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Patterns of party competition (1990–2009)¹

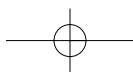
Zsolt Enyedi and Fernando Casal Bértoa

Introduction

Almost two decades have passed since the ‘Third Wave’ of democratisation brought new democracies into being in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). In their constitutional order and economic regime the ten new member states have followed largely Western European patterns. Many feared the development of hybrid, semi-authoritarian regimes but the countries of the region are by now (at least) as liberal in terms of economic policy and the regulation of individual rights as Western Europe. Yet, in terms of the fluidity of party systems the differences between post-communist and Western countries have remained conspicuous (Mair, 1997; Toole, 2000: 442; Millard, 2004; Enyedi, 2006; Lewis, 2006; O’Dwyer, 2006: 43; Webb and White, 2007).

Close cooperation with Western political institutions within the European Union (EU) provides stimuli for both stabilisation and destabilisation (Enyedi, 2007). The mechanisms of transnational cooperation, imitation, diffusion and socialisation may reduce the prevalence of idiosyncratic party ideologies and conflict patterns, and foster the standardisation of political discourse, party identities and coalition strategies. Such processes not only bring West and East closer to each other but are also likely to provide the new member states with more temporal continuity and a more transparent and simple structure of political competition. But the introduction of new arenas of contestation (European parliamentary election, selection of EU commissioners, etc.) has in fact caused considerable turbulence in the respective countries (Enyedi and Lewis, 2006).

As of the autumn of 2009, the ten new EU states had held at least five free and fair parliamentary elections. This time span allows us to synthesise the fundamental characteristics of their political configuration and assess the trends of change. While doing so, we also attempt to advance the understanding of party systems in general and suggest a set of criteria around which



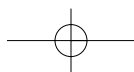
the analysis of party systems should be structured. The chapter proceeds as follows. First, we outline briefly the concepts employed and the way they are operationalised. Then we report data that show both the direction of temporal change and the differences across the ten countries, averaged for the post-communist period. Finally we examine the relationships between the various features of the party systems.

The analysis will show that in terms of the configuration of competition the party systems analysed do not converge to a single pattern, half of them adjusting to a bipolar structure with the other half moving to a multipolar one. The coalition-building strategies of parties show signs of path-dependency: most of the countries can be easily classified as having either open or closed governmental arenas. The groupings based on the closure of the governmental arena and on the stability and relevance of alliance structures largely coincide with the division into polarised and non-polarised countries. The fragmentation of parliaments is also related to the previous dimensions, but so far as fragmentation is concerned there has been a marked decline across the region during the decade since 2000, with the notable exception of Lithuania and Bulgaria.

While in terms of electoral volatility the region is characterised by rather trendless fluctuation, it is still possible to distinguish the notoriously unstable countries from more stable ones. This division, however, diverges somewhat from the grouping of countries based on the previously noted variables. It is therefore possible to differentiate countries where the progress towards institutionalisation is driven primarily by elite behaviour from those where it is, rather, the electorate that shows signs of consolidation. On average, however, the different dimensions of party systems are closely intertwined.

Conceptualising the party system

The lack of consensus concerning the conceptualisation of party systems has been lamented by many students of the field (Sartori, 1976: 297; Daalder, 1983: 27; Ware, 1996; etc.). But there seems to be a convergence around Sartori's (1976: 44) classical definition of party system as 'the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition'. We also take this definition as the starting point of our conceptualisation and operationalisation, but complement it with the observation that 'how parties compete with one another at one level of the polity may well be different from how they compete at another level' (Bardi and Mair, 2008: 161). Therefore we suggest that the profiles of the party systems should be drawn by observing the parties' behaviour in all three major political terrains (Smith, 1990: 195): the electoral, parliamentary and governmental arenas.

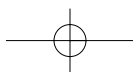


A number of researchers, most importantly Mair (2001), consider the competition for government as the core of the party systems. More precisely, in his view the regularity and predictability of coalition making determines the closure of party systems. Closure is relevant not only because it captures an important aspect of elite strategy but also because it has the potential to influence the behaviour of voters. We take openness *versus* closure as one of the principal dimensions of party systems.

No matter how important it is, the governmental level is only one of the arenas where parties interact. Looking only at government coalitions, for example, we learn little about the opposition parties, although the functioning of the party systems and the stability of the governments are inevitably related to the character of the opposition. Therefore a proper description of party systems should contain variables that describe the mechanics of party politics outside the government as well. Three such variables are based on routinely applied criteria: ideological polarisation, fragmentation and electoral volatility. *Fragmentation* tends to have a significant impact on the stabilisation of party politics, determining the number of possible interactions and reflecting on the balance of power. The amount of electoral *volatility*, although more a feature of the voting population than of the parties, captures that aspect of electoral behaviour which is most relevant for party system stability and consolidation. Finally, the lack of *polarisation* is expected to facilitate coalition making, promote policy continuity and reduce the stakes and decisiveness of elections. Polarisation, as demonstrated recently (Enyedi and Todosijevic, 2008), is also a major factor behind party identification in both Eastern and Western Europe. Polarisation, understood as hostility between parties, may be a more relevant phenomenon in the region than the spread of programmatic positions. But since we have information only on the latter and since the comparative politics literature also focuses on ideological-programmatic differences, polarisation will henceforth be equated with ideological distance between parties.

The four dimensions discussed so far typically appear in the form of continuous variables in party system analyses (see below, the section on operationalisation). They allow the development of standardised instruments of measurement, facilitating the comparison of a large number of countries. By relying exclusively on these aspects, however, one risks downgrading national peculiarities and treating differences in quality as differences of quantity.

In order to get a realistic picture of the structure of party politics in a particular country, one should also describe the principal electoral alternatives and the most important blocs of the party systems: their ideological character, the leading (or core) party (if there is one), their stability and weight (relevance) within the political system. A cluster of parties is regarded as

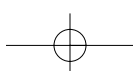
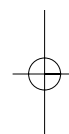
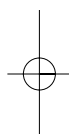


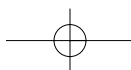
forming a bloc, or a principal alternative, if parties within the cluster have cooperative internal relations, claim some common ideological identity and aim to determine who is prime minister. The latter clause means that the blocs analysed should also be considered electoral alternatives. While party system change can be conceptualised in various ways, for the actors involved the change in principal alternatives, in their ideological character and in the leading party is perhaps the most visible and most consequential development. In comparative work the configuration of these factors is often neglected, partly because of their qualitative character and partly because of the concomitant danger of subjective judgement on the part of the analysts. When a party or a group of parties is distinct and strong enough to count as an alternative is, for example, a difficult question to tackle. We think, on the other hand, that shying away from qualitative assessment is no less problematic than just coming up with tentative decisions. Therefore, we suggest the *relevance of party-blocs* and *bloc-pattern stability* as the fifth and sixth dimensions of the party system.

Dimensions of the party system

To measure fragmentation we use a commonly employed indicator, Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) 'effective number of parties' (ENP), applied to parliaments ($ENP = 1/\sum s_i^2$, where s_i is the proportion of seats of the i^{th} party.). The measurement of polarisation is inevitably more controversial, since this field lacks a formula that would be as universally accepted as ENP. In this chapter we use the standard deviation of the parties' left-right position. For the party position we rely on multiple (i.e., four) data sources, in order to arrive at an unbiased assessment. The data come from two expert surveys (Hooghe *et al.*, 2008 and Benoit and Laver, 2006) and from the EES 2004 survey. The European Election Study (EES) allows for the calculation of both the party electorates' mean self-placement and the respondents' assessment of party position (unfortunately Lithuania, Bulgaria and Romania are not covered by EES). The overall ranking of the countries on polarisation will be determined by taking into account all information that is available. For electoral volatility we use a widely established, though not uncontroversial formula, the Pedersen index of total electoral volatility ($TEV = \sum |v_{i,t} - 1 - v_{i,t}|/2$, where, $v_{i,t}$ is the vote share for a party i at a given election t , Pedersen, 1979). This measure reflects both the amount of vote switching and stability in the supply of parties, but in our model it represents primarily the electoral aspect of party system consolidation.

The identification of blocs inevitably carries with it some degree of uncertainty. Our classifications have been informed by analysis of ideological similarities, membership of international party federations, public gestures – friendly



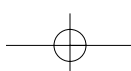
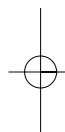
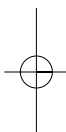


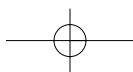
and hostile – of politicians, expert opinion of observers, and both pre-electoral² and post-electoral coalitions. We need to go beyond actual coalitions because they are often due to idiosyncratic short-term considerations. For example, parties may stay out of a government not because of policy differences or hostile relationships with government parties but just, for example, to avoid the negative incumbency effect.

The major blocs form the principal guidelines on the mental map of the voters. This means that, following a Sartorian logic, electoral support is an important criterion, but not the only one. An extremist party, for example, that receives 10 per cent is more likely to have a prominent role in shaping the political discourse and dynamics than a 20 per cent-strong niche party that represents an ethnic minority or professional group. The latter may be a more stable component of the party system, but it is unlikely to represent one of the fundamental directions the country can take and therefore should not be counted as a principal alternative.

We describe the party blocs using labels that go beyond the restricted terminology of left and right but still travel across a range of parties: nationalism, populism, conservatism, liberalism, socialism and communism. Blocs that have their leaders as the fundamental appeal will be marked as ‘charismatic’. In some instances this feature only complements the established ideological profile, but in others it forms the very essence of the party’s identity. Countries in which the coalitional alternatives can be predicted from historical and ideological patterns rank high on the bloc relevance dimension. Position on the bloc stability dimension is defined by the frequency of cases when alliance structures change, whether in opposition or government.

The operationalisation of closure is the most complicated. Mair (1996, 2007) identifies three components. *Alternation in government* can take the forms of wholesale alternation, partial change and non-alternation. In the first case, the incumbent government leaves office in its entirety and is replaced by a wholly different party or group of parties. In the second case the new cabinet contains both incumbents and new parties. The third option is marked by a complete absence of alternation, as the same party or parties remain in exclusive control of government over an extended period of time. The second component is *innovation* or *familiarity of the governing formula*: whether there are stable groups of parties that tend to govern together (familiarity) or whether there is a tendency towards previously unseen forms of party combination (innovation). The third and final component, *access to government*, simply indicates whether all parties have a chance to join the executive or whether some parties are permanently excluded from participation in office. Party systems are considered to be closed if (1) alternations of governments are either total or none (2) governing alternatives are stable over





a long period of time, and (3) some parties ('outsiders') are permanently excluded from participation in national government. They are open when there are (1) partial alternations of government (2) no stable combinations of governing alternatives and (3) access to government has been granted to all relevant parties.

In the numeric representation of the above characteristics 0 stands for openness, 1 for closure. If, in case of a change of government, the composition of the cabinet did not change at all or changed in its entirety (meaning that all parties have been replaced), then that change receives a value of 1 on *alternation*. If no new party joined the government and the party composition of the government was not altered either, then our score will have a 1 on *access* and *formula* as well. Being open on one account (e.g. partial alternation) but closed on the other two variables (no new party and no unfamiliar coalition) results in 66.6 per cent on the overall indicator of closure. The values of individual government changes are added up and divided by the number of government changes experienced in the period under study.

We need counting rules to establish the number of governments and their partisan composition in order to determine which parties actually have governing status, taking into consideration only parties that are directly represented in the executive by their members and/or nominees.³ As for distinguishing between governments, in accordance with the literature on party government in Western democracies, *changes of government* are recorded when (1) there is a change in the partisan composition of the government coalition (i.e. when the representatives of one or more parties leave the coalition government or join it); (2) the prime minister leaves office; and (3) parliamentary elections are held, even in cases when there is no change in the partisan composition of the cabinet (Müller and Strøm, 2000: 12). Caretaker ('technocratic') governments, if they are in office for a short time to bridge the period until the next election, are excluded from the analysis. Since non-partisan government represents a radical break with the usual patterns of government formation, they receive by default a 0 on all three variables. Exceptions are made in cases when support for specific parties is clearly discernable behind a formally non-partisan process.

Innovative governments are considered to be all those that have never previously existed in that form during the post-authoritarian period. Thus, a party coming to office for the first time in the form of a single-party government is innovative, even if it has previously governed as part of a coalition (Mair, 2007: 140). On the other hand, and building on Sikk (2005: 399), *genuinely new governing parties* are considered to be all those which, having a novel name and structure, are not successors to any previous government party. In order to count a party as 'new', we apply the following rules (this is also relevant for categorising the 'governing formula'):

1. If two parties merge into one, the new party is counted as old.
2. If one party splits and one of the splinter parties can be clearly considered as a successor, then we consider that party as an old party. Otherwise all splinter groups are counted as new formations.

We also needed to determine when the first democratic government was invested. This is a difficult issue. As Müller-Rommel *et al.* (2004: 870) have put it:

In some countries, the first democratic government was formed after the first free election but before the country became independent [. . . In others . . .] an interim ‘Constituent Assembly’ together with an interim government was mainly responsible for drafting a new constitution. Once the constitution was approved by parliament (or by a referendum), new elections took place, and the interim democratic government resigned, being replaced by a fully responsible party government

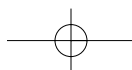
In order to allow for a systematic comparison, we define *founding government* as the one created after ‘founding elections’ are held. Reich (2001: 1239–40) defines founding elections as the ‘first competitive, multiparty elections occurring during a transition to democracy after (a) at least ten years of authoritarian rule and (b) following reforms that allow for the formation of multiple political parties independent of the state and free from state repression’. In this sense, founding governments are defined as those created by the first free election taking place in a country after regime collapse, independence, or after a revised constitution is approved by an interim constituent assembly (Table 6.1).⁴

Party system profiles: patterns and trends

The configuration of party systems: blocs, core parties and ideological divides

None of the countries can be characterised by one single pattern for its entire post-communist period, but some did spend most of the two decades from 1990 under one particular structure of alternatives. The condensed review below captures the most relevant changes in the configuration of the principal alternatives in the ten countries analysed.

The Slovenian party system started off fragmented, with a rapidly emerging pivotal party. The liberals (LDS), although left of centre in their ideological orientation, occupied a position that was similar to the status of Christian Democrats in a number of West European countries. The left- and right-wing parties played a secondary role in government coalitions dominated by the liberal centre. The relational and ideological structuration of the party system remained low, but this loose form of structure proved to be stable, lasting

**Table 6.1** Regime transition in new Central and East European democracies

Country	Independence date	Breakaway elections	Founding elections	Founding government
Bulgaria	–	10 June 1990 ^b	13 October 1991	8 November 1991
Czech Republic	1 January 1993	8–9 June 1990 ^a	5–6 June 1992	1 January 1993
Estonia	6 September 1991	–	20 September 1992	21 December 1992
Hungary	–	–	3 May 1990	23 May 1990
Latvia	6 September 1991	–	5–6 June 1993	4 August 1993
Lithuania	6 September 1991	–	25 October 1992	2 December 1992
Poland	–	4 June 1989 ^c	27 October 1991	23 December 1991
Romania	–	20 May 1990 ^b	27 September 1992	13 November 1992
Slovakia	1 January 1993	8–9 June 1990 ^a	5–6 June 1992	12 January 1993
Slovenia	25 June 1991	–	6 December 1992	12 January 1993

Notes: ^a Czechoslovak Federal Assembly.

^b Elections to the Constituent Assembly.

^c Only one-third of the seats were freely contested.

Source: Adapted from Müller-Rommel *et al.* (2004: 871).

until the collapse of the Liberal Democrats in 2004. The second phase is characterised by a more bipolar logic (pitting conservatives against social democrats, SDS and SD), although the style of competition remained pragmatic.

The tripolar pattern had a much shorter life span in Hungary, and barely lasted until 1994. Even during this period, when the socialists (MSZP), conservatives (led by MDF) and the liberals (led by SZDSZ) offered distinct ideological alternatives, the discourse and the political preferences tended to be structured in a bipolar way: during the first months evolving around the communist vs anti-communist divide, after that around the cultural differences splitting conservatives and (social) liberals. From 1994 until the end of the period analysed a two-bloc pattern prevailed: the left (led by MSZP) and the right (led by Fidesz) commanded similar levels of support, and they jointly received close to 90 per cent of the vote. The particularly aggressive, uncompromising attitude of the blocs towards each other engendered a centrifugal pattern of competition.

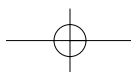
In the Czech Republic the first period was characterised by the opposition between the communists and the gradually fragmenting anti-communist bloc. In this regard the pattern was fairly similar to that in many of the neighbouring countries (with the exception that instead of a large, social-democratising ex-communist party and a few hardliners, in the Czech Republic there was a medium-sized hardliner party). As the social democrats (CSSD) grew in size the political arena became dominated by the rivalry of centre-left and centre-right forces. The small parties in the middle played an important role

in government building, but in terms both of ideology and of electoral strength the communists (KSCM) were the third relevant force. Given, however, their irrelevance from the point of view of government building, the Czech party system is best described as a two-and-a-half party system, with the social democrats and the conservative ODS as the principal alternatives. The bipolar logic has become particularly crystallised during the last years of our period.

The Estonian party system can be less easily captured with ideological labels, since Estonian politics is less ideological in general. The original competition unfolded between moderate and technocratic reformers, on the one hand, and nationalist (but also pro-West) anti-communists, on the other. The second pattern, the one that is still in place, is a multipolar one, with a particular relevance of three forces: conservatives (led by Isamaa), liberal technocrats (led by Reform) advocating right-wing economic policies, and the Centre Party (Keskerakond). The last alternative is ideologically the most ambiguous component of the system, but perhaps it is best described as a leftist and moderately populist force which happens to occupy the pro-Russian minority corner of the party system, and which bases its electoral appeal, to a large extent, on its leader. The Estonian parties have realigned with considerable frequency in the past, although conservatives and liberals often consider each other as natural allies.

The trajectory of the Romanian party system is divided into three phases. The first configuration was bipolar, pitting the post-communist socialists against a cluster of parties that was dominated by conservatives and liberals. Between the two blocs operated the small but significant social-liberal Democrats and on the right flank of the system the nationalists, who cooperated during the 1990s with the socialists but maintained a distinct ideological appeal. In the second formula the nationalists lost, while the Democrats gained significance. But the two major alternatives remained the same (except that the right-wing alternative became dominated by the liberals, PNL, after the collapse of the conservatives, PNTCD). The third formula reflects the further ascendance and transformation of Democrats who, under a charismatic leadership, became a major pole of party competition. They have a vague ideological profile, combining populist and centre-right elements. The three parties (PDS, PNL and PDL, together with a few minor satellites) form an almost perfect triangle, leaving open the possibility of cooperation on all fronts.

The first Slovak party system was anchored by the presence of a sizable nationalist force (HZDS) that was opposed by the colourful bloc of liberals, conservatives and social democrats. By the dawn of the new millennium the pivotal role of nationalists vanished, but the bipolar logic survived and continues to structure the second configuration as well. In both configurations

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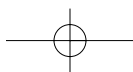
liberal conservatives (recently led by SDKÚ) faced a populist opponent led by a charismatic leader. Perhaps the only significant difference between the two patterns was that in the second socio-economic left-right issues divided the two blocs more evidently and Smer, the leader of the populist-bloc, is more pragmatic (and therefore more open to alternative coalitions) than HZDS used to be.

Latvia is characterised by high degree of fragmentation in terms of both individual parties and clusters of parties. During the 1990s a partly ethnic (Russian) and partly ideologically (leftist) defined bloc (led by Harmony) faced two right-wing clusters, a more liberal one (led by LC) and a more nationalist/conservative one (led by LNNK). As a result of the decline of LC the system became less centre based, the right-wing parties regrouped around the conservative TP and the style of competition became more confrontational. The second pattern resembles the first, to the extent that it maintains high fragmentation, high volatility and the exclusion of leftist parties from government.

Lithuania started with a clear two-bloc competition, dominated by the attitude towards the communist heritage, pitting LDDP against Homeland Union. This simple logic was disturbed at the end of the century by the emergence of liberals, represented by NS. The third phase continued to be based on a tripolar logic, but at this time populists, represented by a number of consecutive charismatic politicians, form the non-socialist and non-conservative pole.

In its first phase the Polish system was tripolar, but the position of liberals (led by UD, later UW), situated between socialists (led by SLD) and conservatives (whose most important party at that time was ZChN), weakened rapidly. Some of them left politics, others joined the conservatives, transforming the configuration of competition into a two-bloc pattern. The last phase is somewhat more difficult to summarise and is definitely more unusual. Socialist groups survive, but are relegated to a marginal position. Conservatives (PiS) and liberals (PO) form the only viable electoral alternatives, and while ideologically these two groups used to be relatively close, by now the difference between them is clear both in economy (conservatives being more statist), in culture (liberals being more permissive) and anti-communism (conservatives being more intransigent).

Finally, the Bulgarian party system, as with many other countries in our sample, was also originally structured by the anti-communist cleavage. The two-bloc structure (socialists, led by BSP, and conservatives, led by SDS) lasted almost a decade, producing a centrifugal and bipolar structure. This transparent logic was complicated by the emergence of a centrist, liberal force (NDSV) which, however, based its appeal more on its leader than on its ideology and which turned out to be more open to cooperation with the



socialists than with the conservatives. While the socialists continue to form a principal electoral alternative in the third phase, the liberal bloc contracted, and under the leadership of GERB a new, conservative-populist bloc was formed. Radical right-wing nationalists have been present in both of the last two patterns, but only on the margins of the system.

The patterns in Table 6.2 capture with a great degree of simplification the principal developments in the configuration of the ten party systems analysed. The ideological character of the blocs is signalled by abbreviations explained in the note below the table. Wherever possible, we describe blocs as being either socialist, conservative or liberal (in some cases conservative liberal or liberal conservative). Adjectives like nationalist or populist typically appear as secondary features (in brackets), fine-tuning the ideological profile of the parties, together with references to the parties' charismatic nature, communist origin or economic and cultural policies. But in some instances these adjectives refer to the very essence of the parties' ideological appeal, and therefore they are used as the principal labels describing the party's profile.

Table 6.2 shows that the party systems of the region do not converge to a single pattern of competition. Some countries have always had a fundamentally bipolar structure (Czech Republic, Slovakia), or drifted in that direction after a tripolar beginning (Hungary, Poland, Slovenia), while in other countries the configuration became multipolar in the second stage (Romania, Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria) or has always been fragmented (Latvia). The discussion above also suggests that the countries analysed do not completely lack structure and stability. It has been possible, after all, to summarise almost two decades of – turbulent – party politics by distinguishing only two or three patterns. Note, however, that these patterns do not have the same relevance for each country. In those countries where the alliance structures change often and where coalitions are not based on ideological traditions, there is less mileage to be gained from noting similarities and friendships among parties. Table 6.3 contains an assessment concerning the overall stability and relevance of blocs. Stability and relevance are closely related, with some notable exceptions. In the Czech Republic the ideological configuration is stable, but parties do cross over bloc borders from time to time in order to provide the country with a governing majority. In Hungary intra-bloc loyalty is a more serious factor, but the alliance structures went through a fundamental reconfiguration in 1994. At the other end of the scale, in Latvia only the ethnic divide represents a solid line of demarcation, while in Estonia virtually no coalition can be excluded. But in Estonia there is more continuity in the (weak) underlying structure than in Latvia, to a large extent because new parties appear more frequently in the latter country.

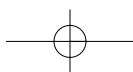
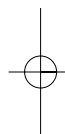
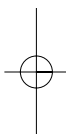


Table 6.2 Patterns of party relations: number, identity and leaders of the major party blocs

Country	Period	No.	Ideological character of principal alternatives	Bloc leaders	Cause of the change in bloc pattern
Bulgaria 1	1990–2001	2	Soc Conslib	BSP SDS	The king's movement creates a strong liberal centre, the system moves towards multipolarity.
Bulgaria 2	2001–7	3.5	Soc (CP) Lib (CH) Conslib	BSP NDSV SDS	Collapse of NDSV and SDS, emergence of GERB.
Bulgaria 3	2007–	2.5	(Nationalists) Soc (CP) Cons (CH, P)	(Ataka) BSP GERB	
Czech Republic 1	1992–95	2	(Nationalists) Com	KSCM	Social Democrats become the left-wing alternative, the system becomes bipolar.
Czech Republic 2	1995–	2.5	Libcons Soc Libcons (Com)	ODS CSSD ODS (KSCM)	
Estonia 1	1992–99	2	Soft reformers Libcons (N, RE)	Koond Isamaa	Kesk and Reform emerge as principal alternatives.
Estonia 2	1999–	3	Pro-minority populists (CH) Lib (RE)	Kesk Reform	
Hungary 1	1990–94	3	Cons (N, RE) Soc (CP) Lib Cons (N)	Isamaa MSZP SZDSZ MDF	Fidesz joins the right, SZDSZ joins the Socialist government, the system becomes bipolar.

Table 6.2 Continued

Country	Period	No.	Ideological character of principal alternatives	Bloc leaders	Cause of the change in bloc pattern
Hungary 2	1995–	2	Soc (RE, LC, CP) Cons (N, LE)	MSZP Fidesz	
Latvia 1	1993–2002	3	Soc/Russian Lib	Harmony LC	LC declines, TP becomes the main party of the right-wing cluster.
Latvia 2	2002–	3	Cons(N) Soc/Russian	LNNK Harmony	
Lithuania 1	1990–2000	2	Lib and cons and green Soc (CP)	TP LDDP	Liberals emerge as a principal alternative.
Lithuania 2	2000–4	3	Soc (CP) Lib (CH)	LSDP NS	Populists emerge as a powerful force.
Lithuania 3	2004–	3	Cons Soc (CP) Populists (CH)	Homeland (TS/LK) LSDP No stable leader	
Poland 1	1991–2001	3	Soc (CP) Lib Cons (N)	Homeland (TS/LK) SLD UD	Left liberals decline, liberal conservatives emerge.
Poland 2	2001–5	2	Soc (CP) Libcons (RC)	ZCHN SLD	Socialists become a minor party, the moderate and populist wings of the right separate.
Poland 3	2005–	2	Libcons Cons (RC)	PO PO PiS	

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Romania 1	1992–2003	2, 5	Soc (CP, N) Conslib (Nat, CH)	PDSR/PSD PNTCD/PNL (PRM)	Democrats turn populist and enter alliance with Liberals, Nationalists decline.
Romania 2	2003–7	2, 5	Soc (CP) Lib Populists (CH, RE)	PSD PNL (PD)	Liberals and Democrats split. Democrats eliminate statutory clause of non-coalition with the PSD.
Romania 3	2007–	3	Soc (CP) Populists (CH) Lib	PSD PDL PNL	
Slovakia 1	1992–2002	2	Nationalists (P, CP) Libcons and Soc	HZDS KDH	The populist left reorganizes under the leadership of Smer.
Slovakia 2	2002–	2	Soc and Nat (P, CP) Libcons (RE)	Smer SDKÚ	
Slovenia 1	1990–2004	3	Soc (CP) Lib (CP) Cons	ZSLD LDS SLS	Centre declines, SDS becomes the main right-wing party.
Slovenia 2	2005–	2	Soc Cons	SD (ZSLD) SDS	

Notes: Column 3 contains number of principal alternatives.

Acronyms: soc (socialists), con (conservatives), lib (liberals), N (nationalist), P (populist), RE (right-wing economic), LE (left-wing economic), RC (right-wing cultural), (LC) (left-wing cultural), CH (charismatic), CP (communist past).

Table 6.3 Relevance and stability of blocs

<i>Country</i>	<i>Relevance of blocs</i>	<i>Bloc pattern stability</i>
Slovenia	Very low	High
Hungary	Very high	Very high
Czech Republic	High	Very high
Estonia	Very low	Low
Romania	Low	Low
Slovakia	High	Low
Latvia	Very low	Very low
Lithuania	High	High
Poland	High	Low
Bulgaria	Low	Low

Governmental arena: closure patterns

Figure 6.1 shows how the character of competition for government changed in the new EU member states during the last two decades. The data indicate that there is some tendency towards convergence across the ten countries, and also that countries tend to cluster into distinct groups. The difference between Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia and Latvia, on the one hand, and Hungary, the Czech Republic and, to a lesser extent, Romania and Lithuania, on the other, is constant and clear: after the third election the lines of 'very high/high' and 'very low' countries do not cross. The 'very high/high' countries never fall below 50 per cent of closure, while the 'very low' countries almost never reach above 35 per cent (Slovakia being the only exception in 1994 and 1998). At the same time the 'very low' countries gradually increase their level of closure, and therefore the distance between the different groups has decreased. The Czech Republic, Lithuania and Estonia started out with a relatively high level of predictability, but the first two countries deviated from this pattern already during the early 1990s, while Estonia lost its 'high' status gradually, and by now all three belong to the group of countries with medium closure. Bulgaria is the only country whose level of closure has not fluctuated (33.3 per cent).

Table 6.4 contains the averaged summary index of closure for the ten countries. In terms of its mean, Hungary stands out as the country with the most closed governmental arena. Then, after a large gap, there is a group of countries with mid levels of closure: the Czech Republic, Romania and Lithuania. This group is followed by Poland and Estonia. Finally, and after a large gap, at the open end of the scale we find Slovakia, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Latvia.

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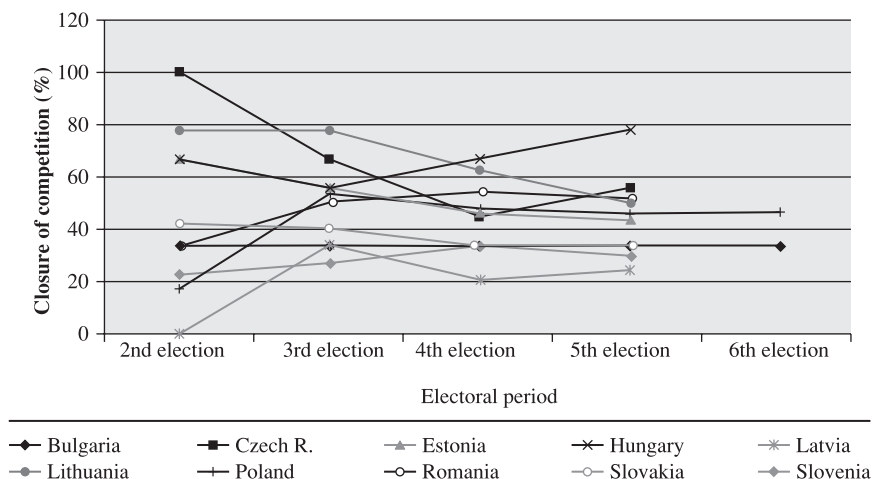


Figure 6.1 Closure of competition for government, 1990–2009

Table 6.4 Closure averages by government

Country	Closure (%)
Hungary	75.0
Czech Republic	55.6
Romania	51.5
Lithuania	50.0
Poland	46.7
Estonia	42.4
Slovakia	33.3
Bulgaria	33.3
Slovenia	29.6
Latvia	27.1

Source: All data on government formation and stability are based on Müller-Rommel *et al.* (2004), but cross-checked with information provided by the *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbooks*, and by country experts and sources on the World Wide Web.

It follows from these results that, at the level of government, fluidity prevails over predictability. According to data analysed by Casal Bértoa and Mair (2009), the party systems of Western and Southern Europe showed considerably more closure in the decades following democratisation. The other conclusion must be that there is a large variance within the region. The countries at the extremes of the scale are the ones that have been reported by other scholars as being over- and under-achievers in terms of institutionalisation.

But the relatively high ranking of both Lithuania and Romania comes as a surprise. The conflict between the communist successor parties and the opposition formed against them may be behind the relatively high degree of closure in these cases.

Parliamentary arena: degree of fragmentation

Figure 6.2 shows a general decline in the number of parliamentary parties across the region, but Lithuania and Bulgaria go against the trend, while in Slovakia and Latvia no clear trend is discernable. Next to decreasing fragmentation, the region is also characterised by increasing homogeneity in the number of parties, because extreme results (cf. first Polish or second Latvian election) do not occur any more.

Table 6.5 confirms, however, that the last two decades of post-communist politics have been characterised by a high level of multipartism. The majority of post-communist countries have an average ENP above 4, which is the cut-off point used in a number of classifications of party systems (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995: 31–2; Siaroff, 2000: 72). Countries that are subject to the most intense competition in terms of the average number of political actors are Slovenia and Latvia, followed by Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania and Estonia. At the opposite end Hungary and Bulgaria exhibit the lowest average ENP, and Romania and the Czech Republic follow this group relatively closely. Most likely the confrontational and bipolar competition between BSP and SDS and between MSZP and Fidesz has limited the number of entrants into the political contest in these two countries.

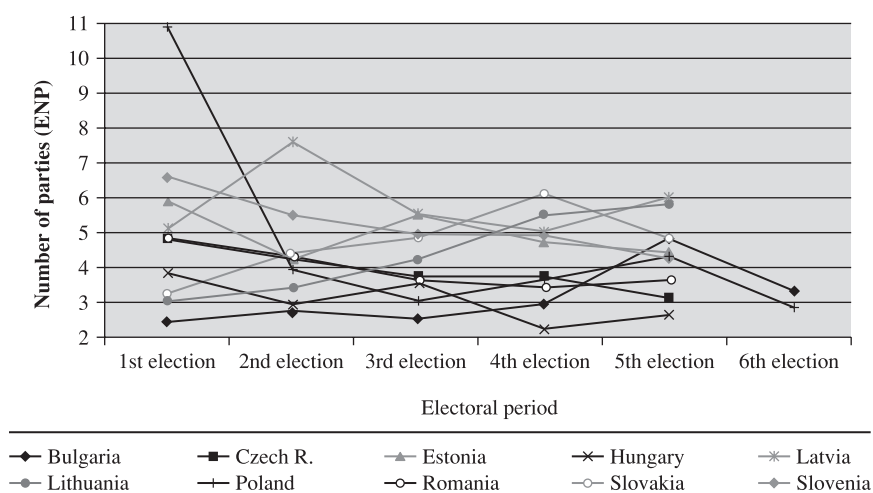
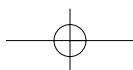


Figure 6.2 Effective number of parties in the parliaments, 1990–2009

**Table 6.5** Effective number of parties (ENP): parliamentary averages

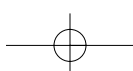
<i>Country</i>	<i>ENP</i>
Hungary	3.0
Bulgaria	3.1
Czech Republic	3.9
Romania	3.9
Lithuania	4.4
Slovakia	4.7
Poland	4.8
Estonia	4.9
Slovenia	5.2
Latvia	5.8

Sources: Gallagher (2009). Data from 2006 to 2009 are from our own calculations.

Electoral arena: levels of volatility

Figure 6.3 indicates that in terms of volatility there is larger variance between elections than between countries. In Bulgaria, for example, volatility increased from 19.1 to 44.0 per cent between 1993 and 2005, while in Hungary it decreased from 32 to 8 per cent between 1998 and 2006. This means that volatility is less systemic than the dimensions examined previously: it is more exposed to factors outside of the political institutional framework (economic crises, scandals etc.). Only the Czech Republic, and to a lesser extent Lithuania, appear to have rather constant levels of volatility. Slovakia, Bulgaria and Slovenia have experienced their most volatile elections during the last years, while Hungary and, less unambiguously, Estonia, Latvia, Romania and Poland saw a trend towards greater electoral stability.

Table 6.6 contains the averaged volatility figures for the ten countries. These figures must be treated with caution, however, because, as we have seen above, the volatility figures for most countries change rather erratically from election to election. The region as a whole exhibits more than twice as much volatility as the West does (28.2 vs 13 per cent), and more than three times more than the West did between 1945 and 1965 at 10 per cent (Bartolini and Mair, 1990). The figure exceeds the Southern European average of 13.4 per cent (Gunther and Montero, 2001: 90) and even the Latin American figures – for the 1970 to 1993 period Mainwaring and Scully (1995: 8) reported 24.3 per cent. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania are the most stable countries in the region as far as vote shifts are concerned, followed by Estonia, Slovakia and Slovenia. Bulgaria and Poland are markedly more volatile, while the extreme positions (by any standards) are occupied by Latvia and Lithuania.



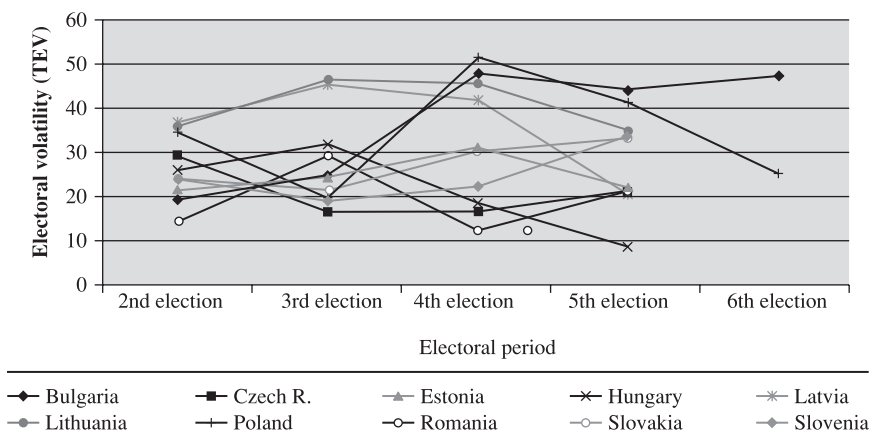


Figure 6.3 Electoral volatility, 1990–2009

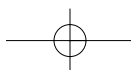
Table 6.6 Total electoral volatility: country averages

Country	TEV (%)
Romania	19.1
Czech Republic	20.8
Hungary	21.0
Estonia	24.6
Slovenia	24.7
Slovakia	27.0
Poland	34.3
Bulgaria	34.8
Latvia	36.0
Lithuania	40.7

Sources: Sitter (2005), Tóka and Henjak (2007). Data from 2006 are from our own calculations.

Polarisation

So far as left–right polarisation is concerned, we must refrain from commenting on temporal trends, as we have comparable information only on the 2002–2004 period. This period is, however, highly relevant, since this is the time when the majority of the countries examined joined the EU. The diverse indicators included in Table 6.7 do not give identical rankings, but by comparing and averaging the indicators we find the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia among the most polarised party systems, followed by Lithuania and Poland. Then, after a gap, come Estonia, Bulgaria and Latvia, and finally, at the opposite end one finds Slovenia and Romania.

**Table 6.7** Polarisation figures, 2002–4

<i>Country</i>	<i>EES party electorates (2004)</i>	<i>EES party positions (2004)</i>	<i>Marks et al. party positions (2002)</i>	<i>Benoit and Laver party positions (2003–4)</i>
Slovenia	1.58152	1.84116	1.54157	4.28333
Slovakia	1.68371	2.32246	2.50570	5.22860
Latvia	1.17355	1.58762	2.26163	5.46281
Hungary	2.10153	2.291035	2.36712	5.69129
Estonia	0.64848	1.18976	n.a.	4.92185
Czech rep.	2.05163	2.69802	2.55925	5.01439
Poland	1.51638	1.90992	2.02728	5.93345
Romania	n.a.	n.a.	1.70716	2.45868
Bulgaria	n.a.	n.a.	1.79070	4.05816
Lithuania	n.a.	n.a.	2.63201	3.55596

Relations between the party system dimensions

As the final step of the analysis we have examined the relationships among the different dimensions of party systems. Table 6.8 presents the rough (four-degree) ranking of the countries on the principal dimensions.

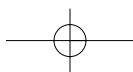
The six dimensions are related to each other in various ways: mechanically, causally, through third variables etc. The task of the present analysis is not to examine the causes of the relations but to simply find out which are the most marginal and which the most central variables of the entire ‘package’. Based on the literature, positive correlations could be expected between closure, polarisation, stability and the relevance of blocs, low fragmentation and low volatility. All these variables are related, more or less directly, to the overall institutionalisation of the party systems. If one converts the category ‘very low’ into 1, ‘low’ into 2, ‘high’ into 3 and ‘very high’ into 4, then it becomes possible to analyse the data in a more quantitative fashion (in the case of fragmentation and volatility, the ranking has to be reversed, as high volatility and fragmentation are expected to indicate low levels of institutionalisation). We have checked whether the countries are similarly ranked on the various dimensions or there are substantial (that is, more than one position) differences between the rankings and we have also examined Spearman correlations and Cronbach alphas. Given the low number of cases and the large amount of noise in the data, the conclusions can be, of course, only tentative.

The analysis of the covariances indicated that volatility is most marginal to the overall ‘package’. The Cronbach alpha (.85) of the six variables would somewhat decrease if any of the items were to be deleted, with the exception

Table 6.8 Dimensions of inter-party competition in Central and Eastern Europe

Country	Relevance of blocs	Bloc pattern stability	Closure by government	Fragmentation	Volatility	Polarisation
Hungary	Very high	Very high	Very high	Very low	Very low	Very high
Czech Republic	High	Very high	High	Low	Very low	Very high
Romania	Low	Low	High	Low	Very low	Very low
Lithuania	High	High	High	High	Very high	High
Estonia	Very low	Low	Low	High	Low	Low
Poland	High	Low	Low	High	High	High
Slovakia	High	Low	Very low	High	Low	Very high
Bulgaria	Low	Low	Very low	Very low	High	Low
Slovenia	Very low	High	Very low	Very high	Low	Very low
Latvia	Very low	Very low	Very low	Very high	Very high	Low

Notes: Closure categories: very low (0–35), low (35–50), high (50–65), very high (65–100); Fragmentation categories: very low (0–3.5), low (3.5–4), high (4–4.5), very high (5–); Volatility categories: very low (0–23), low (23–30), high (30–35), very high (35–100). Polarisation categories were determined by judgements on the four indicators displayed, while bloc-politics was categorised on the basis of the qualitative description of party systems.

*Patterns of party competition*

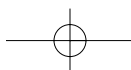
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of volatility. Governmental closure, bloc politics and polarisation appear as more central. Given the low number of cases, correlation figures (Spearman) are not completely satisfactory indicators of the robustness of the ties between the variables, but it is indicative that the three relationships that reach the level of 95 or 96 per cent significance are: closure and the relevance of blocs (.61), closure and stability (.63) of blocs,⁵ and the relevance of blocs and polarisation (.84). Loyalty to friends and opposition to enemies seem to be at the heart of institutionalisation.

In order to summarise the binary relationships between variables, we shall first examine the linkages between the three classical dimensions: volatility, fragmentation and polarisation. Based on the literature on Western countries (e.g. Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Lane, 2008), a particularly close covariance was expected between party system fragmentation and volatility. Most of the results are in accordance with this expectation, although Slovenia has many parties and relatively low volatility, while Bulgaria has a volatile electorate that supports relatively few parties. Fragmentation and polarisation also seem to go together, but in Romania and Bulgaria there are more parties than expected based on the polarisation figures, while Slovakia is surprisingly polarised for its relatively few parties. Most party systems that are volatile are also less polarised, although Slovenia and Romania are simultaneously relatively stable in terms of vote shifts and depolarised, while the Lithuanian voters keep moving between the parties in spite of the relatively high level of polarisation.

As the next step let us examine the behaviour of less standard but apparently more crucial variables: bloc politics and closure. The two characteristics of bloc politics are very closely related, and Slovenia is the only country where the alliance structures are relatively stable in spite of the low relevance of ideology in the choice of governmental coalition partners. In general parties tend to be loyal to their bloc partners in countries where the electoral volatility is low. Partial exceptions are Lithuania, where the relatively stable alliances failed to produce stable electoral loyalties, and Romania, where voters are more predictable than the politicians. In Romania blocs are not only volatile but also of secondary relevance when it comes to coalition making, similarly to Slovenia, although volatility is relatively low in both countries. The latter country is deviant also in the sense that it is the only one that disturbs the otherwise close covariation between bloc stability and governmental closure.

In fragmented party systems blocs tend to be unstable and inconsequential, although they play a relatively marginal role in the concentrated Bulgarian system as well, and the fragmented Slovenian system should have had even more promiscuous parties. As noted above, alliances are most consequential in highly polarised party systems, the relationship between these two variables



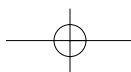
having no exception. The stability of alliances is also closely related to polarisation, with the partial exceptions of Slovakia (where the stability of blocs is relatively low) and of Slovenia (which has a depolarised system with relatively stable alliance structures).

The review of the relationships above already indicates the strategic status of government closure. Closed governmental arenas go together with low electoral volatility, although in the Lithuanian system government closure coincides with a relatively high level of electoral volatility, while the Slovaks and the Slovenes managed to keep electoral volatility low in spite of the relatively open governmental arena. Fragmentation and closure would be almost perfectly related were it not for Bulgaria, which is on the extremes of both party system concentration and government openness. So far as closure and polarisation are concerned, there are two deviant countries: Romania, with its low polarisation, and, more importantly, Slovakia, where the openness of governmental interactions coincides with very high polarisation. As mentioned above, with the partial exception of Slovenia and Romania, bloc stability and relevance seem to be closely related to governmental closure. This should not come as a surprise, since the two variables tap to a large extent the same phenomenon: fidelity in inter-party relations.

There is a high degree of covariation across the six variables examined. In only three instances is there a large divergence between the variables: the levels of polarisation and volatility in Romania, of closure and polarisation in Slovakia and of fragmentation and closure in Bulgaria, which indicate different levels of institutionalisation.

Putting all the dimensions together, there is a clear and very sharp difference between Hungary and the Czech Republic, on the one hand, and Slovenia, Estonia, Bulgaria and Latvia, on the other. In the case of Slovenia, nevertheless, the stability of the blocs does suggest the seeds of institutionalisation, while in Bulgaria the low level of fragmentation could be seen as promising for institutionalisation, were it not a heritage of the past rather than a reflection of novel trends. So far as the remaining four countries are concerned, Romania is perhaps the closest to the institutionalised group by having a high level of closure, low fragmentation and low volatility, at least compared to the volatile regional environment. Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania all share a relatively high level of polarisation and disciplined bloc politics, but only the last of these managed to achieve a high level of government closure and all three are fragmented, with volatile electorates.

In the case of Poland it is the ideological constraints on alliances that give some degree of structure to the system. The Lithuanian system is institutionalised on many accounts, but far too fragmented and particularly volatile. Slovakia is a mixed bag: on the one hand highly polarised, with a relatively high bloc relevance and low volatility, but the stability of blocs, the relatively



high level of fragmentation and the lack of closure point to an open, amorphous pattern of competition. Romania is closer to the institutionalised group: electoral behaviour, as well as the behaviour of parties in government formation, is relatively predictable and the number of parties in parliament is low. But the level of polarisation is also low, there are shifting alliances among parties and ideological constraints are often disregarded. In three of the cases the ambiguity is to a large extent due to temporal change, as Romania and Lithuania were originally more polarised, with stricter bloc boundaries, and they have opened up only in the second part of the period.

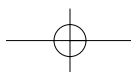
To conclude, the different facets of party systems tend to be intertwined in CEE. Volatility is the least integrated aspect of party systems. It is particularly loosely related to the relevance of blocs and to polarisation. This is not surprising, however, since volatility is the aspect of the party systems that is least controlled by the parties themselves. Institutionalisation and Europeanisation processes are closely related, but not identical. The conspicuous symptoms of de-institutionalisation in many West European party systems underscore this observation. At the same time predictability in party relations based on the logic of classic party families is a pattern that would satisfy both criteria. The present chapter has demonstrated that countries of the region vary considerably in their proximity to this model. However, it is not cultural closeness to the West or integration with the EU that are the principal driving forces behind stability, but rather, domestic institutional factors and the choices of domestic elites.

Notes

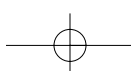
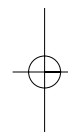
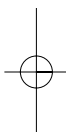
- 1 We would like to express our gratitude to Marina Popescu, Vello Pettai, Alenka Krasovec, Daniel Bochsler, Kristin Nickel and Sean Hanley for their expert opinions. All responsibility for the final classifications is ours.
- 2 Whether coalitional preferences are made public before the election is relevant both for the decisiveness of elections and for the predictability of party systems (Strøm and Müller, 1999; Powell, 2000; Martin and Stevenson, 2001; Golder, 2006; Carroll and Cox, 2007).
- 3 All those cabinets formed by so-called 'independents' or non-partisan members have been excluded.
- 4 Focusing only on 'founding elections' in Eastern Europe, rather than on 'breakaway elections' (i.e. the ones held immediately after the collapse of communist rule) as a point of departure is also justified because the latter 'were often merely referenda on communist rule rather than true expressions of political preferences' (Ishiyama, 1997: 309; Jasiewicz, 2003). Hungary is the only exception to this general rule.
- 5 There is some overlap in the definition and operationalisation of closure and bloc politics (although the latter covers oppositions as well), and therefore these covariations were expected.

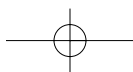
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