Development of post-communist party systems: Bulgaria and Romania in comparative perspective

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Abstract

This paper deals with the process of party system formation in post-communist societies. The case study used is Bulgaria in the period 1989-1997. In order to introduce a comparative perspective, I take Romania as a reference point in my analysis. The analysis assesses whether the communist-successor parties were able to influence the formation of the party system in a way favorable for them. The format of the party system is assessed after each election using the classifications of Giovanni Sartori and calculating the number of the effective parties. Based on the results of the analysis, the paper concludes that the communist-successor parties in Bulgaria and Romania were able to extend their control over the party system beyond 1989. That control and their dominance over the system resulted into low effective number of parties and low number of relevant parties in both countries.

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Introduction

In the autumn of 1989 a series of changes took place in East Central Europe (ECE). Communist governments were overthrown or stepped down to initiate the beginning of a transition to democracy and market economy. One of the most important aspects of the changes was the development of liberal democracy and the formation of a plural party system. However, the process is under-researched, due to the relatively short period of time since the fall of Communism. Nevertheless, some authors have tried to extend the existing theory of parties and party systems to the emerging democracies and draw conclusions on how and why they are different from the established democracies of Western Europe. The issue has been addressed in the works of Juan Jose Linz, Alfred Stepan, Herbert Kitschelt, Peter Mair, András Bozóki, Petr Kopecky, and others.

Although seen as a group, the former communist countries in East Central Europe also differed in such key aspects as type of communism, strength of civil society, role of religion in society, etc.[1] Apart from the historical differences the ECE countries experienced different patterns of transition. For some of them the process of democratic transition was accompanied by simultaneous developments. Some countries, such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia were engaged in process of state and nation building, while others like Romania had a violent "revolution" and ethnic clashes.

My research addresses the question of the main features of the developing post-communist party systems. The existing theory on democratic transition is applied to the cases of Bulgaria and Romania. I approach the patterns of democratic competition in both countries and compare them. The main explanatory tool for the outcomes will be the specifics of the communist regimes in the countries. The second aim of the study is to follow the strategic

[1] [1] For the country-to-country differences in public and elite positioning on different issues see Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski, Gábor Tóka, *Post-communist party systems: competition, representation, and inter-party cooperation.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

choices of the communist-successor parties which they employed in order to keep control over the transition process. A detailed analysis of this aspect of the formation of the party system will allow better understanding of the processes that took place.

The importance of the research is that it concentrates on the events and outcomes that have not been analyzed from a perspective, centered on the character and legacies of the communist regimes. The strategic considerations of the major political actors are assessed together with the long-term results of the political process. The party system is evaluated at several key points in time, which follow the respective national parliamentary elections.

The objective of the study is to test the assumptions of the existing literature on democratic transitions regarding Bulgaria and Romania. I follow the developments in the party systems in order to assess whether the communist successor were able to turn their superiority in terms of resources and practical knowledge into an effective control over the political process in both countries.

The limitations that the analysis faces concern mainly the assessment of the ability of the communist-successor parties to stay in control of the democratic transition. The limitations will be a result of the fact that not all the events and factors that determined the favorable position of the renamed communists in Bulgaria and Romania were publicly known.

Research question, hypothesis and methodology

In my research I am going to analyze the development of the Bulgarian party system after the fall of the communist regime in the country. I am using elections data from which I derive the main variables that describe a party system and put it into a comparative perspective - number of relevant parties, effective number of parties and polarization of the party system. I

am explaining the outcomes by using the existing literature on democratic transitions. I also look at the different strategies that the parties employed in the electoral competition.

As the type of communist regime is very important for the nature and path of transition and thus influential for the character of the post-communist party system, I take the development of the party system of another post-communist country – Romania as a reference point in my analysis. Given the fact that communism in Bulgaria fell into the so-called "patrimonial"[2] type, it could be expected that the reform wing of the communist party would be in control during the initial stage of the transition process. Bulgaria is a good case for a case study because the country fits perfectly the patrimonial type of regime – it was mainly rural in the inter-war period and communism was able to deliver goods to its subject during its first decades in power.

The analysis addresses relatively recent events. Most of the literature has speculated about the possible scenarios but an in-depth study, especially one drawing a comparison to neighboring countries is needed. As I use literature on democratic transitions, the question is how its principles apply to the Bulgarian case. I also address the question if countries with similar pre-democratic background (Romania) experienced a similar pattern of party system formation and if so, how the possible differences can be explained.

My preliminary hypothesis was that, given the patrimonial character of the previous regime and the virtual lack of civil society in pre-1989 Bulgaria, the reformed communists would have the leading role in the developing party system. A similar pattern should be expected in Romania and the question here would be if the control of the renamed communist party was even stronger. That would be a result of the more extreme character of the regime there – the sultanistic[3] rule of Ceauşescu. I also try to identify the moment when that control

[2] For detailed description of the main types of communist rule see Kitschelt et al, *Post-Communist Party Systems*, 22-24.
[3] For definition of sultanistic regimes see H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, *Sultanistic regimes*, (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)

of the former elite is becoming weak and the path for a genuine democratic competition is open.

I argue that the different types of communist regime "produce" communist successor parties of different strength. The successor parties can be described as "the primary successors to the former governing party in the communist regime and inherited the preponderance of the former ruling parties' resources and personnel".[4] In the cases of Bulgaria and Romania these were the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the National Salvation Front (NSF) respectively. By strength of the successor party I mean its ability to keep superiority over the emerging opposition in terms of resources and cognitive capabilities. I assess this issue by examining the election results and also the influence of the renamed communist in setting the agenda during the initial period of democratization.

Probably the most accurate measurement of the strength of the communist successor parties and their ability to remain credible in the new environment are the first free elections in the ECE countries. The election results in these countries underline a clear distinction between the countries with patrimonial type of regime (Bulgaria, Romania) and the ones with national-accommodative (Poland, Hungary) and bureaucratic-authoritarian regime (Czechoslovakia). In Bulgaria and Romania the renamed communists were able to secure majorities in the parliaments and form governments, while their counterparts in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia received between 10 and 15% of the popular vote and assumed the role of opposition.[5]

Based on the assumption that a victory in the first free elections confirms the strength of the communist successor party, I examine the developments during the democratic transition in order to assess whether the renamed communists were able to influence the

[4] András Bozóki and John T. Ishiyama, eds. *The communist successor parties of Central and Eastern Europe*, (Armonk, NY : M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 3.
[5] For detailed data about the post-1989 elections in ECE, see http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/election.asp.

democratization by manipulating the agenda of the process. I start my analysis with a return to the Round Table agreements in Bulgaria and the corresponding events in Romania, assessment of the institutional arrangements that the talks produced, and their respective influence on the following political developments in both countries.

In my analysis I take into account the electoral system adopted after the fall of the communist regime. The electoral system used in Bulgaria after 1989 is a proportional one and has been applied to all the parliamentary elections so far with just one exception – the elections for Grand National Assembly in 1990. The Grand National Assembly was needed to adopt a new constitution and was formed under a mixed majoritarian-proportional system. Half of the 400 mandates were contested in single-member districts with run-off in case none of the candidates won more than 50% in the first round. The other half was distributed under the proportional system (PR) with a 4% threshold. Thus, there were two ways for a party to gain representation in parliament - either by winning at least one single-member district or by passing the 4% threshold nationwide. Starting with the 1991 Parliamentary election, the electoral system has been just proportional one, with 4% threshold and 240 mandates to be divided among the parties which managed to pass it. I will approach the question of why this electoral system was selected by focusing on the Round Table negotiations. The electoral system adopted in Romania after the changes was PR without a threshold. A 3% national threshold was introduced for the 1992 elections. The threshold has been raised to 5% after the 1996 parliamentary elections in the country. The electoral systems in both Bulgaria and Romania are similar which will make the comparison between the two party systems easier.

I also assess whether the electoral system had an effect on the party formation processes in accordance with Duverger's laws and if not what the possible reasons could be. This raises the question of the initial post-communist divisions of the society and the salience of each of the main issues that shaped the party competition. Of course, any attempt at such

generalization can not overlook the propositions of Maurice Duverger.[6] The so-called "laws" stipulate that a plurality electoral system with a single ballot would favor the creation of a two-party system, while a majority system with two ballots and proportional representation (PR) will facilitate a multiparty system.[7] Another author that also summarizes the expected effects from different types of electoral system on the party system is Sartori.[8] Sartori is concerned with the rules for counting the parties and after applying his numerical criterion (mentioned above), defines his "laws". His third "law" is relevant in the case of Bulgaria – stating that "a two party format is impossible – under whatever electoral system – if racial, linguistic … or otherwise incoercible minorities are concentrated in above-plurality proportions in particular constituencies".[9] On the other hand, PR has a "reductive effect" in the case of small constituencies, which would raise the effective threshold.[10] Of course, the legal threshold should be taken into account in cases where the whole country is one electoral district, as in Bulgaria.

Another feature of the formation of the party system that I analyze is the influence of European parties and party foundations. These can be expected to influence the process in two ways – by political mentoring and direct funding of the newly established Bulgarian parties. I approach this impact through personal interviews with Bulgarian politicians and members of Parliament on the one hand and officials from the Bulgarian branches of the respective foundations on the other. These interviews also serve the purpose of identifying the specific motivations behind the strategies that parties adopted in the initial stage of transition. The members of Parliament were asked to give their opinion on the major factors that shaped the Bulgarian party system.

[6] Maurice Duverger, *Les partis politiques.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1951).
[7] Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative constitutional engineering: an inquiry into structures, incentives, and outcomes*, (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 29.
[8] Sartori, *Comparative constitutional engineering* .
[9] Sartori, *Comparative constitutional engineering*, 40.
[10] Sartori, *Comparative constitutional engineering*, 40.

The main line of analysis follows the electoral results in Bulgaria and Romania. The format of the party system is assessed after each election and conclusions are drawn about the main causes behind it. The timeframe of analysis will be 1989-1997. I set 1997 as an end point because that year the communist-successor party of Bulgaria (BSP) ran for the last time in parliamentary elections as a relatively unreformed party.[11] I assume that it would be before the reform in the party in terms of endorsing the principles of the democratic competition that it would be willing to exploit its cognitive and organizational superiority over the democratic forces. As a criterion for reform of the successor party I adopt its position on Bulgaria's accession in the EU and NATO. In the case of the BSP, it was the party congress in 2000 that promoted new leadership and endorsed the Bulgarian aim for membership in the EU and NATO. Thus, I consider that during the 2001 parliamentary elections in Bulgaria, BSP was at least partly reformed and that point marks the beginning of a new period in the party development. Similarly, the Romanian communist-successor party became more programmatic and became reforming after its electoral defeat in 1996.

Based on the results of the analysis, the paper concludes that the communist-successor parties in Bulgaria and Romania were able to extend their control over the party system beyond 1989. That control and their dominance over the system resulted into low effective number of parties and low number of relevant parties in both countries.

In the next chapter I review the main theories and approaches for classifying party systems, as well as the main streams in the democratic transition literature. Then I approach the beginning of the transition process in Bulgaria and Romania in order to assess the ability of the communist-successor parties in both countries to control the initial phase of the process. Afterwards, I continue by analyzing the elections in Bulgaria and Romania. The first elections in both countries are grouped in a chapter three, the second – in chapter four and the last

[11] For the process of reformation of the communist-successor parties see Bozóki and Ishiyama., *The communist-successor parties.*

elections before the reform of the communist-successor parties – in chapter five. Then I address the possible confounding factors influencing the formation of the Bulgarian party system – the impact of the European party federations and foundations and the role of religion.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework

In order to characterize a political system and compare it with others, the adoption of some universal criteria is needed. One of the leading theorists in party systems stasiology is Giovanni Sartori.[12] He adopts the number of parties in the system as an indicator but his major contribution is the specific way of counting relevant political parties, also referred to as the "numerical criterion". As Sartori notes, we need the number of parties in a system because it "immediately indicates … the extent to which political power is fragmented or non-fragmented, dispersed or concentrated". The numerical criterion, that Sartori applies, consists of two rules which are aimed at eliminating the irrelevant parties. The first one concerns a party's "coalition potential" and it states that, no matter how big in terms of electoral strength a party is, it is considered irrelevant if "it is never needed or put to use for any feasible coalition majority." This definition threatens to leave out of the analysis otherwise big and influential, "anti-system" parties which stay in permanent opposition. Regardless of the fact that they do not participate in government, they have an impact on the political process and, as Sartori says, "it would be absurd to discount them". That leads him to add the second rule, stating that "[a] party qualifies for relevance whenever its existence, or appearance, affects the tactics of party competition and particularly when it alters the direction of the competition".[13]

Based on the numerical criterion, Sartori moves on to work on the classification of party systems. He tries to avoid the simplistic division into one-party, two-party and multi-party systems. After some considerations, he adopts a seven-class classification into the following categories of systems: one party, hegemonic party, predominant party, two-party, limited pluralism, extreme pluralism and atomised system. In Sartori's words, the first three

[12] Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*, (Colchester: ECPR, , 2004).
[13] Sartori,.*Parties and Party Systems*., 105-109.

categories originate from the previous solid "one party system" category. Whereas the definition of a one party system is clear, some clarification needs to be made about the hegemonic party and predominant party systems respectively. The former is described as a case in which "one party commands, alone and over time, the absolute majority (of seats)", while the latter is used to describe the situation when one party "counts more" in terms of Sartori's criteria then all the others combined. Sartori keeps the "two-party" class but breaks down the multi-party category into three separate classes, depending on the level of polarization of the respective systems. The definition of atomised system leaves little room for speculation – Sartori refers to it as a case in which none of the parties can have "any noticeable effect on any other". It is more complicated to see the difference between limited and extreme pluralism. It is first suggested that when the number of relevant parties is three to five we have a limited pluralism and in the case of six to eight – an extreme one. However, this is rather vague distinction, so Sartori adds up that the ideological distance between the parties, which should also be taken into account when measuring the polarization of the system.

Apart from Sartori's classification, which as demonstrated above lacks clarity at certain points, I would consider the effective number of parties' index, introduced by Taagapera and Shugart.[14] The index is calculated by the formula $N=1/\Sigma p_i^2$, where N is the effective number of parties and p_i is the fractional share of the i-th component. The effective number of party N "indicates the number of hypothetical equal-sized parties that would have the same effect on the fractionalization of the party system as have the actual parties of varying size".[15] The use of the effective parties index will help tackle the deficiencies in Sartori's classification, especially when it comes to the distinction between limited and extreme pluralism of the party sytem.

[14] Rein Taagapera and Matthew Soberg Shugart, *Seats and votes : the effects and determinants of electoral systems*, (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1989).

When examining a developing political system, it is necessary to take into account the recent history and background of the respective country. In the case of the ECE countries these mostly coincide with the character of the communist regime. There are different classifications of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe but the one of Herbert Kitschelt[16] is among the most influential. Kitschelt distinguishes between three "modes of communist rule" – patrimonial, national-accommodative and bureaucratic-authoritarian. Patrimonial communism is one, which relies on "personal dependence between leaders in the state and party apparatus and their entourage". Bureaucracy is penetrated by the ruling party and it is party hierarchy that determines the appointments in it. According to Kitschelt, patrimonial communist regimes were likely to emerge "where a traditional authoritarian regime … ruled over society of poor peasants". In such countries there was virtually no middle class and the industrial working class comprised only small percentage of the population. A single case of a patrimonial regime is the so-called "sultanistic" rule, a term introduced by Linz and Stepan[17], a "rule of an individual and his family". Romania under Ceauşescu is an example of sultanistic rule, while Bulgaria can be seen as a classic case of patrimonial communism.[18]

The second "mode of communist rule", that Kitschelt speaks of, is the so-called the national-accommodative one. Unlike patrimonial regimes, national-accommodative ones allowed some separation between the party apparatus and state administration. They were also counting more on co-optation than on sheer repressions to insure the allegiance of the population. As Kitschelt notes, such regimes were willing to allow "modest levels of civil rights and elite contestation at least episodically". The reason for that should be looked for in the fact that, in the countries under national-accommodative regimes, the communists came to

[15] Taagapera and Shugart, *Seats and Votes*, 79.
[16] Kitschelt et al. *Post-Communist Party Systems*.
[17] Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

realize that they could only retain power by "broadening their societal support base". This was a result of the changes in the USSR after Stalin's death and the consequent decreasing support for communist party leaders in Eastern Europe that were virtually appointed by him. The search for broader support led ruling parties to undertake some steps, although modest, to economic and even political liberalization. Finally, the best reason for labeling these regimes national-accommodative could be found in Kitschelt's words that "tacit mutual accommodation between ruling party and potential civic challengers was the only way to preserve an element of national autonomy from the Soviet hegemon". Hungary was one of the countries with national-accommodative mode of communist rule.[19]

The third type of communist rule, the bureaucratic-authoritarian one, was the closest to pure totalitarism. The main characteristic of that type of regime, as Kitschelt summarizes it, is that the communist party "relied on a tier of sophisticated professionals who governed a planned economy that produced comparatively advanced industrial goods and services". The communist party itself was very disciplined and "hierarchically stratified". All these specifics of the regime gave it little incentives to use co-optation methods in its dealings with possible challengers. Rather repressions were used. Countries under bureaucratic-authoritarian regime are characterized by "considerable liberal democracy experience" in the period between the two World Wars and high level of industrialization of their economies at that time. As a result, class-based parties mobilized the bourgeois and proletarian segment of society. That led to the above-mentioned strong party discipline enjoyed by the communists. Examples of that type of regime were Czechoslovakia and East Germany.

Peter Mair[20] is among the authors that try to develop an understanding of the post-communist party systems. He is searching for the reasons that make "newly-emerging post-

[18] Kitschelt et al. *Post-Communist Party Systems*. 22-24.
[19] Kitschelt et al. *Post-Communist Party Systems*. 24-25.
[20] Peter Mair. *What is different about post-communist party-systems?*, University of Strathclyde, Working paper, No.1996/259.

communist party systems … look and perform differently from established party systems." Mair's main hypothesis is that these could be the "differences in the democratization process, in the character of the electorate, and in the context of competition".[21] He describes his methods of research as not based on direct observation of the systems examined but "constructed on the basis of an extrapolation … of the principal characteristics associated with established, or consolidated, party systems." In other words, Mair examines whether all the stabilizing factors of the consolidated systems are present in the developing systems in Central and Eastern Europe.[22]

As mentioned above, Mair does not look at cleavages but searches for the differences that distinguish the developing party systems. He proposes that the process of democratization in post-communist countries was different than the one observed in Western and Southern Europe. That should be a result of the "absence of a real civil society"[23] and the fact that the whole transition process was multidimensional. It comprised not only the pursuit of liberal democracy but also a full-scale economic transformation and, at least in some cases, efforts of state-building. The second major difference that Mair approaches, is the characteristics of the electorate itself. He describes it as "more open and more available". In his words, this reflects the fact that the "early years of party systems … tend to prove the most unstable."[24]

On the question of possible divisions in the early post-communist societies, I am going to build on another work of Kitschelt.[25] Similarly to Mair, Kitschelt also reaches the conclusion of different pattern of competition but through analyzing the cleavages in post-communist societies. As mentioned above, these are the scope of participants, the procedures and the allocation of resources. He rightfully notes that the questions of participation and procedures

[21] Mair, *What is different about post-communist party-systems?* 3-4.
[22] Mair, *What is different about post-communist party-systems?*. 4.
[23] Mair, *What is different about post-communist party-systems* , 6.
[24] Mair, *What is different about post-communist party-systems?*, 10
[25] Herbert Kitschelt. *The Formation of Party Systems in Eastern Europe*, Working Paper, No.1991/91-8 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

align together on the axis "decentralized, participatory mode" – "exclusive notion of politics". The exclusive notion of politics restricts voting and/or citizenship rights and limits the democratic choices. Another way to distinguish between these dimensions is to call them libertarian and authoritarian. Kitschelt argues that the position of parties on this axis also determines their stance on the resources allocation issue. Libertarians advocate the principles of free market, while the authoritarian camp is against it, using equality slogans to justify its position.[26] This is in strict opposition with the division in the "advanced capitalist democracies", where market principles are defended by the right side of the political spectrum which is also associated with nationalism and stands against broadening the scope of democratic governance.[27]

Having established the main axis of competition, Kitschelt goes on to speculate about how the voters will be grouped on it. He argues that this will depend on the level of economic development. We should expect voters will prefer libertarian values in case of good economic situation and vice versa.[28] The author tries to apply this logic to individual level. Here his proposition is of great value to the theory of transitions. Kitschelt claims that "what may account for individual's political orientation within the post-communist setting is not their past location in the collapsing socialist economy, but their ability to convert the resources and capabilities they controlled under the old regime into new resources and capabilities in what they expect to become the new socio-economic regime". Again, that is a major contribution to the means of understanding the way and nature of transition and the configuration of actors that emerged after the changes. An obvious conclusion from this proposition is that people who benefit from the new market system "will endorse libertarian/pro-market policies and

[26] Kitschelt. *The Formation of Party Systems in Eastern Europe*, 16.
[27] Kitschelt. *The Formation of Party Systems in Eastern Europe*, 18.
[28] Kitschelt. *The Formation of Party Systems in Eastern Europe*, 20.

parties", whereas the "losers" will turn their allegiance to the authoritarian camp, represented by the (un)reformed communist parties.[29]

I will also look at the different strategies that the parties employed in electoral competition. One of the authors that conceptualize party strategies in post-communist countries is Nick Sitter.[30] He distinguishes between three main types of party strategy in post-communist realities – right-left alignment, attempts for revival of "historical parties" and a third mode comprising the parties on "the flanks of the party system" i.e. unreformed communists or nationalists.[31]

[29] Kitschelt. *The Formation of Party Systems in Eastern Europe*, 22-26.
[30] Nick Sitter. *Cleavages, party strategy and party system change in Europe, East and West.* Perspectives on European Politics and Society, vol. 3, 2002, 425-451.
[31] Sitter, *Cleavages, party strategy and party system change*, 435.

Chapter 2: Beginning of transition and the Round Table talks

In the end of the 1980s communists in ECE began to lose power. Poland was the first country where semi-free[32] elections were introduced. The communist regimes were either confronted by the opposition, which was gaining strength (Poland, Hungary) or chose to initiate pre-emptive moves in order to stay in control during the transition process.

Bulgaria is an example of the second scenario since the opposition there was limited at best for the most part of the communist period in power.[33] The transition in Bulgaria was initiated by a faction within the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP). It started by a "palace coup" on November 10, 1989 when the long-reigning communist leader Todor Zhivkov was "forced to resign"[34] from his position by the Politburo. Meanwhile, the creation of an organized opposition to the regime had begun. In September 1989, during a meeting of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Sofia, an environmental organization named "Eco-Glasnost" initiated protests in the city, "in an attempt to alarm the international community about forest devastation."[35] The first opposition umbrella-organization was founded on December 8, 1989 - the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). It comprised various small parties, movements, student unions, environmental organizations, clubs for "glasnost and perestroika". According to Kolarova, the Round Table talks in Bulgaria were urged "by the opposition trade union Independent Federation of Labor Podkrepa (Support) call for a general strike on December 24, 1989".[36] The whole month of

[32] Only 35 percent of the seats in the Sejm were open to free contest.
[33] Kitschelt et al, Post-Communist Party Systems. 21-24.
[34] Rumyana Kolarova and Dimitr Dimitrov, Round Table Talks in Bulgaria in Jon Elster, ed. *The Round Table Talks and the Breakdown of Communism*, (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1996), 184.
[35] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*, 183.
[36] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*, 185.

December was a "time of expanded mass protest".[37] In this situation, the first contacts between government and opposition were made in order to set a framework for the conduction of Round Table negotiations.

2.1. The Bulgarian Round Table Negotiations

In Kolarova's opinion, the Bulgarian Round Table was designed to be "a kind of consultation between the ruling parties (the BCP and BANU) and all other political organizations".[38] The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU) was a junior coalition partner of the communists ever since their advent to power in 1944. The agenda was intended to comprise three main points: "(1) to reach an agreement about a new coalition government, which would include some of the leaders of the emerging opposition; (2) to agree on some amendments to the constitution; and (3) to set a date for new elections as soon as possible".[39] These preliminary goals of the incumbent government show its strategy for retaining power after the proposed free elections. The proposed early date for elections (March 1990 was the initial date proposed) would not give enough time to the opposition to organize and create adequate structures throughout the country. The BCP on the other hand, could enjoy organizational superiority both within the party hierarchy and in territorial terms. The other two goals set by the communist leaders – creation of a coalition government and constitutional amendments should be seen as an attempt by BCP to gain further legitimacy in the post-1989 environment. Communist ideology could not be sufficient anymore in the face of democratic changes all over Eastern Europe.

This first, preliminary stage of talks also indirectly addressed the question of inclusion and exclusion from the talks. In a situation of transition and questionable legitimacy of both

[37] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*, 184.
[38] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*, 186.
[39] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*, 186.

government and opposition, the Round Table turned into an instrument to assert and confirm the credibility of the participants. As Karasimeonov notes, "by accepting UDF as a main negotiator and opponent on the Round Table, BCP *de facto* legitimized the main opposition political subject of the new democratic party system".[40] But the reverse process also took place – by sitting at the same table with the new leadership of BCP, the UDF acknowledged some legitimacy on the behalf of the communist government. The long-time coalition partner of the communists – BANU also took part in the negotiations. It was invited to be part of the so called government "quota". The negotiations between opposition and communists on the format of participation led to the formula of equal "quotas" for both of them on the Round Table, meaning equal number of people they could invite to take part in the talks.[41] So, BANU and other pro-governmental organizations managed to assure participation in the Round table but another important political subject, representing a significant segment of the Bulgarian society was left out of the process. That was the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). The MRF was founded on January 4, 1990 by members of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. The creation of MRF can be seen as a result of the nationalist tensions that arose in Bulgaria in the mid-1980s, when the Turkish minority was a subject of "forced assimilation"[42]. None of the sides on the Round Table invited the MRF to participate in the talks, although as it later became obvious it represented a large number of Bulgarian citizens.[43] Thus, that minority party was effectively denied the possibility to gain legitimacy and influence the agenda-setting of the transition process in that early stage. It might be the case that the UDF simply lacked information about the existence of MRF (since MRF was established during the preparatory talks) and that is why they did not invite the minority party

[40] Georgi Karasimeonov, *The party system in Bulgaria* [second edition], (Sofia: Goreks Press, 2006),45.
[41] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*, 186.
[42] Jon Elster, Claus Offe and Ulrich Preuss, *Institutional design in post-communist societies: rebuilding the ship at sea*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 43.
[43] The MRF was able to claim 6,03% of the popular vote during the first free elections and 23 out of the 400 mandates in the parliament.

to the talks. However, the calculations of the communist side were probably deliberately excluding the MRF. As it later became visible from the proposals of BCP during the talks, the communists were against any minority parties, autonomy of minorities, etc.

During the talks, BCP and BANU advocated early elections, while UDF proposed "a partial replacement of the current assembly so as to insure some representation of the opposition".[44] It is easy to understand these positions if we take into account the organizational capacities of the parties. BCP and BANU, as the only two legal parties in the 1945-1989 period, had structures covering the whole territory of the country. UDF on the other hand, needed time to organize its hierarchical structure.

The positions of government and opposition on the question of the presidency and its powers were no different than the ones on the Round Table talks that already took place in the region. In both Poland and Hungary it was the communists who pushed for strong presidency, envisioning communist leaders holding the office.[45] BCP also opted for strong president "with a five or six year mandate and supremacy of the presidential power"[46] UDF's proposal was for a limited, one-year term and representative functions of the first president. On the question of the future electoral system, the initial proposal of BCP stipulated 70% of the members of parliament (MPs) to be elected in single-member districts and 30% based on the proportional vote of each party. The UDF proposed all the MPs to be elected on the principle of proportionality but eventually agreed on a mixed 50/50 system – 200 MPs were to be elected in single-member districts and 200 more – based on proportionality.

The most salient issue at this stage of negotiations was, as Kolarova asserts, "linked to the legitimacy of the newly elected president".[47] BCP agreed on a short term with limited

[44] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*, 189.
[45] For a detailed description of the Round Table talks see Wiktor Osiatynski, The Round Table Talks in Poland and Andras Sajo, The Round Table Talks in Hungary in *The roundtable talks and the breakdown of communism.* Ed. Jon Elster,. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)
[46] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*, 191.
[47] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*, 192.

powers for the first president until the adoption of a new constitution after the elections. But it also pushed for direct elections for the post in order to boost its legitimacy. The leaders of BCP were sure of the election of the communist head of state Petar Mladenov as "opinion surveys showed that he had overwhelming popular support".[48] UDF proposed that the first, interim president is elected by the acting, communist controlled National Assembly which would have denied him the legitimacy of being popularly elected. BANU proved to be a decisive factor again by siding with the opposition on that issue. Isolated, BCP conceded but the price that UDF had to pay for that was an agreement for holding the elections on June 10 and 17, 1990. Thus, opposition and government managed to reach an agreement on the institutional arrangement in post-communist Bulgaria.

The agreements reached at the Bulgarian Round Table set up the framework for the start of the genuine democratic competition in the country. The talks between opposition and government addressed the question of institutional arrangement that was crucial in the realities of transition from communism to liberal democracy. By sitting at the same table and reaching consensual agreements, both sides reinforced their legitimacy, thus making the Round Table results credible in front of the society. The agreements answered the questions of balance between the branches of power, as well as the introduction of the institution of presidency. As a result, the legislature to be elected democratically under the name Grand National Assembly had the powers to adopt the new constitution and decide on its term.

At this point, the hypothesis of imposed agenda by the incumbents, which favored them in the subsequent stages of the democratic transition was confirmed – the BCP managed to secure a favorable electoral system and early election date, which gave it an advantage over the opposition.

[48] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*, 192.

2.2. Start of transition in Romania

As a country with sultanistic type of communist regime, Romania had no dissident movement and the regime faced little resistance. During the 45 years of communist rule between 1944 and 1989, the major upheavals against the regime were miners' strikes which were violently suppressed by the state coercive apparatus.[49] The definition of "unrestrained personal rulership"[50] that Linz and Stepan give for a sultanistic regime describes correctly the pre-1989 realities in Romania. In order for the regime to change, Ceausescu had to either initiate the transition to democracy himself or be removed from power. In Bulgaria a "palace coup"[51] by a reformist faction was enough to start the transition. In Romania due to the strongly personalized character of the regime, Ceausescu was put to a show trial and executed just days after the beginning of the changes.[52]

The night after Ceausescu left Bucharest (December 22, 1989) a group of people appeared on the national TV and claimed to be taking control of the revolution. The creation of a National Salvation Front was announced. This group comprised communist party members such as Ion Iliescu as well as dissidents.[53] Thus, a self-appointed government that guided the transition process was created. Although it claimed to be revolutionary in character, the NSF did not represent a clear break with Romania's communist past. Its leadership was "a group of old Communists, including army and *Securitate* generals".[54]

The legitimacy that the NSF gained by incorporating some dissidents and the weakness of the genuine opposition forces made possible the practical imposition of the new democratic

[49] Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation : southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe*, (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 351.
[50] Linz and Stepan, *Problems of democratic transition*, 54.
[51] Linz and Stepan, *Problems of democratic transition*, 336.
[52] Daniel N. Nelson, *Romania after Tyranny*. (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1992), 14.
[53] Nelson, *Romania after Tyranny*, 14.
[54] Nelson, *Romania after Tyranny*, 21.

rules by the NSF provisional government. The Romanian renamed communists did not deviate from the tactics of their counterparts throughout the ECE region. The institution of the presidency was introduced and its first holder – Iliescu was given considerable powers. The Romanian president had the power to appoint the prime-minister and the whole system resembled the French model to a large extent. The president also held the right to dissolve the parliament if it did not give a vote of confidence to the proposed government two times.[55] The electoral system, unlike in Bulgaria, was not negotiated between government and opposition but imposed by the NSF in the form of a decree. It stipulated proportional representation with no threshold.[56]

As in the case of Bulgaria, the communist successor-party in Romania – the National Salvation Front (NSF) pushed for early elections in order to capitalize on its overwhelming organizational and cognitive superiority over the opposition. The resources that the NSF has at its disposal included the assets of the state, the control over the printing presses inherited from the old regime and maybe most importantly, control over the media.[57] The latter was a substantial advantage in "a society where television had shaped the outlook of millions of people".[58] In addition, the NSF initially claimed that it would not participate in the elections but just organize them. Thus, it acquired initial legitimacy as a caretaker government and embodiment of the process of change.

Similarly to Bulgaria, the authorities in Romania did not organize local elections or assured representation of the opposition in the local authorities. The self-appointed caretaker government of the NSF was able to shape the institutions at will. Iliescu was declared president in December 1989 while the new parliament (still under the control of the NSF) was

[55] Articles 85 and 89 of the Romanian Constitution, available at www.constitutia.ro.
[56] Aurelian Craiutu, Light at the end of the tunnel, Romania 1989-1998 in Geoffrey Pridham and Tom Gallagher, eds., *Experimenting with democracy: regime change in the Balkans*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 173.
[57] Tom Gallagher, *Romania after Ceausescu: the politics of intolerance*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) 100.
[58] Gallagher, *Romania after Ceausescu*, 100.

formed in February 1990. The fact that a "reform-minded" communist became a president shows the extent to which the successor party in Romania was able to stay in control of the changes. Capturing the presidency and giving it strong prerogatives was a strategic choice by almost all the communist-successor parties in ECE but none besides the Romanian succeeded. In Hungary the opposition initiated a referendum which prevented the popular election of the MSzP candidate Pozsgay. In Poland Jaruzelski held the post briefly before being forced to resign by the Solidarność leader Wałęsa. The Romanian scenario was close to be repeated in Bulgaria but a leaked tape with the communist leader Mladenov urging for tanks to disperse popular protests provoked a huge scandal. BSP opted for a weak presidency and eventually the leader of the opposition Zhelyu Zhelev was elected president by the Grand National Assembly.

Chapter 3: The first elections

The results that the first free Bulgarian elections in fifty years produced gave absolute majority of seats to the former communists. Renamed to Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), they claimed 211 of the 400 seats in parliament. (Table 1) The opposition represented by UDF and the party of the ethic Turks in Bulgaria – the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) was able to get 40% of the seats altogether. However, as visible from the results of the proportional voting BSP did not win the majority of the votes. It gained parliamentary majority due to the mandates allocated through single-member districts. It appears that was not the only factor that influenced the results. To some extent the very fairness of the election process is under question. As Grzymala-Busse notes, "the party [BSP] continued to use its informal advantages".[59] The irregularities during the electoral process included "vote manipulation, suspiciously high turnout … and outright fraud".[60] In addition, BSP was able to use its dominant position in the structures of local government during the vote. As Kolarova points, there were no local Round Tables and the question of the opposition of opposition representation at local level was deliberately not discussed at the Round Table.[61] The first local elections in Bulgaria were held just in 1991, almost a year after the parliamentary elections. The fraud and irregularities are pointed as one of the main reasons for the victory of BSP in the 1990 elections by MPs from present day opposition in the Bulgarian National Assembly.[62]

Table 1.

[59] Anna Grzymala-Busse, Authoritarian Dominants of Democratic Party Competition: The Communist Successor Parties in East Central Europe in *Party Politics*, 2006; 12; (London: Sage, 2006), 426.
[60] Grzymala-Busse. Authoritarian Dominants of Democratic Party Competition, 426.
[61] Kolarova et al. *Round Table Talks in Bulgaria*. 194..
[62] Personal communication with the current MPs Neno Dimov, Svetoslav Malinov and Ventsislav Varbanov, April 2007, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Results of the 1990 Bulgarian parliamentary elections

Party	Proportional System result	Majoritarian System result	Seats in Parliament (Total)
Bulgarian Socialist Party	47.15% (97 mandates)	114 mandates	211 (54%)
Union of Democratic Forces	36,20% (75 mandates)	69 mandates	144 (36%)
Bulgarian Agricultural National Union	8,03% (16 mandates)	-	16 (4%)
Movement for Rights and Freedoms	6,03% (12 mandates)	11 mandates	23 (5%)
Fatherland Union	-	2	2 (0.50%)
Independent	-	2	2 (0.50%)
Social democratic Party- Non-marxists	-	1	1 (0.25%)
Fatherland Party of Labor	-	1	1 (0.25%)
Total Number of Seats	200	200	400

Source: Central Electoral Commission[63]

So, under Sartori's criteria there were three relevant parties in the Bulgarian party system after the elections. BSP was the governing party, while UDF had blackmailing potential because its participation as opposition brought legitimacy to the system. MRF should also be counted as relevant. Its case is more specific since it was giving further legitimacy to the system in the light of the events of attempted assimilation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. The presence of MRF in the first parliament was a sign these tendencies were over. BANU was not needed as coalition partners and did not influence the party competition at that time. The majoritarian element can be seen as a reason for the disproportional allocation of the

seats[64], thus influencing the structure of the system. The allocation of half of the seats through single member districts (SMD) benefited the two main parties – BSP and UDF. The fact that MRF won 11 mandates through SMD confirmed Sartori's challenge to Duverger, namely that "a two party format is impossible – under whatever electoral system – if racial, linguistic … or otherwise incoercible minorities are concentrated in above-plurality proportions in particular constituencies".[65]

However, the influence of the main division in the Bulgarian society at that time – "communism-anticommunism" should also be taken into account. Although technically a two-party one, the Bulgarian party system of that time was not following the pattern of competition of the established two-party systems such as the British or the American one. Instead of moving to the ideological center, BSP and UDF were closer to the extremes in the most relevant cleavage division – their attitude towards the former regime. As Karasimeonov notes, contrary to most of the other ECE countries the democratic values and the discrediting of the former regime were not that strongly evident in the Bulgarian society at that point.[66] That conclusion is in line with Kitschelt's propositions concerning the background of the transition process in countries with patrimonial mode of communist rule. In his words, communist parties in patrimonial regimes "enjoyed not only the support of the countryside and of the industrial working class, but also of many new urban industrial and administrative strata".[67] These segments of the society were the ones that Karasimeonov refers to as supporting "the *old*, associated with socialism" as opposed to the part that embraced the "*new*" and the democratic liberties".[68] That division of society found reflection in the

[63] Quoted in Georgi Karasimeonov, 2006. *The Bulgarian party system*, Sofia: Goreks Press, 59.
[64] For example BANU won no single district and won just 4% of the seats, despite of claiming 8% of the popular vote.
[65] Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*, 40.
[66] Karasimeonov, *The Bulgarian Party System*. 56
[67] Kitschelt et al. *Post-Communist party Systems.* 24
[68] Karasimeonov, *The Bulgarian Party System*. 57

campaign slogans of the two main parties – UDF used the more radical "45 years are enough!" while BSP employed the more neutral "Success for Bulgaria!".[69]

The agreements reached during the Round Table negotiations should be taken into account as equally important reason for the post-electoral configuration of the party system. The Bulgarian transition process is a classical case of what Kitschelt calls a "preemptive strike" by an elite faction which "expects to protect its long term interests by a quick reform on its own terms".[70] After removing the long-reigning Secretary of the party Todor Zhivkov, the renamed communists were able to gain some credit as reformers and stay in effective control of the transition process. It was they who controlled who would participate in the Round Table. Thus, the Union of Democratic Forces was allowed to participate and gain legitimacy and popularity, while MRF was isolated from the process.[71]

The Romanian elections of May 1990 saw the NSF winning a sweeping majority of roughly two-thirds of the votes and claiming 263 of the 396 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The ethnic Hungarian party Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR) came distant second with 7.23% of the vote, while the historical parties – the National Liberal Party (NLP) and the National Peasant Party (NPP) got respectively 6.41% and 2.56%. (Table 2)

[69] Karasimeonov, *The Bulgarian Party System*, 57.
[70] Kitschelt et al. *Post-Communist party Systems*, 29.
[71] Karasimeonov, *The Bulgarian Party System*, 44-45.

Table 2.
Results of the 1990 Romanian Parliamentary Elections – Chamber of Deputies[72]

Party	Electoral result	Seats won
National Salvation Front	66.31%	263
Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania	7.23%	29
National Liberal Party	6.41%	29
Romanian Ecological Movement	2.62%	12
National Peasant Party – Christian Democrat	2.56%	12
Alliance for Romanian Unity	2.12%	9
Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania	1.83%	9
Romanian Ecological Party	1.69%	8
Romanian Socialist Democratic Party	1.05%	5
Other 7 non-ethnic parties receiving less than 1% of the vote	-	9
11 Ethnic parties receiving at least one guaranteed seat	-	11
Total number of seats		396

As in Bulgaria, the fairness of the Romanian elections is contested. It is known that "[t]he NSF ran its electoral campaign by using state assets and the national television to boost its candidates and discredit its political opponents".[73] In addition to that, violence was used against opposition politicians and activists.[74] A detail that arouses suspicion over the fairness of the elections is also the high number of invalid votes. More than 1.1 million votes were declared invalid which was more than 7.5% of all the votes cast. In comparison, in the simultaneous presidential elections was less than 0.5 million with the same number of people

[72] All the results from Romanian parliamentary elections are taken from the database of Essex University, available at http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/election.asp.
[73] Craiutu, Light at the end of the tunnel, 175.
[74] Nelson, *Romania after Tyranny*. 31.

exercising their voting rights.[75] However, unlike in the Bulgarian case, where frauds and irregularities can be seen as contributing to the slim parliamentary majority of the BSP, in Romania "it was clear that the NSF was the preferred choice of a substantial majority of the electorate".[76]

Under Sartori's criteria, the Romanian election results produced a predominant party system, where one party has the absolute majority of seats. Just like in Bulgaria, the strongest party in terms of electoral support was a communist-successor party. The differences between two cases concern the level of consolidation of the opposition forces. While in Bulgaria UDF managed to unite the majority of democratic forces, in Romania the opposition parties participated in the elections separately which no doubt affected their cumulative result.

One of the factors behind the fragmentation of the opposition was the absence of genuine Round Table negotiations in Romania. Round Table talks served two important purposes for the opposition in Bulgaria. First, the opposition felt the need to unite in order to counter the communists during the negotiations and second, the participation in the talks gave the opposition parties the legitimacy of a recognized political actor and popularity across the whole country through the TV coverage of the event. Thus, the absence of united opposition in Romania did not allow the emergence of a Romanian analogue to the UDF – an opposition party which is relevant because it brings legitimacy to the whole system. DAHR possessed certain "soft" blackmailing potential as its exit from the system would have harmed its credibility so it should not be discounted as irrelevant.

In terms of the effective number of parties, the elections in Bulgaria and Romania produced similar results.[77] The indexes have values of 2.75 and 2.21 respectively based on the

[75] For a detailed data of the first Romanian elections see http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/indexCountry.asp?country=romania.
[76] Gallagher, *Romania after Ceausescu*, 103.
[77] Hereon I use the data and calculations of Michael Gallagher and Paul Mitchell (eds), *The Politics of Electoral Systems* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

votes and 2.42 and 2.20 based on the distribution of seats in the national parliaments. These numbers come to confirm the expectations that the influence of the strong communist-successor parties would keep the effective number of parties low by marginalizing the opposition. The difference between the values of the index based on the number of seats would have been greater had there been an electoral threshold in Romania. That would have shown the greater extent to which the NSF was able to dominate the system and weakness of the Romanian opposition.

The effective number of parties' index has certain shortcomings in the case one party has more than 50% of the seats (as in the Bulgarian Grand National Assembly in 1990) and that is acknowledged by Taagapera.[78] He concedes that in such cases the index "still indicates a multi-party constellation", although one party has the majority.[79] However in the Bulgarian case the value of 2.42 is somehow close to the number of relevant parties by Sartori's criteria and thus this result should not be overlooked.

The results of the first free elections in Romania show an interesting difference from the Bulgarian case – unlike the peasant BANU, the Romanian NPP got an inferior result in the elections (2.56%) and managed to enter parliament just due to the lack of an electoral threshold. This fact confirms the assumption that the existence of nationwide organizational structures favors a party during the first elections. BANU was a junior coalition partner of the BCP during the whole period of communist rule in Bulgaria and was allowed to maintain a network of organizations throughout the country. In contrast, the NPP was violently suppressed in the wake of the communist advent to power in Romania and eventually banned. Thus, the party was in an inferior position vis-à-vis the NSF in terms of organizational capacity and that reflected its electoral result.

[78] Rein Taagapera, Supplementing the Effective Number of Parties in *Electoral Studies*, 18(4), (1999)
[79] Taagapera, *Supplementing the Effective Number of Parties*, 497.

In both countries parties of the ethnic minorities managed to secure representation in parliament – the DAHR in Romania and the MRF in Bulgaria. Both appealed strictly to the respective minority group (Hungarians in Romania and Turks in Bulgaria) and that strategy was successful for gaining parliamentary seats. Given the fragmented character of the Romanian party system during the first elections DAHR emerged as the second strongest political party at that time, while MRF's electoral result in terms of parliamentary seats was third in Bulgaria.

Chapter 4: Alternation in Bulgaria, continuity in Romania

The second free elections in Bulgaria took place slightly more than a year after the first ones, on 13 October 1991. Those ahead-of-schedule elections were caused by series of events, partly product of civic protest led by the opposition and partly due to internal conflicts in the socialist party and inability of the government of Andrei Lukanov to deal with the situation in the country.[80] Some important changes concerning the main political parties occurred before the elections. UDF got divided into three parts – UDF-movement, UDF-center and UDF-liberals, which participated in the elections separately. One of the biggest parties in the UDF coalition itself – BANU-Nikola Petkov also chose to take part independently, effectively becoming a fourth faction of the previously united coalition. The agrarian union represented in the Grand National Assembly – BANU incorporated members of BANU-Nikola Petkov and thus formed BANU-united. The electoral law was based on proportional representation with a 4% threshold.[81]

The fragmentation of the opposition was present already during the work of the Grand National Assembly. A number of present day MPs have been asked to point the main reason for the breakdown of the parliamentary group of the UDF in that period. One of the main reasons that all of them agree on, is the diversity of parties and organizations comprising the UDF coalition. The main division within the parliamentary group of UDF was between the moderates, who were willing to compromise with BSP and the radicals, who rejected the communist-set agenda of the Grand National Assembly. The composition of the group of moderates is interesting in terms of their distance from the previous regime. In any way,

[80] The opposition organized a permanent protest in front of the parliament, a violent crowd set the former headquarters of the Communist Party on fire and the first Bulgarian president – the socialist Peter Mladenov was forced to resign after making remarks of possible army intervention against the demonstrators.

among the moderates there were former BCP party members and apparatchiks. The interviewees refer to them with terms varying from "parts of the BCP nomenclature, unsatisfied by their social status"[82] to people "infiltrated [by the BCP]"[83].

The results of the elections gave the democratic opposition its first victory. (Table 3) However, the winning margin was so narrow (just over one percent) that UDF was not able to obtain majority in the National Assembly. It formed a minority government with the support of Movement of Rights and Freedoms, which effectively turned MRF into a relevant party with coalition potential under Sartori's criteria. That defined the party system as a multi-party one. The parties in parliament were just three so the party system qualified as limited pluralism. However, the ideological distance between the two main parties gave the system some features of the extreme pluralism type. Sartori talks about the importance of the ideology but states some conditions to describing a system as extreme pluralism. In the Bulgarian case, two crucial conditions are not met – the system comprised no anti-system parties and there was no bipolar opposition. Thus, the Bulgarian party system at that point qualifies as a one with limited pluralism.

The new electoral system could be seen as favorable to UDF, as it eliminated the majoritarian element in the election and thus limited the ability of the former communists to exploit their advantage in terms of nationwide known figures. On the other hand, the adoption of PR instead of the mixed electoral system lowered the effective threshold for parliamentary representation which could have encouraged the breakaway UDF factions to run in the elections on their own.

[81] Karasimeonov. *The Bulgarian Party System*. 67-68
[82] Kostadin Paskalev, Member of parliament from the Bulgarian Socialist Party, personal communication, April 2007, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Table 3.
Results of the 1991 Bulgarian parliamentary elections

Party	Electoral result	Mandates
UDF	34.36%	110
BSP (in coalition with 9 other parties)	33.14%	106
MRF	7.55%	24
BANU-united	3.86%	
BANU-Nikola Petkov	3.44%	
UDF-center	3.20%	
UDF-liberals	2.81%	
"Kingdom Bulgaria"	1.82%	
BBB	1.32%	
BNRP	1.13%	
The remaining 28 parties and coalitions	7.37%	
Total number of seats		240

Source: Central Electoral Commission[84]

That change of the type of party system shows the initial instability of post-communist party systems. The significance that MRF acquired showed the potential of an already existing cleavage – "ethnic majority-ethnic minority". As mentioned above, in the mid-1980s the BCP decided to make the Turkish minority in Bulgaria a subject of "forced assimilation".[85] The MRF is a successor of the illegal Turkish organization that opposed the assimilation and the imposition of Slavic names on the Bulgarian Turks.[86] The political strategy of MRF can be better understood by using Nick Sitter's typology.[87] He distinguishes

[83] Ventsislav Varbanov, Member of parliament from the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union – People's Union, personal communication, April 2007, Sofia, Bulgaria.
[84] Karasimeonov. *The Bulgarian Party System*, 72.
[85] Kolarova et al., *The Bulgarian Round Table Talks*. 43.
[86] Dr. Hasan Ademov, Member of Parliament from the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, personal communication, April 2007, Sofia, Bulgaria.
[87] Nick Sitter. *Cleavages, party strategy and party system change*.

between three main types of party strategy in post-communist realities – right-left alignment, attempts for revival of "historical parties" and a third mode comprising the parties on "the flanks of the party system" i.e. unreformed communists or nationalists.[88] MRF was the first party in Bulgaria to successfully follow the third strategy and eventually achieve participation in government. If we assess the position of the party in the light of cleavages in the Bulgarian society, at that period MRF combined anticommunism stance with minority representation function. It should be noted that three parties - two of the breakaway factions from the original UDF coalition and the BANU-United came just short of entering parliament. Should the threshold been set at 3% for example, there would have been an effective multi-party system in place with six relevant parties, as every one of them would have had coalition potential.

As Karasimeonov notes, at this point "the classic dividing line right-left started to acquire certain meaning, albeit hidden under the ideological opposition communism-anticommunism".[89] This is in line with the data, collected by Kitschelt during the functioning of this parliament, which assign to BSP a rating of 4.3 and to UDF – 17.7 on a 0 to 20 scale, with 0 symbolizing the Left extreme and the 20 – the Right one.[90] Thus, we can summarize that the two main parties in the system were using the right-left division to attract voters, while MRF as a minority party relied on ethnic appeals to secure the vote of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. The ideological distance between BSP and UDF remained important, since both parties did virtually nothing to reduce it and the level of polarization of the system had just increased by the opposition's boycotts of parliamentary sessions and organized mass protests against the socialist government.

[88] Nick Sitter. *Cleavages, party strategy and party system change*, 435.
[89] Karasimeonov. The *Bulgarian Party System*, 74.
[90] The ratings were assigned by politicians from all political parties in parliament so they did not reflect just the self-perception of the party. Kitschelt et al. *Post-Communist Party Systems*, 251.

In Romania, the 1992 elections saw the incumbents retaining power. The original NSF was split in two factions – the Democratic National Salvation Front (NDSF), which was under Iliescu influence and a faction, led by the former prime-minister Petre Roman which kept the name NSF. DNSF won the elections, gaining 27.72% of the votes and Iliescu appointed a NDSF dominated government under prime-minister Nicolae Vacaroiu. The governing coalition did not include the NSF but rather relied on the support of the nationalist PRNU and GRP, as well as the Socialist Party of Labour. Unlike the first elections, the opposition was more consolidated in 1992 and that paid off – the result of 20.01% reached by the Democratic Convention of Romania (DCR) greatly surpassed the cumulative result of the NLP and NPP on the previous elections (less than 9%). (Table 4)

Table 4.
Results of the 1992 Romanian Parliamentary Elections – Chamber of Deputies

Party	Electoral result	Seats won
Democratic National Salvation Front	27.72%	117
Democratic Convention of Romania	20.01%	82
National Salvation Front	10.19%	43
Party of Romanian National Unity	7.72%	30
Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania	7.46%	27
Greater Romania Party	3.89%	16
Socialist Party of Labour	3.04%	13
Agrarian Democratic Party of Romania	2.998%	-
National Liberal Party	2.63%	-
Romanian Ecological Movement	2.25%	-
13 Ethnic parties with guaranteed seats	-	13
Total number of seats		341

The 1992 Parliamentary elections in Romania marked the entry of the nationalist parties in parliament – the Party of Romanian National Unity **(**PRNU) and the Greater Romania Party (GRP). Unlike Bulgaria, nationalists in Romania were able to achieve parliamentary representation. In Bulgaria it was the BSP that managed to secure the nationalist vote. The highest-scoring nationalist party in Bulgaria was the Bulgarian National Radical Party (BNRP) which recorded mere 1.13% of the votes in the 1991 Parliamentary elections. The reasons for that can be looked for in the fact that the Romanian Communist Party under Ceauşescu had a long record of provoking ethnic tensions between Romanians and Hungarians, while BCP acquired some nationalist character just in the last years of its reign in Bulgaria. Another reason for the success of the nationalist parties in Romania could be the disappearance of the Romanian Communist Party which allowed influential figures, connected with the previous regime to start independent political career. That is the case with both leaders of PRNU and GRP – Gheorghe Funar and Corneliu Vadim Tudor. The former used his mayoral post in the city of Cluj-Napoca as a base for party-building, while the latter was a prominent figure of the Ceauşescu regime, when "he serviced the dictators' personality cult with a stream of odes and eulogies".[91]

Based on their ideology and coalition preferences, PRNU and GRP also qualify as parties close to the previous regime. Analysts describe GRP as "rooted in the Romanian Communist Party" and "made up of propagandists and retired *Securitate* officers".[92] The leader of GRP Corneliu Vadim Tudor was the former poet of Ceausescu. PRNU also comprised "retired army and Securitate officers".[93] So, if we look beyond the sheer numbers, the pattern of party

[91] Tom Gallagher, *Romania after Ceausescu*, 209.
[92] Alina Mingiu-Pipidu, The Romanian Postcommunist Parties in Bozóki and Ishiyama, eds. *The communist successor parties*, 199.
[93] Mingiu-Pipidu, *The Romanian Postcommunist Parties*, 202.

competition and positioning in Romania resembles the Bulgarian case – communist-successor party(ies) on one side, democratic bloc on the other and party of the ethnic minority.

There is a clear division between the strategies of the parties that entered parliament. The "communism-anticommunism" divide clearly applied to the competition between the DNSF and the DCR. The other formations on the formally left side of this divide were the NSF of Petre Roman and the Socialist Party of Labour. The parties that operated on the political extremes were the nationalist PRNU and GRP, along with the ethnic Hungarian DAHR. The Hungarian minority party, similarly to MRF in Bulgaria, combined its ethnic appeal with anti-communist stance. At this point the minority parties in both countries were forced into the right side of the political spectrum simply by the presence of the communist-successors on the left.

The effective number of parties, based on the distribution of votes went up in both countries – it was 4.19 for Bulgaria in 1991 and 6.96 for Romania in 1992. In both cases the fragmentation of the opposition contributed to that rise. As mentioned above, in Bulgaria three formations split from the previously united UDF coalition. Thus, four separate opposition parties participated in the elections. In the Romanian case, in addition to the various opposition parties that pursued representation outside the DCR, the rise of the nationalists and the split of the original NSF also contributed to the fragmentation of the system.

The respective indexes, calculated over the share of seats that each party secured provide a better profile of the party systems at that point. The numbers are lower – 2.41 for Bulgaria and 4.78 for Romania. In the Bulgarian case, there was literally no change from the 2.42 value on the previous elections. The Bulgarian parliament still comprised the two big parties of roughly the same size – UDF and BSP and the MRF, which happened to be the tie-breaker. In Romania the index went up from its previous value of 2.20. The reasons are to be looked for

in the split of the original NSF but also in the low threshold applied in the elections – 3%. Should the threshold have been 4% for example, the parliament would have comprised not 7 but just 5 parties, which is the difference between the limited and extreme pluralism in a system. As mentioned above, the higher threshold in the Bulgarian case prevented three parties with results above 3% from entering into parliament.

The Romanian party system after the 1992 elections was highly segmented under Sartori's criteria. The governing majority comprised of the Democratic National Salvation Front (DNSF), the Party of Romanian National Unity (PRNU), the Greater Romania Party (GRP) and the Socialist Party of Labour (SPL). All the governing parties were relevant due to their coalition potential. The Democratic Convention of Romania (DCR) was effectively altering the pattern of competition, while DAHR contributed to the polarization of the party system by opposing the nationalist RRNU and GRP. I discount the NSF as irrelevant at that point because it was not needed for forming a government and it did not alter the character of the competition - ideologically it stood close to the DNSF. So, after the 1992 elections the Bulgarian and Romanian party systems were showing similar patterns of limited pluralism. The number of relevant parties in Romania was higher due to the higher salience of the division "ethnic majority – ethnic minority", which produced two parliamentary represented nationalist parties.

Chapter 5: Last elections before the reform of the communist-successor parties

During the period 1994-1997 there were two parliamentary elections in Bulgaria and one in Romania. The reason for the ahead-of-schedule election in Bulgaria was that the minority government of UDF in Bulgaria was not able to fulfill its mandate as a result of conflicts with the MRF. It governed for just more than a year before the prime-minister Philip Dimitrov lost a vote of confidence. However, the fall of the UDF government did not cause immediate new elections. BSP and MRF formed a new government which also received backing by some defectors from the UDF parliamentary group. The new government was presented as an expert one and was led by Lyuben Berov – an advisor of the newly elected president Zhelyu Zhelev. That government managed to survive until BSP provoked its collapse in September 1994. The socialists were assessing the political situation as favorable and pushed for new elections.

The significance of this episode in the Bulgarian politics is that it marks the point where the MRF stopped being *a-priori* part of the anti-communist forces. Cooperation with the UDF was still possible as in the case of the 1996 Presidential elections but MRF was also open for partnership with the socialists. The "communism-anticommunism" divide was replaced by rational deliberations as a leading principle in MRF's political strategy. That is a major difference in the comparison to the ethnic party in Romania – DAHR, which never entered into alliance with the communist-successor party.

The third free elections in post-communist Bulgaria took place on 18 December 1994. BSP came back to power, claiming 43.50% of the popular vote, but a majority of 125 seats in parliament. (Table 5) That allowed the Socialists to form a one-party government. UDF came second, while MRF managed to keep its status as parliamentary party although without as

much influence as in the previous parliament. Two new formations managed to gain representation – the People's Union and the Bulgarian Business Bloc (BBB). The People's Union was a coalition comprising two revived traditional parties – BANU and the Democratic Party. The People's Union attracted some of the voters that were disappointed by UDF's inability to hold power, which allowed BSP to govern the country again. According to Svetoslav Malinov, the people that voted for the People's Union "wanted to punish Philip Dimitrov for the lack of will and character to keep the power".[94] BBB on the other hand, was a classic populist party. It managed to gain popularity as a consequence of the 1992 presidential elections when its leader George Ganchev received almost 17% of the vote. The party counted mostly on the charisma of its leader and appeals to "protest voters".[95]

Table 5.
Results of the 1994 Bulgarian parliamentary elections

Party	Votes received	%	Mandates
BSP	2 262 943	43.50	125
UDF	1 260 374	24.23	69
People's Union	338 478	6.51	18
MRF	283 094	5.44	15
BBB	245 849	4.73	13
DAR	197 057	3.79	
BCP	78 606	1.51	
"New Choice"	77 641	1.49	
Patriotic Union	74 350	1.43	
"Kingdom Bulgaria"	73 205	1.41	
Another 38 parties	310 468	5.97	
Total number of seats			240

Source: Central Electoral Commission[96]

[94] Svetoslav Malinov, DSB MP, personal communication, April 2007, Sofia, Bulgaria.
[95] Karasimeonov. *The Bulgarian Party System*. 77,83.
[96] Karasimeonov. *The Bulgarian Party System*, 83.

The results of the parliamentary elections confirmed the tendency of the party system to establish as a multi-party one, something expected under proportional representation. Besides the two main parties occupying the opposite sides of the "communism-anticommunism" cleavage – BSP and UDF, the parliament comprised a more moderate center-right party as the People's Union, a minority party – MRF, and last but not the least a populist party – BBB. An interesting pattern of party competition becomes clear when we examine the small parliamentary parties. Each one of them earned representation using different strategy – ethnic appeals in the case of MRF, attempts to revive traditional interwar parties in the People's Union coalition and populist slogans of the Business Bloc.

The fact that two small, non-ethnic parties managed to enter parliament shows that the BSP and UDF were not able to marginalize the rest of the system anymore. UDF was no longer the only party to successfully exploit the anticommunist rhetoric as it was shared by the People's Union too. The success of BSP on the elections can be attributed to the fact that the socialists successfully calculated that backing the weak government of Lyuben Berov will harm the credibility of UDF, part of which also supported it. After it governed for two years, the society was opened for the strong etatist appeals of BSP.

UDF's monopoly over the center-right was broken by the electoral success of the People's Union but it was not that easy for a new leftist formation to appear. The social-democratic orientated Democratic Alternative for the Republic (DAR) fell short of gaining representation. The failure of establishing an alternative to BSP in the center-left comes to show that the former communists were still able to present themselves as the only relevant party in that side of the political spectrum. The nature of the former regime could be used as an explanatory tool here, as there was still a segment of society that associated communist rule with rapid modernization and industrialization of the country. Another factor that secured BSP wide

support among the working class was party's stance against shock reforms in pursuit of market economy. All in all, BSP was the dominant party at this moment but the party system did not change its main feature – the main dividing line of "communism-anticommunism" stipulated a two-bloc system with the socialists on the left and UDF and PU on the right. UDF was a relevant party as the main opposition subject, which altered the competition. The ideological centre comprised the MRF and the BBB. MRF can be seen as retaining some soft blackmailing potential as the party of the Turkish minority, whose presence was bringing additional legitimacy to the system. BBB did not have any influence and was not a relevant party for the 1994-1997 period.

The 1996 Romanian parliamentary elections resulted in alternation in power. The DCR was victorious, claiming 30.17% of the popular vote, while the successor of DNSF – the Romanian Party of Social Democracy (RPSD) came second with 21.52%. Petre Roman's NSF, renamed to Social Democratic Union (SDU) kept its third position from the previous elections. The two nationalist parties and the ethic Hungarian DAHR remained represented. The only party that did not manage to keep its representation from the previous parliament was the SPL which fell under the 3% threshold. (Table 6)

Table 6.
Results of the 1996 Romanian Parliamentary Elections – Chamber of Deputies

Party	Electoral result	Seats won
Democratic Convention of Romania	30.17%	122
Romanian Party of Social Democracy	21.52%	91
Social Democratic Union	12.93%	53
Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania	6.64%	25
Greater Romania Party	4.46%	19
Party of Romanian National Unity	4.36%	18
Socialist Party	2.29%	-
Socialist Party of Labour	2.15%	-
15 Ethnic parties with guaranteed seats	-	15
Total number of seats		343

The composition of the new parliament, in combination with Iliescu's loss at the presidential elections, provoked a change in government. Victor Ciorbea from the DCR became the prime-minister in a coalition government comprising also the SDU and DAHR. Thus, an ethnic minority party participated in the government of Romania for the first time. After six years in power, the communist-successor party was forced in opposition.

The third democratic elections in both countries saw a moderate decrease in the effective number of parties. Based on the votes, the index went down from 6.96 to 6.09 in Romania and from 4.19 to 3.85 in Bulgaria. That decrease should be attributed on the effect of social learning that took place on the behalf of the political parties. As Kitschelt points, during the initial phase of the transition the institutions (in this case the electoral threshold) "are endogenous to party competition".[97] In his words, it takes some time "before political actors

[97] Herbert Kitschelt, Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe in *Politics and Society*, Vol. 20. No.1, 9, (1992).

fully understand the institutional constraints imposed on their actions".[98] In this sense, we can assume that political actors in Bulgaria and Romania were not taking the institutional constraints into account during the elections in both countries in the early 1990s but by the time of the third democratic elections the social learning has taken place. I would argue that voters themselves were more aware of democratic procedures and alternatives at that time. For example the amount of wasted votes (votes cast for parties which did not achieve representation in the parliament) in Bulgaria went down from 24.95% in 1991 to 15.59% in 1994.[99]

The effective number of parties, based on the seats allocation went slightly up in Bulgaria – from 2.41 to 2.73 and down from 4.78 to 4.31 in Romania. The higher value in the Romanian case are not due to the lower electoral threshold as all the parliamentary parties had results which would have satisfied the higher Bulgarian barrier. The reason is rather the successful nationalist parties in Romania, while as argued above, in Bulgaria the nationalist vote was absorbed by the BSP and no relevant nationalist party appeared.

The character of the Romanian party system remained limited pluralism as the ruling coalition comprised three parties and the RPSD was altering the competition. Thus, the relevant parties with coalition potential were DCR, SDU and DAHR, while the blackmailing potential of RPSD was giving it relevance. The two nationalist parties were not needed as coalition partners. They also did not possess blackmailing potential so I discount them as irrelevant for the 1996-2000 period.

[98] Herbert Kitschelt, *Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe*, 9.

5.1. Democratic landslide

The government of BSP was not able to fulfill its mandate due to the economic crisis that it put country in. The collapse of the banking system and hyperinflation in the last months of 1996 effectively decreased the living standards in the country and devaluated the savings of the population. Mass demonstrations broke out in January 1997 in Sofia and other cities. Prime-minister Videnov resigned but the initially BSP insisted on forming another government. However that idea was abandoned after mass strikes and blockades across the country. An interim government was appointed in order to organize elections. They took place in April 1997.

The center-right was united for the elections in the coalition Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). It comprised the UDF and People's Union as well as several non-parliamentary represented parties. ADF won a majority of the popular vote – 52.26% and 137 of the 240 seats in the parliament. BSP lost a lot of its public support but still managed to get a respectful share of the vote – 22.07%. The party participated in the elections in coalition with several small leftist parties under the name Democratic Left. The MRF decided to participate in the elections in a coalition format under the name Alliance for National Salvation (ANS). Its coalition partners were some marginal liberal parties but that alliance marked the first case in which the MRF ran in the elections in a coalition with ethnic Bulgarian parties. The ANS received 7.60% of the vote. The populist Business Bloc also retained its representation in parliament. (Table 7)

The new thing that the 1997 elections brought to the Bulgarian party system was the first successful challenge of BSP's dominance over the center-left side of the political spectrum. Although with a non-impressive share of the votes – 5.57%, the Euroleft party managed to

[99] My calculations, based on the election results published in Karasimeonov, *The Bulgarian Party System.*

enter parliament. Thus, it became the first party, besides the previously hegemonic BSP, which gained representation with a leftist appeal.

Table 7.
Results of the 1997 Bulgarian parliamentary elections

Party	Electoral result	Seats won
Alliance of Democratic Forces	52.26%	137
Democratic Left	22.07%	58
Alliance of National Salvation	7.60%	19
Euroleft	5.57%	14
Bulgarian Business Bloc	4.93%	12
Bulgarian Communist Party	1.30%	-
Total number of seats		240

The effective number of parties went down to 2.52 mainly due to the substantial result of the united opposition and the fact that their coalition comprised basically all the significant parties of the Bulgarian center-right. The left was not solid for the first time in the history of post-communist Bulgaria but still it was the BSP that received four-fifths of the leftist vote. The two main political subjects had almost 75% of the vote between them, while the smaller parties recorded results just above the threshold. Even under the new coalition format the MRF did not manage to get a result, bigger than its usual ethnic vote.

The election results discounted as irrelevant parties the ANS (the electoral coalition of MRF), the Euroleft party and the BBB. The ADF was in government and thus – relevant, while the BSP under the coalition formula Democratic Left was the main opposition force and should not be discounted due to its substantial result – almost a quarter of the parliamentary seats. Given that the number of relevant parties was down to just two, the Bulgarian party system at that point had the feature of a two-party one with dominance of the ADF.

The electoral defeats of the incumbent post-communist parties in Bulgaria and Romania in 1996-1997 triggered processes of reformation of both BSP and PRSD. However, these changes were gradual and without clear brake with the past and legacies of the parties. In the case of BSP it took three years – until 2000 before the party declared its support for Bulgarian membership in the EU and NATO. Even then, as visible from the conducted interviews, "in some situations EU membership was presented as better than joining NATO".[100] However, that official change in BSP positions marks the end of the period when the party was clearly not open for reform. Karasimeonov concludes that by 2001 BSP was in end of the process of "evolution … from post-communist to social-democratic formation".[101]

The Romanian RPSD was put under international pressure to stop cooperating with the extreme nationalist and reform already before the end of its term in power.[102] A year before the end of the term, in 1995 the alliance with the nationalists broke down "over the government's decision to sign a Basic Treaty with Hungary, guaranteeing certain basic human right to ethnic minorities".[103] After the electoral loss in 1996 in both the parliamentary and presidential race, RPSD continued to work on improving its image as a modern social-democratic party. In reflection of that trend, in 2000 the party officially endorsed Romanian attempts to join the EU and NATO by declaring itself a "European, social democratic party, committed to joining the European Union and NATO".[104]

Thus, I argue that in the 2000-2001 elections in Bulgaria and Romania BSP and RPSD were at least partly reformed, which is symbolized by their endorsement of EU and NATO membership.

[100] Kostadin Paskalev, personal communication.
[101] Karasimeonov, The Bulgarian party System, 99.
[102] The American ambassador in Romania published an appeal to Iliescu to give up his nationalist allies in March 1995. For details see Alina Mungiu-Pipidi, *The Romanian Post-Communist parties*, 203.
[103] Jeffrey Stevenson Murer, Mainstreaming Extremism in Bozoki and Isiyama, , *The Communist Successor Parties*, 374.
[104] PDSR Party Platform 2000 in Murer, Mainstream Extremism, 378.

Chapter 6: Europeanization of the system

The impact of European parties and foundations on the Bulgarian party system mainly concerns the contacts between the main European party federations (Party of European Socialists, European People's Party, European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party) and the respective Bulgarian parties on one side, and the forms of cooperation between the parties and the Bulgarian branches of the most influential European foundations – the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert Stifting, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, etc. However, that impact was limited at best in the very first years of the democratic transition in Bulgaria. None of the above-listed foundations operated in Bulgaria before 1993.[105] Also, the pursuit of membership in the respective European party federation did not appear before the mid-1990s. As a matter of fact, the first Bulgarian party that acquired such membership was the UDF, which joined the European People's Party (EPP) in 1998.

So, only after 1993-94 can we talk about an influence of the European foundations on the Bulgarian party system. According to interviews with Bulgarian MPs and information from the respective foundations, the main forms of co-operation between the latter and the Bulgarian political parties were co-sponsored conferences, seminars, publications, etc. The subject of the seminars and trainings provided to party members varied from "local government, tax policy, young leaders' formation" to "possibilities for constitutional reforms".[106] Parties were also the beneficiaries of trainings for their candidates in local and parliamentary elections.[107]

[105] Information from the web-sites of the Bulgarian branches of the foundations – www.kas.de/Sofia, www.fes.bg, http://www.fnst-freiheit.org .
[106] Kostadin Paskalev, personal communication.
[107] Neno Dimov, personal communication.

The impact of European party federations on the Bulgarian party system came mostly in the form of specific policy stances that the Bulgarian parties needed to adopt in order to be able to apply for membership. Interviewees testify that there were such cases, regarding the applications for membership in the respective European party federations of the BSP and the MRF. There was an "external pressure over BSP to support officially the Bulgarian membership in EU and NATO" by the Party of the European Socialists (PES).[108]

The European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDRP) put several conditions to be fulfilled by the MRF before considering its application for membership. The main condition was the abandonment of the ethnic character of the party.[109] In the case of UDF, party politics and policies did not need to be amended since they were already to a large extent in line with the positions of the European People's Party.[110]

The impact of the European party federations over the Bulgarian party system took also the form of exchange of good practices between the parties. Interviewees declare that their parties were able to use the experience of their European counterparts in "forming [policy] positions"[111] and help was always available to them in such cases.[112] However, it is doubtful whether all the practices that work successfully in Western Europe are directly applicable to Bulgaria. Among the reasons interviewees pointed certain "Bulgarian peculiarities"[113] and the fact that actually "elections are won on the spot"[114] with a strategy designed for the specific situation. The clear example confirming this view is the fact that although all the leaders of the European People's Party (EPP) came to Sofia to support the campaign of the ADF in 2001, the party came distant second in the parliamentary elections.

[108] Kostadin Paskalev, personal communication.
[109] Hasan Ademov, personal communication.
[110] Neno Dimov, Svetoslav Malinov, personal communication.
[111] Ventsislav Varbanov, personal communication.
[112] Hasan Ademov, personal communication.
[113] Kostadin Paskalev, personal communication.
[114] Neno Dimov, personal communication.

Another factor that usually affects the formation of party systems is the role of religion. However, in the case of Bulgaria we should talk about the lack of impact of religion on the formation and early development of the party system. That tendency is noted by Kitschelt who acknowledges the "general secularization of the Bulgarian society and the submission of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church under the state".[115] In the conclusions of the comparative study between Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, Kitschelt asserts that economic issues have the major role in determining the political divides in Bulgaria while cultural issues, including religion have only minor effect.[116] The electoral results of a minor Bulgarian party named Bulgarian Christian Coalition can serve as an empirical confirmation of these findings. The highest result of that party was 0.66% of the votes in the 1997 elections.[117]

The European party federations and foundations had an impact on the Bulgarian party system but in the initial phase of the formation of parties and the system as a whole. The process of party formation and their positioning on the political spectrum took place before the start of any deliberate European influence. Thus, I argue that the factors and causes that had an impact on the initial formation of the Bulgarian party systems are domestic rather than external, as the cooperation between Bulgarian parties and European foundations started in the mid-1990s, when the main divisions in the Bulgarian society were already clear. The full-scale cooperation between the parties and the European party federations concerns a period which is outside of my timeframe of analysis. The politics and policies of the Bulgarian parties were no doubt influenced by the interaction with their European partners but additional research is needed in order to fully address the process.

[115] Kitschelt et al. *Post-Communist Party Systems*, 321.
[116] Kitschelt et al. *Post-Communist Party Systems*, 390.
[117] Detailed results of the Bulgarian parliamentary election are available at http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/indexCountry.asp?country=bulgaria&opt=elc .

Conclusion

I have examined the strategies and results of the communist-successor parties in Bulgaria and Romania and their impact over the party systems in the period when the parties were relatively unreformed (1989-1997). I have also analyzed the character of the two party systems as described by the numerical criterion of Sartori and the effective number of parties of Laakso and Taagapera. Based on the results of the analysis, I conclude that the communist-successor parties in Bulgaria and Romania were able to extend their control over the party system beyond 1989. That control and their dominance over the system resulted into low effective number of parties and low number of relevant parties in both countries.

I have brought evidence that the communist-successor parties were able to influence the transition process and practically stay in control of it. The BSP was effectively in power for almost six of the seven years after the first free elections in June 1990. The situation in Romania was similar – the NSF won two successive elections and governed during the first six years of the transition period. The strategy that the renamed communists in Bulgaria employed was more successful than that of the opposition, starting with the Round Table negotiations. The institutional arrangements, agreed upon during the talks, included the adoption of a mixed proportional system, favoring the socialist party. In addition, the representatives of the old regime kept power on local level, which gave them further organizational advantage. That allowed BSP to gain majority in the first parliament without claiming a majority of the popular vote. The case of Romania displayed an even stronger control of the communist-successor party over the institutional arrangements. The self-appointed caretaker government of the NSF was able to shape the institutions at will. Its leader Iliescu assumed the role of president without being elected. NSF won a sound victory in the first elections, claiming almost two-thirds of the popular vote. At this first phase of the

transition, the Romanian successor party exercised full control of the system. BSP was also dominating the Bulgarian party system, although to a lesser extent because of the more consolidated opposition in Bulgaria. NSF's dominance over the initial phase of transition was illustrated by the fact that Iliescu became the only former communist leader elected president in the ECE region.

The dominance of the communist-successor parties continued in the period after the first elections in Bulgaria and Romania. The retained position in power allowed BSP to remain solid. On the other side the opposition, represented by the UDF, was divided in its attitude towards the socialist imposed agenda for adopting a new constitution. These internal divisions prevented the UDF from winning a majority in the 1991 elections, although the cumulative vote for all the resulting factions would have been enough to secure more than 50% of the seats in parliament. As a result of that and further divisions within the parliamentary group of UDF, its minority government fell after slightly more than a year in office. However, based on the existing literature and publicly accessible data, it is not possible to claim that BSP held direct responsibility for the failure of the UDF government. On the other hand, the chronological analysis of the events after 1989 shows a stable pattern – BSP was firmly ahead of the competition in terms of strategy. It managed to achieve favorable institutional arrangements and did not suffer an outright electoral loss until 1997. Thus, 1997 can be identified as the year when the communist-successor party lost any advantage over the opposition as it remained an opposition party until the completion of the UDF four-year term in power.

The NSF was not as solid as the Bulgarian socialists and a breakaway faction under the leadership of Petre Roman, which kept the original name of the party, managed to secure representation in parliament. However, the Iliescu led faction, under the name DNSF won the elections and formed a government backed by the other parties which had roots in the

previous regime – the nationalists and the Socialist Party of Labor. Thus, the communist-successor parties in Romania were able to govern the country in the first six years after the beginning of the changes.

My initial hypothesis of the effect of the strong communist-successor parties over the format of the party system found confirmation in the Bulgarian case. There, the number of relevant parties did not go over three for the whole 1989-1997 period due to the considerable influence and electoral size of the BSP. I have based my analysis on election-to-election calculations but results are the same if we take the period as a whole. BSP, UDF and MRF were the parties that participated in the governments and altered the competition. Smaller parties such as the PU and BBB managed to enter parliament but did not have influence there. This tendency is reflected in the effective number of parties index which held steady values between 2.41 and 2.73 in four consecutive elections. The outright character of the party system was a two-party one although the MRF was able to provide the swing vote during the 1991-1994 period. Apart from that time frame, single-party governments of either the BSP or the UDF were formed.

Romania displayed a higher number of relevant parties for the whole period of analysis. The relevant parties for 1989-1997 are the PRSD, DCR, DAHR, SDU and the nationalist PRNU and GRP. In comparison to Bulgaria, DAHR is the counterpart of the Turkish-ethnic MRF, while DCR represents the united democratic opposition. At first glance it seems that the higher number of relevant parties in Romania marks a different pattern of party system formation but we should also take the character and origin of the parties into account. Based on their ideology and coalition preferences, PRNU and GRP also qualify as parties close to the previous regime. SDU also started as a breakaway faction from the communist-successor NSF. The conclusions that can be drawn are that the umbrella organization formula employed by the communist-successors in Romania enhanced the fractionalization of the party system,

which in turn increased the number of relevant parties. I argue that the umbrella organization format of the NSF was influenced by the character of the communist regime. The highly-repressive sultanistic rule of Ceauşescu made the preservation of the Romanian Communist Party impossible and thus, a new political organization was needed in order to give legitimacy for the communist-successors.

The fact that the PR electoral system with a relatively low threshold of 4 percent did not produce more than three relevant parties comes to show the salience of the "communism-anticommunism" cleavage in the first years of the Bulgarian transition. Apart from MRF which benefited from the steady vote of the Turkish minority, the party system consisted of the relatively solid blocks BSP and UDF, divided mainly by their attitude towards the previous regime. Populist rhetoric proved to be successful in the short-term providing representation for the BBB. However, after two consecutive elections in which the party was represented, the BBB broke apart, lost its parliamentary group[118] and never managed to recover as a significant political subject. PU was able to emerge as an autonomous subject in the center-right side of the political spectrum in the 1994 elections but rejoined the UDF-led Allied Democratic Forces in 1997.

In the case of Romania, the "communism-anticomunism" divide was also strong but its impact on the system was modified by the strong inter-ethnic tensions. Unlike in Bulgaria, here the appearance of a party of the ethnic minority provoked the rise of nationalist parties. In addition, the electoral threshold in Romania was lower and nationalists secured their first appearance in parliament with electoral results under the 4% level.

The overall conclusion, after observing the formation and development of the Bulgarian party system in its first seven years, is that the communist-successor BSP was the most influential party. It was able to withstand the challenge of the inexperienced opposition and stay in power for almost the whole period. The opposition needed seven years in order to

organize and score a decisive electoral victory. The party system format between 1989 and 1997 reflected these tendencies and the main line of competition was between the anti-communist UDF and the communist-successor BSP. This classic two-pole structure of the system was challenged just in 2001 when new political actors, employing mainly populist rhetoric entered the Bulgarian political arena.

A similar pattern of dominance of the NSF (later DNSF) over the party system is displayed during the first six years of the Romanian transition. The party won the first two democratic elections and governed the country until 1996, while its leader Iliescu was president with strong prerogatives. Unlike Bulgaria, there was not even a brief period of dominance of the democratic opposition. The sharp line of change in Romania is 1996 with the election victory of the democratic opposition. Similarly to Bulgaria, the electoral defeat of the communist-successors provoked the need for reform and already in 2000-2001 BSP and RPSD were closer to the image of social-democratic parties, embracing the membership of both countries in the EU and NATO as their strategic goals.

One of the possibilities for further research is a comparative study between the party systems of countries which experienced different types of communist rule – for example comparison between Bulgaria, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The conclusions of such a study will put in comparative perspective communist-successor parties of different strengths and the influence they were able to exercise over the respective party systems.

The findings of this paper can be used as a basis of analysis of the party systems of countries with pre-democratic regime type close to that of Bulgaria and Romania – Serbia, Macedonia, and to some extent Slovakia. Naturally, the specifics of the respective national minorities should be taken into account, given the role that ethnic minority parties played in Bulgarian and Romanian politics. The main feature of the present analysis that is applicable to

[118] At least 10 MPs are needed to form and sustain a parliamentary group in the Bulgarian National Assembly.

other countries is the explanation of the strength of communist-successor parties and their impact on the party system as a whole.

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