formed after splitting the older party, and it obtained a different name and identity, (3) a party that was established by mergers of new and old parties, but the core of the party and its identity was shaped by the new parties, not by old ones. We didn't consider the party to be new if it formed as a merger of two older parties. And as it was noted before, we counted only parties represented in the legislature, not extra-parliamentary new parties.

Table 4: Effective number of electoral parties in the Baltic States (ENEP)

	1st elections	2nd elections	3rd elections	4th elections	5th elections	6th elections	7th elections	Average ENEP 1992-2011
Estonia	8,9 (1992)	5,9 (1995)	6,9 (1999)	5,4 (2003)	5,0 (2007)	4,8 (2011)		6,15
Latvia	6,2 (1993)	9,6 (1995)	6,9 (1998)	6,8 (2002)	7,5 (2006)	4,4 (2010)	5,1 (2011)	6,64
Lithuania	3,8 (1992)	7,9 (1996)	5,6 (2000)	5,8 (2004)	8,9 (2008)			6,4

Source: Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006; Mikkel, 2006; Ramonaite, 2006 and author's calculations

Table 5: Types of party systems in the Baltic States according to Siaroff[3]

	1st elections	2nd elections	3rd elections	4th elections	5th elections	6th elections	7th elections
Estonia	extreme multiparty system with one dominant party	extreme multiparty system with one dominant party	extreme multiparty system with a balance among parties	extreme multiparty system with a balance among parties	extreme multiparty system with a balance among parties	moderate multiparty system with a balance among parties	-
Latvia	extreme multiparty system with a balance among parties	same	same	same	same	same	same
Lithuania	moderate multiparty system with one dominant party	moderate multiparty system with one dominant party	extreme multiparty system with a balance among parties	extreme multiparty system with a balance among parties	extreme multiparty system with one dominant party	-	-

Source: Siaroff 2000, author's calculations following the instructions outlined by Siaroff

Estonia and also in Slovenia we can see quite viable and stable party systems emerging, supported by small and medium-sized parties, while in Hungary and the Czech Republic (where party systems are also regarded as relatively consolidated) two large parties have acquired a dominant position.

Examining the party system fragmentation, one can limit the analysis only with statistical indices like the ENEP. But for capturing other significant attributes, like the relative size/strength of the parties and the balance between them, it is suggested to employ more elaborated analytical contributions – like the typologies of party systems. It is a highly recommended strategy for CEE countries, whose party systems are unstable and, therefore, the shifts from one party system type to another provide more information about the internal dynamics of the system and its maturing.

3 For classifying party systems, Siaroff takes into account four main parameters: (1) the number of parties with at least 3% of seats – P3%S, (2) two-party seat concentration - 2PSC - the sum of the percentage of seats obtained by two parties winning the most seats in the legislature, (3) the seat ratio between the first and second party – SR1:2, (4) seat ratio between the second and third party – SR2:3.

As it was pointed out earlier, several theories have focused on the classification of party systems. We suggest applying the typology elaborated by Siaroff (2000), because it makes a distinction between several multiparty system sub-types and, therefore, fits more into the context of CEE and the Baltic States.

Even according to the typology developed by Siaroff, the Baltic party systems tend to be very fragmented (see Table 5), and they are usually classified as 'extreme multiparty systems'. Nevertheless, the table with the classifications outlined below reveals the fact that party competition in Lithuania has been more concentrated than in other Baltic States, particularly in the 1990s when one of the two dominant parties was able to assume a dominant position. Even recent elections (5th elections) have revitalised the old patterns, albeit the ENEP is not demonstrating the above-mentioned qualitative shift and remains record high. Hence, this illustrates that in CEE countries it is often useful to supplement ENEP with a more indepth analysis of party system types, which reveal more information about the internal dynamics and balances within the party systems, not always captured by mere scores of the ENEP.

Party competition in Estonia and Latvia has been clearly more balanced but highly fragmented as well. However, recent elections in Estonia, where only four parties were elected into parliament, raise some hope that party system's fragmentation will be reduced. Similar tendencies were not manifested in the Latvian case, where party system fragmentation has been the most pronounced.

Parties' penetration into society

The question of how strongly parties are rooted into society is often considered to be essential in party system analysis (Mair, 1998a; Mair, Müller, & Plasser, 2004). Looking back at analytical comparative frameworks developed by Ware (1996) and especially students of party system institutionalisation – both emphasised the importance of the respective dimension.

However, the concept does not lend itself for easy operationalisation. Some authors propose using ideological voting as a major indicator (Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006), while others stress the importance of well-manifested cleavage constellations in society (Kitschelt, 1995; Tóka, 1998; Whitefield, 2002). Voter turnout, electoral volatility and party membership are considered to be very informative indicators as well (Rose & Munro, 2003; van Biezen, 2003, 2005).

Unfortunately, there is no survey date available on ideological voting in the Baltic States. Party membership and cleavage constellations will be examined in the subsequent sections of the paper. Voter turnout is affected by several other factors and it is a concept too strongly imbedded in the realm of voting behaviour – thus, it would be too problematic to take it as a sole measure of parties' penetration into society (see: Franklin, 2004). Hence, we will employ another measure – trust in parties, applied in several studies on parties and party systems in post-communist countries, and it indicates quite well how legitimate political parties as actors in the society really are (Lewis, 2000, 2008; Rose, 1995; Wyman, White, Miller, & Heywood, 1995).

Table 6: Trust in parties (ENEP)

	Average 2004 - 2010
Estonia	**20%**
Latvia	**6%**
Lithuania	**9%**
The EU	**18%**

Source: Eurobarometer, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/

According to Table 6, confidence in political parties is the highest in Estonia and the lowest in Latvia. The watershed between Estonia and the two other Baltic countries is noteworthy indeed, and although trust in parties is not a sole indicator for analysing parties' penetration into society, the results presented above provide perhaps some explanation as to why party systems in Latvia and Lithuania are less consolidated.

Ideological party families and their historical roots

Now we move on with qualitative dimensions, which are equally significant in party systems comparative analysis.

Beyme (1985) distinguished between nine families of party ideologies in Europe: (1) Liberal and Radical, (2) Conservative, (3) Socialist and Social Democratic, (4) Christian Democratic, (5) Communist, (6) Agrarian, (7) Regional and ethnic, (8) Right-wing extremists, (9) Ecological movement (Greens).

It is a somewhat tricky task to link the major parties in the Baltic States to the Western European party families, because like everywhere in CEE, parties' ideological profiles are often confusing (Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Mansfeldová, 2006).

However, concerning the core parties in the Baltic States, we can argue that the most overpopulated of the party families (at least in the right wing) are conservatives and liberals. In Lithuania, Homeland Union declares itself to be a conservative party, while several new populist parties (e.g. Order and Justice) are also regarded to be rather as conservative. Among the right-wing parties of Estonia, the liberal Reform Party and national-conservative Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (IRL) have acquired a leading position in the party system. Even in Latvia several new parties (Peoples Party, New Era Party, etc.) have adopted rather a conservative ideology.

The major difference between Latvia and Estonia, on the one hand, and Lithuania on the other is that in Lithuania the conservative-liberal right wing has been balanced by strong social democrats (Social Democratic Party of Lithuania), while in Estonia and Latvia social democratic parties are fairly weak and, consequently, the whole party system is rather rightist-inclined (Mikkel, 2006; Pabriks & Stokenberga, 2006; Ramonaite, 2006). In Latvia, Russian minority parties have occupied the niche otherwise reserved for social democrats, while the Estonian Social Democratic Party usually obtains only 10% - 15% of votes. The major left-wing party in Estonia, the Centre Party, identifies itself as a social-liberal party and, in fact, it is very difficult to classify it according to Beyme's typology.

The second major difference between the Baltic countries concerns ethnic parties. Although the Russian minority is quite numerous both in Latvia and Estonia (Pettai, 2006), ethnic parties have been successful only in Latvia, where they regularly take 20-25% of votes at elections (Pabriks & Stokenberga, 2006). However in Estonia, Russian parties gained a tiny representation in the parliament at the end of the 1990s (6% of seats), but have been insignificant thereafter (Mikkel, 2006). In Lithuania, where a Polish minority is even more active than the local Russians, Polish Electoral Action has managed to get 1% of seats in the legislature on several occasions (Ramonaite, 2006).

Agrarian parties were doing quite well in the 1990s in all three Baltic countries, but in the recent decade they haven't enjoyed noteworthy popularity (Krupavičius, 2005b). Only Greens and Farmers in Latvia have retained a significant position in Latvian party politics, although their ideological profile is confusing and, in fact, they are not considered to be a classical agrarian party (they are rather seen as a 'pocket party' of an influential oligarch – Aivars Lembergs).

Green parties haven't taken a substantial foothold in the Baltic States. Only the Estonian Green Party was elected into parliament for a brief period (2007 – 2011).

Hence, we can draw the conclusion that major distinctions between the Baltic States have been manifested through the positions attained by social democratic parties and ethnic parties: social democrats are quite weak in Latvia and Estonia and, thus, the respective countries' party systems are

dominated by right-wing parties, while in Lithuania the party politics is ideologically more balanced; ethnic parties play an important role in Latvia, while in Estonia and Lithuania they have acquired an insignificant position (see also: Table 7).

The historical roots of the parties in CEE, associated with the process of democratic transition in the late 1980s and early 1990s, have shaped the parties' identities even to a larger extent than their ideological self-identification in the Western European sense. It has been manifested especially in the cases of communist-successor parties but also for other types of parties in the post-communist world (Bozóki & Ishiyama, 2002; Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Hough, Paterson, & Sloam, 2006). Thus, we propose that more indepth small N comparative analysis on party systems in CEE is expected to explore not only the ideological profiles of the parties and their connections with Western European party families, but also their historical origins as a region-specific additional variable.

According to Kostelecky (2002), five types of parties could be grouped by their historical roots in CEE: (1) communist successor parties, (2) former satellite parties (existed legally during the communist period, though they were absolutely marginal), (3) historical pre-communist parties (banned by communists, but re-established after the fall of the regime), (4) parties that have their roots in dissident movements, (5) new parties (completely new parties).

Estonia and Latvia are very exceptional in CEE, because they are the only countries where communist-successor parties didn't survive or have played a marginal role in politics. The Estonian Socialist Labour Party (later called the Leftist Party) managed to get representation in the parliament in 1999 with only two percent of seats. In fact, it has played an utterly marginal role in Estonian party politics thereafter (Toomla, 2005). The Latvian Socialist Party has been more powerful, but not very influential either (Runcis, 2005). Since the 1993 elections, it has been a part of several wider Russian coalitions (For Human Rights in United Latvia, Harmony Centre, etc.), but even in those electoral unions it has not played a very outstanding role. In 1995, the Socialist Party was running for elections on its own and managed to get only 5% of votes. In general, it is problematic to treat both Estonian and Latvian communist-successor parties as classical successor-parties like in other CEE countries, because they are now clearly ethnic parties (Estonian Leftist Party merged with several ethnic Russian parties in 2008, and Latvian Socialist Party has been the party of Russian-speakers since its beginning).

Thus, Lithuania is very exceptional compared to other Baltic countries. Today's Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (also known as the Democratic Labour Party of Lithuania 1990 - 2001), which has its roots in former Communist Party, has been a major party in Lithuania since the early the 1990s. It has won several elections (1992, 2000), has been a governmental party many times and has been the major counterbalance for the right-wing conservative Homeland Union – another dominant party in the Lithuanian party system (Krupavičius, 2005a; Novagrockien 2001; Ramonaite, 2006). Hence, it makes Lithuania more similar to the Visegrad countries (e.g. Hungary, Poland, Slovakia), where communist-successor parties have also played a prominent role.

At the beginning of the 1990s, there were several attempts to restore former inter-war parties in Estonia and Latvia (e.g. Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party, Latvian Farmers Union, Farmers Assembly in Estonia), but all these experiments failed and re-established parties merged with the larger ones (Runcis, 2005; Toomla, 2005). Only in Lithuania historical pre-communist parties got a stronger foothold and were moderately successful in the 1990s and in the early 2000s (e.g. the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party - distinct from communist successor party, the Lithuanian Christian Democrats and the Lithuanian Peasant Party). However, in the recent decade they have merged with bigger parties or attained a marginal status (Krupavičius, 2005a).

Former dissident parties, which have their roots in the independence movements, are dominant forces both in today's Estonian and Lithuanian party politics. Homeland Union, a leading right-wing conservative party in Lithuania, has its origin in former Lithuanian Popular Front (Sajudis), and two core parties in Estonia, the Centre Party and Pro Patria (now merged with a new party - Res Publica) also have historical connections with the former Estonian independence movement (with

Table 7: Historical roots of the major parties and dominant party families in the Baltic States

	Historical roots of the major parties	Dominant ideological party families
Estonia	Dissident parties, new parties	Liberals, conservatives
Latvia	New parties	Conservatives, ethnic parties
Lithuania	Communist-successor parties, dissident parties, new parties	Conservatives, social democrats

Source: author's compilation

the moderate Popular Front and more radical nationalist Estonian Congress correspondingly). Latvian Way, the successor party of the Latvian Popular Front, failed at elections in 2000 and merged with the populist Latvian First Party (Pabriks & Stokenberga, 2006). The only former dissident party that has still survived is For Fatherland and Freedom, which has historical links with the radical wing of the Latvian independence movement (called the Latvian Congress).

As it was noted earlier, there has been a remarkable influx of new parties into the party systems of the Baltic States. Many of them have failed, but some have become core parties. For example, the Reform Party in Estonia (founded in 1994, a governmental party since 1999) and Res Publica (a populist flash party, founded in 2001 and later merged with Pro Patria, now constituting the second right wing party in Estonia – IRL). In Lithuania, several new populist parties were founded for elections during the recent decade, but it is hard to say which of these will survive. Nevertheless, the proportion of genuinely new parties in the contemporary Lithuanian party system is quite remarkable. The Latvian case is even more extreme – a brief look at the Latvian party system reveals the fact that it predominately consists of new parties. As a result, today's Latvian party system bears very little resemblance with the party system that took shape in the 1990s.

Consequently, we can argue that to some extent all three Baltic States are quite similar to each other – in all three countries some genuinely new parties have managed to capitalise their success (see: Table 7). However, there are still remarkable differences: in Lithuania and Estonia former dissident parties still constitute the core of the party system, while in Latvia genuinely new parties have acquired a central position. Probably the most striking difference is the success of a communist-successor party in Lithuania and the failure of this type of party in Latvia and Estonia.

Dominant cleavage constellations

According to a sociological approach to party systems, social cleavages are one of the key forces framing party competition (see: Ware, 1996). Most party system analysis students in Western Europe put a great emphasises on cleavages, their formation and change in European party politics (e.g. Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Broughton & Donovan, 1999; Mair, 1990). Thus, it seems to be justified to incorporate the given dimension into our framework. The major reason is that in CEE we can find more variations between cleavages constellations than in Western Europe, where class-cleavage is a sole prevailing cleavage (see: Deegan-Krause, 2007).

The question on cleavages in CEE has puzzled many scholars (Berglund, Hellén, & Aarebrot, 1998; Evans & Whitefield, 1998; Kitschelt, 1995, 1999; Lawson, et al., 1999; Moreno, 1999; Sitter, 2002; Tóka, 1998; Whitefield, 2002). The broad scholarly consensus is that social cleavages are not rooted in post-communist societies to the same extent as in the West and, therefore, cleavage-based party politics is not as pronounced in CEE. Thus, most of the scholars doubt that the classical Lipset and Rokkan (1967) theory is fully applicable to post-communist countries. There have been several efforts to propose an alternative theory or typology of cleavages in CEE, but probably the most widely acknowledged contribution came from Kitschelt (1999) and colleagues, who suggested that we should call cleavages 'divides', because the fully constituted cleavages in the Western sense were still missing in the region.

Kitschelt identified six major divides for post-communist societies: (1) political regime divide (supporters of regime change vs. retainers of the old communist regime); (2) economic-distributive divide (economic losers of the transition vs. winners of transition and supporters of market reforms); (3) socio-cultural divide (supporters of libertarian ideas in politics, society and economy vs. supporters of authoritarian and protectionist ideas), (5) National-cosmopolitan divide (self-centred nationalism vs. cosmopolitan outlook), (6) ethnic divide.

The authors of the paper recommend updating Kitschelt's typology (mostly on labels) and supplementing it with the classical Lipset-Rokkan theory, still party applicable for CEE. Thus, we ended up with a typology of cleavages as follows: (1) communist-anti-communist cleavage (value-based cleavages manifested through the assessment on communist rule); (2) socio-economic cleavage, (3) urban vs. rural cleavage, (4) Clerical vs. anti-clerical cleavage, (5) centre-periphery cleavage, (6) ethnic cleavage, (7) national vs. cosmopolitan (Westerners) cleavage.

In Estonia, ethnic cleavage mixed with a communist/anti-communist cleavage has been a central divide in the party competition: there is an anti-communist and nationalist camp (IRL, Reform Party), on the one hand, and the fairly Russian-friendly Centre Party, which has also been more neutral towards the communist past, on the other hand. Socio-economic cleavage has played a secondary role or has been merged with the latter-mentioned dominant cleavages (IRL and the Reform Party have been market-liberals, while the Centre Party has a left-wing orientation). In the 1990s, an urban-rural cleavage was also quite pronounced, but during recent years it has lost its ground. Clerical/anti-clerical cleavage has played absolutely a marginal role in Estonia, because Estonian society is regarded to be one of the most secular in Europe (World Value Survey, 2010).

In Latvia, ethnic cleavage is considered to be central according to many authors (Krupavičius, 2005b; Pabriks & Stokenberga, 2006; Pettai, et al., 2011; Runcis, 2005). Although socio-economic cleavage is gaining importance, it hasn't overshadowed the significance of the ethnic divide. Although urban-rural cleavage is more accentuated in Latvia than in Estonia, it is still considered to be a cleavage of secondary importance. Clerical/anti-clerical and centre-periphery cleavages have obtained a less prominent position in Latvian party politics, but they are still reasonably manifested, because the South-Eastern part of Latvia (Latgale) is quite different from rest of the country, both in religious and economic terms (rest of Latvia is Protestant, but Latgale is Catholic and Latgale is economically the poorest region of the country). Curiously, the communist/anti-communist cleavage has never been as essential in Latvia as in Estonia and Lithuania – mostly because it has been an integral part of ethnic cleavage and not as accentuated by itself (Pettai, et al., 2011).

In Lithuania, the communist/anti-communist cleavage was central in the 1990s, mixed with clerical/anti-clerical and socio-economic cleavages (Jurkynas, 2004; Pettai, et al., 2011; Ramonaite, 2006). There was a nationalist, anti-communist, market liberal and Catholic camp on the one side (Homeland Union), and a more cosmopolitan, rather anti-clerical camp on the other side, which was also more favourable towards the communist past (Democratic Labour Party – today's Social Democratic Party). However, the situation changed in the early 2000s when both blocks lost legitimacy and with the emergence of new parties, the socio-economic cleavage was pushed into the centre (Ramonaite, 2006). However, the communist/anti-communist cleavage still retained its relative significance (Pettai, et al., 2011). An urban-rural cleavage has also played a considerable role in Lithuanian politics, manifested mostly through several populist parties that appeal to rural voters.

Hence, the cleavages constellations have been quite idiosyncratic in three counties (see: Table 8): both in Lithuania and Estonia, the communist/anti-communist cleavage has been essential, but in Estonia it has been linked with ethnic cleavage, while in Lithuania it has been somewhat overshadowed by a socio-economic divide. In Latvia, the ethnic cleavage has been so entrenched in party competition that all other cleavages have become less significant. A common feature for all three Baltic States is the fact that the urban-rural cleavage was relatively prominent in the 1990s and in the early 2000s, but is now losing ground with the decline of agrarian parties.

Table 8: Cleavages in the Baltic States

	Major cleavages	Cleavages with secondary importance	Cleavages playing a marginal role
Estonia	Ethnic cleavages linked to communist-anti-communist cleavage	Socio-economic cleavage, Urban-rural cleavage	Clerical/anti-clerical, centre-periphery
Latvia	Ethnic cleavage	Socio-economic cleavage, Urban-rural cleavage, cleavage, Clerical/anti-clerical	Centre-periphery
Lithuania	Socio-economic cleavage, communist/anti-communist cleavage	Urban-rural cleavage, clerical/anti-clerical	Ethnic cleavage, centre periphery

Source: author's compilation

Strength of the party organizations

Party organizations, their strength and independence, occupy a vital position in the theory of party system institutionalisation (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006). Students of party systems in CEE have emphasised the role played by party organizations in the process of party system consolidation (Lewis, 1996; van Biezen, 2003). Because the question on party organizations has attracted quite a lot of attention from the authors studying party systems in new democracies, we decided to include it into our comparative framework.

There are various possibilities of how to assess the qualities of the party organizations. There have even been some efforts to quantify some vital parameters of the party organizations and to measure their strength (Appleton & Ward, 1995; Janda, 1983; Janda & Colman, 1998). Combining the works of Panebianco (1988) and Janda (1983) we can outline six major variables essential for the analysis of party organizations: (1) party size – membership, (2) member activity, (3) organizational complexity, (4) autonomy of the party, (5) power concentration, (6) balance of power within the organization (see also: Enyedi & Linek, 2008).

Unfortunately, there have been very few systematic and focused studies on party organizations in the Baltic States (some exceptions: Ibenskas, 2010; Smith-Sivertsen, 2004). The only data available on all three countries are party membership scores and qualitative expert assessments on the strength, complexity and scope of the party organizations. There is no hard data for us to carry out a more sophisticated comparative analysis or to quantify variables beyond the numbers of party membership.

While membership is the most widely used indicator in the studies on Western European party organizations as well, the strength and scope of the organizations is suggested to include into analysis as a specific CEE variable, because party organizations in post-communist countries are usually less developed and institutionalised, and discrepancies between the countries are often more pronounced than in the West (see: Lewis, 1996).

Party membership in Estonia is undisputedly the highest in the region and even comparable with the European average (Table 9). At the same time, the membership score in Latvia is the lowest in Europe (Biezen, et al., 2009). Party membership in Lithuania has increased in recent years, but the upward trend hasn't been as prominent.

The statistics presented are somewhat compatible with our previous result on trust in parties and allow us to pose a hypothesis that parties are probably more rooted in society in Estonia than is evident in Lithuania and particularly in Latvia.

Table 9: Party membership in the Baltic States

	Total party membership as percentage of electorate	Change since the beginning of the early 2000s[4]
Estonia	4,84%	+1,53%
Latvia	0,74%	n/d
Lithuania	2,66%	+0,61%
Mean of 27 countries in Europe	4,61%	-0,38%

Source: Biezen, et al., 2009

The picture is not very different if we examine party organizations more closely. In Lithuania, there is a pronounced difference between fairly strong and established party organizations of 'two old major' parties, (Homeland Union and Social-Democratic Party) on the one hand, and new parties with growing, but still relatively underdeveloped party organizations on the other hand (Ibenskas, 2010; Ramonaite, 2006).

Discrepancies between the individual parties are also clearly manifested in Estonia, where the Reform Party, IRL and the Centre Party have a quite extensive network of local party branches and centralised organizations, while the Social-Democratic Party and the Greens are much weaker in their organizational scope (although their organizations are internally more democratic and decentralised).

The situation is different in Latvia, where party membership is exceptionally low, parties are very leader-centred and their organizations fragile and temporary (Pabriks & Stokenberga, 2006). It is also worth noting that Latvia is still the only country in CEE that has not yet introduced state funding for political parties (Kopecký, 2008; Roper & Ikstens, 2008; van Biezen, 2004). Until now, many Latvian parties have been dominated by local business oligarchs, who are using them as vehicles for satisfying their own personal ambitions (see e.g.:Ikstens, 2008). However, in recent early elections in 2011, oligarch-led parties failed to gain a remarkable representation in the new legislature – raising hopes that Latvian politics is going to change.

Hence, for concluding the section we can argue that party organizations turned out to be the strongest in Estonia, yet the difference with Lithuania is not remarkable (except in terms of membership). Latvia has undoubtedly the least developed and institutionalised party organizations. However, we have to be cautious in our diagnosis, because besides party membership there is no hard quantitative evidence available.

Discussion and conclusion

For concluding the analysis, we turn back to the proposed framework and again raise the question of its analytical and explanatory value. There are several moments, which should be emphasised on the matter:

First, although the framework is not utterly innovative and original (variables used could also be found in previous studies), it incorporates dimensions usually analysed separately into a more integrated and coherent framework. Thus, it would make a small N comparative analysis on the party systems more systematic, consistent and theoretically grounded.

Second, the framework has been broken up into two types of variables: more general ones, also suitable for comparative party system analysis in Western Europe, and CEE specific variables. Thus, the strength of the framework lies in its applicability for both parts of Europe (but let us recall again that it was primarily designed for the CEE context, though in some cases it would be useful for Western Europe as well).

4 Data about Estonia from 2002, about Lithuania from 2004, about Europe - the average of 20 countries.

Third, the incorporation of CEE specific variables into the framework allows moving beyond the very formal indicators often used in medium or large N comparative studies on party systems, and to see a more nuanced picture. Besides, the current study demonstrated that very general variables often designed predominately for party system analysis in Western Europe are often too broad and deficient to point out more idiosyncratic features that characterise the party systems in CEE and to capture really substantial differences between the countries in the region.

Fourth, the comparative analysis of the Baltic countries proved that the framework turned out to be empirically applicable: it really allowed us to point out several substantial differences between the countries, which party systems are often considered to be really similar to each other.

However, the author is also fully aware of the shortcomings of the framework. The most striking problem is its complexity – there are too many variables and dimensions, which are not always sufficiently interlinked with each other. Thus, the framework is somewhat awkward and lacks parsimony and elegance, which is often expected in theoretical contributions in political science. Nevertheless, we must remind the reader that small N comparative analyses are expected to be first and foremost relatively in-depth and context sensitive. Parsimony isn't a priority for small N comparative studies.

Concluding the empirical findings of the study (see: Appendix 1), we can argue that the most pronounced differences manifested were concerning the stability of the party systems and parties' roots in society: while the Estonian party system appeared to be relatively stable and fairly rooted in the society (at least in CEE terms), Lithuanian and particularly Latvian party systems were characterised by quite remarkable instability and feeble roots in the societies. At the same time, the common feature for all three countries was their distinctive pattern of party competition, in which rather small parties were dominant, their power relatively balanced, and the party systems themselves were relatively fragmented. Only in Lithuania the party competition has been more concentrated for certain time periods. The origin and ideologies of the major parties and the dominant cleavage constellations were quite idiosyncratic for every country analysed.

The results of the comparative analysis raise the question whether we can really talk about a universal 'Baltic party system' or about 'a lot of communalities' between the Baltic countries. It turned out that the Baltic region is much more diverse than it has been often assumed.

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Appendix 1. Party systems in the Baltic States according to the framework proposed in the article – a comparative table

Dimension of the framework	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
Stability of the party system	Relatively stable	Unstable	Rather unstable
Fragmentation of the party system	Highly fragmented	Highly fragmented	Relatively fragmented
Parties' penetration into society	Relatively high	Low	Low
Origin of the major parties and their ideology	Dissident parties and new parties, liberal and conservative	New parties, liberal and conservative	Dissident parties, communist-successor parties, new parties, conservative and social democratic
Dominant cleavages	Communist/anti-communist linked with ethnic cleavage	Ethnic cleavage	Socio-economic cleavage and communist/anti-communist cleavage
Strength of the party organizations	Relatively strong	Weak	Relatively strong

Source: author's compliation
Note: Adjectives like 'relatively strong/stable/high', etc., should be treated with caution – they are relevant in the context of CEE, not from the point of view of Western Europe.