EUROPEANIZATION OF MOLDOVAN POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE ABSENCE OF EU MEMBERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Europeanization has become a household name in political science and public policy research. Yet, the niche of political party Europeanization, particularly in non-EU and non-candidate countries, is often overlooked. The purpose of this research is to identify the extent of Europeanization witnessed by Moldovan political parties and how this process affects the country's aspirations of European integration. Political party Europeanization is conceptualized by means of addressing programmatic change, relations beyond the national political system, and patterns of party competition. Qualitative content analysis of party manifestos reveals the nature and degree of the Europeanization of political discourse. The level of ties with fellow European party federations confirms the trend of increased Europeanization. Questionnaires with leading politicians and lawmakers offer further insights into the political party Europeanization process in a non candidate country. Coalition behaviour points to the impact of Europeanization on the European integration process. Increased Europeanization is not matched by tangible improvements in the country's democracy, human rights and anti-corruption rankings. Neither does it considerably further Moldova's European integration goal. Hence, we are presented with a case of Potemkin Europeanization in which political parties employ the Europeanization discourse as a legitimation devise. Actor-centred constructivism offers a persuasive explanation, emphasising that actors are not selflessly embedded in the social structures, but use discourse in a strategic way. This, it turn, raises important questions about the process of socialization and lesson learning in the absence of EU membership driven conditionality. The study also raises questions about the effectiveness of good governance assistance and EU's normative power in a highly contested geopolitical environment.

List of Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
ADEPT	Association for Participatory Democracy
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
AEI	Alliance for European Integration
AMN	Alliance Our Moldova
BMD	Democratic Moldova Block
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EL	European Left
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
IPP	Institute of Public Policy
IRI	International Republican Institute
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PCRM	Party of Communists of Republic of Moldova

PDM	Democratic Party of Moldova
PES	Party of European Socialists
PL	Liberal Party
PLDM	Liberal Democrat Party of Moldova
PPEM	European People's Party of Moldova
PSRM	Party of Socialists of Republic of Moldova

Introduction

Europeanization process is a reality, not only within the European Union, but also beyond its borders. By making the outside world a mirror reflection of internal EU dynamics, the Union legitimizes its domestic construction and ensures lower costs of interaction with the external world (Schimmelfennig, 2009:10). The rate and effectiveness of Europeanization depends on the applicability and compatibility of EU rules and norms with any given foreign environment. Europeanization appears more effective in EU's immediate neighbourhood (Epstein and Sedelmeier, 2008:798), particularly where conditionality driven by a membership or potential membership perspective is applied. Yet, in the absence of conditionality, socialization and lesson-drawing can also bring a substantial contribution to norm internalization (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005:9). Europeanization related changes can also take place because countries perceive EU norms and values as appropriate and accurate solutions for domestic uncertainties.

A neighbouring but not yet a candidate country, the Republic of Moldova is a case in point. European integration has long been supported by an overwhelming majority of the Moldovan public. Only in the last two years the Russian-backed Customs Union, now already the Eurasian Economic Union, became a serious contender, rivalling EU integration (IPP, 2015:75). Thus, the previously existing political consensus was discontinued. Since political parties are the main drivers of the political process in a parliamentary system of government, this research assesses the different levels of Europeanization of each of the leading political parties in Moldova by addressing the variation among them in terms of their commitment to European integration (expressed in party platforms) and the level of ties with fellow European party families as well as

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how that affects coalition behaviour in a parliamentary system. This research would contribute towards a better understanding of Europeanization of political parties in a non-candidate country. It is particularly illustrative in the case of Moldova for understanding the power dynamics at the domestic level and how the EU can also be used as a legitimation device by political parties. This research is innovative and aims to address the gap in the literature, in light of the fact that this niche has been largely overlooked by researchers of Europeanization.

This study will be guided by two research question: a) How do levels of Europeanization differ among the five leading political parties? b) What is the impact of these differences on the country's European integration policy? The research has the following objectives: to find out how politicians perceive the importance of EU integration; to reveal how political parties benefit from their ties with fellow European party families; to compare, contrast and rank major national political parties in terms of their level of Europeanization; to analyze coalition behaviour from the Europeanization perspective; to assess the impact of different levels of party Europeanization on European integration policy. Importantly, European integration has become central to the debate about the future of Moldova, its foreign policy and the relation to its immediate neighbours, as well as economic, energy and other areas of policy-making, which are inter-related. European integration has become an overarching policy discourse that permeates almost all national policy areas, even in the absence of a formal membership perspective.

The study begins with the 2005 parliamentary elections, because a series of internal and external watershed events laid the ground work for Moldova's Europeanization. Unlike 2001, when the Party of Communists ran on a pro-Russian message (Volnitchi, 2010:69), the party turned towards Europe in the 2005 election. As all leading opposition parties were manifestly pro-European, the 2005 election was the time Moldova came closest it has ever been to a

national political consensus about the country's European agenda. The study looks at how the Europeanization of political parties has evolved since that turning point and assesses the impact of this evolution on the country's EU integration policy.

Chapter one provides a detailed literature review on current Europeanization debates, looking at developments both within EU borders and beyond. It then specifically addresses the conceptualization of political party Europeanization by pointing out a research gap in the existing literature and ultimately laying out a complex methodological approach for addressing that gap. The second chapter begins with an introduction to the Moldovan political system and explains the evolution of political parties in the last decade, only to then present the empirical findings of this research, which assesses the different levels of Europeanization among leading political parties. The final part of the chapter offers a theoretical explanation for the empirical evidence presented, addressing the impact of political party Europeanization on Moldova's European integration policy.

Chapter 1. The Many Faces of Europeanization

Europeanization is a multifaceted theoretical approach. It has become increasingly fashionable, but remains highly contested (Olsen, 2002:921). It may refer to such general notions as Westernization, democratization, 'return to Europe' or a more narrow understanding of processes accompanying European integration. Moreover, Europeanization is also used in the context of European identity. As a result, the literature abounds with definitions of Europeanization. However, it is not only member and candidate states, but also potential candidate countries, such as Moldova, that fall under some of these broad concepts. Conditionality and the logic of appropriateness can be applied to scrutinize Europeanization even in countries that lack a membership perspective, but where EU is an integral part of the policy debates. Hence, the following sections will present a detailed literature review in three parts. The main part offers a detailed overview of the Europeanization literature (1.1), followed by an account of political party Europeanization debates (1.2), as well as a summary of exiting literature on Moldovan political parties (2.1).

1.1 Defining Europeanization within and beyond EU: a Literature Review

One of the first attempts to define Europeanization belongs to Robert Ladrech, who contended that "Europeanization is an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making" (1994: 69). Whereas, Risse, Cowles and Caporaso focus on distinct governance structures and institutions at the European level, which create authoritative European rules though the interaction of actor and policy networks (2001: 3).

Héritier provides three successive elements of Europeanization: the European decisions, which trigger processes that in turn impact national policies and institutions (Héritier et. al., 2001:3). Radaelli talks about three avenues of norm institutionalization by means of "(a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies" (2003: 30). This vast array of viewpoints has led some to question the usefulness of the concept altogether (Olsen, 2002:922), but abandoning it without a better alternative is not a viable option either.

These definitions are not necessarily competing, but rather complementary. They all see Europeanization as a process of 'rule export' and/or 'institutional approximation'. Even though they are seemingly designed to cover mostly member states and candidate countries, these insights can also be applied to nations aspiring to join the EU. For this, it is imperative to look at what drives such an 'export' or 'approximation' from both the EU and domestic perspectives. Schimmelfennig (2009:10) provides a useful lens when employing the concept of 'domestic analogy'. By making the outside world a mirror reflection of its internal dynamics, EU legitimizes its domestic construction and ensures lower costs of interaction with the external world. The intensity of such process depends on the applicability and compatibility of EU rules in foreign environments, better known as the 'degree of misfit'. Another useful frame comes from the toolbox of sociological institutionalism. The notion of 'institutional isomorphism' can also be helpful in explaining certain domestic changes resulting from long term interactions between institutional structures (Börzel and Risse, 2003:10).

Europeanization process seems to be more intense in the immediate EU neighbourhood, given the conditionality mechanisms implied by membership or potential membership perspective (Sedelmeier, 2011:17). Schimmelfennig (2009:9) emphasizes two important characteristics for the success of democratic conditionality in the pre-accession negotiation phase: a) a credible promise of eventual membership; b) a low cost of adopting democratic and human rights norms, therefore minimizing the threat to regime survival. Yet, conditionality is not the only mechanism of Europeanization, particularly beyond the EU. Socialization and lesson-drawing can also contribute to the 'export of rules and norms' in the absence of conditionality. In some cases such changes take place because countries perceive EU norms appropriate and accurate solutions for domestic uncertainties (Schimmelfennig, 2009:9). Furthermore, EU is pro-active in 'socializing' outside entities by persuading them about the benefits of doing things the 'European way' by spearheading multilateral platforms like ENP and, more specifically, Mediterranean Union and Eastern Partnership, albeit with mixed results.

The vast discrepancy in approximation can partially be explained by the different degrees of suitability between EU's policies, institutions and norms compared to those of third countries (Barbe et al., 2009:380). Rational choice theory suggests that approximation is possible when a cost-benefit analysis overcomes these high costs of 'misfit', particularly in more tangible areas like institutions and policies. However, EU's normative attractiveness is not universal. Its role as a 'civilizing power' or even 'post-modern empire' might have worked in central and eastern Europe, but has repeatedly failed in the Arab world (Zielonka, 2013:37). Thus, not everyone is equally enthused about EU's credentials as a normative power. Some have pointed out the shortcoming of 'a one size fits all approach' (Bicchi, 2006:286), while others scrutinized its dominating tendencies (Merlingen, 2007:438) and hegemonic undertones (Diez, 2013:200),

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ultimately rendering it ineffective and semantically 'empty' notion (Pace, 2007:1060). Yet, criticism only makes the research field richer.

In the process of policy convergence, there are three important variables that determine the degree and the quality of change. Firstly, structure of incentives determines the level of mutual interest of both the EU and the third country in moving towards convergence. Secondly, mutual perceptions and legitimacy contribute to the socialization dimension of the convergence process. Thirdly, intra-EU coherence determines the capacity of power projection, which, in turn, boosts the likelihood of effective convergence (Barbe et al., 2009:385). All these variables indicate an EU-driven nature of convergence. Unsurprisingly, this model works in the context of asymmetric relations, defined in terms of political, economical and cultural power. The model, therefore, fits the pattern of EU-Moldova relations, which started from a 'partnership' approach in the 1990s. It was underpinned by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1994 (enforced 1998). It evolved towards 'external governance' in the 2000s under the EU-Moldova Action Plan (2005) (part of the ENP). Currently, economic integration and political association is underway with the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, which includes a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. The document was signed on June 27, 2014 and provisionally implemented since late 2014, pending ratification by all signatories. This ongoing evolution and institutionalization of partnership presents many challenges to the EU and Moldova alike. What Korosteleva refers to as "slips into the vicious circle of the unproductive and rigid governance approach" (2013:32) through top-down rule transfer remains, indeed, an inefficient foundation for partnership and, even less so, for potential membership talks, as evidenced by the rather critical Council conclusions on Moldova (Council of the EU, 2016) after yet another national political crisis.

All these developments have influenced the nature of Europeanization process, introducing and strengthening conditionality mechanisms, while further promoting socialization and lesson-drawing tools. In the absence of formal EU membership perspective, the case of Moldova presents an interesting research opportunity as Europeanization process is underpinned by a strong, yet dwindling, domestic support base that could potentially replace or rather augment external conditionality with an even more potent internal drive for approximation. This is where political parties play a crucial role as gatekeepers of political power and, consequently, of public policy. Therefore, studying how Europeanization affects political parties will reveal important insights about the intricacies of party system Europeanization within and, more importantly for the scope of this research, beyond the EU.

1.2 Conceptualizing Europeanization of Political Parties

Europeanization of political parties is a relatively new field of research, despite the fact that political parties have become increasingly present at the European level ever since the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979. According to Ladrech (2009:4), during the first decades of European integration researchers focused primarily on domestic explanations for changes in political party systems. However, with the deepening of European integration in late 1980s and early 1990s, Europeanization, as a driver of domestic change, including in the realm of political parties, could no longer be ignored. Even then, the impact of Europe on political parties could only be described as indirect.

In his seminal paper 'The Limited Impact of Europe on National Political Parties,' Mair (2000) finds little evidence that European integration affects the format and the mechanics of political parties directly. Instead the realm in which parties operate changes as EU imposes policy constraints on national governments composed of political parties. An explanation for the

absence of any spill-over into the national political party system may be derived from the lack of a genuine European-level party system, instead there are, what Mair calls, 'proto-Europarties'- "disaggregated into collections of national parties that enjoy loosely defined cross-national links" (2000:38). The common perception of European elections as second-order elections (Norris and Reif, 1997; Marsh, 1998; Schmitt, 2005; Hix and Marsh, 2011) further undermines the prospects of a true Euro-party system. Yet, latest developments surrounding the 'spitzenkandidat' process may boost the standing of EU-wide parties should a genuine executive electoral arena emerge at the EU level.

However, Europeanization researchers have increasingly made a distinction between how political parties are affected by EU related processes in old and new member states (Sedelmeier, 2006; Lewis 2007; Ladrech, 2009; Pigeonnier, 2012). EU's influence over Central and Eastern European countries has been more comprehensive and explicit, given the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* (Sedelmeier 2006: 4). Even so, there is no denying that there are very few direct effects on parties in either old or new members. The most obvious is the appearance of new parties running on a clear pro or anti-European agenda. Yet, this development is negligible in old member states, according to Mair (2000:30), who finds that only three parties out of 140 that emerged between 1960 and 1998 in 12 member states were linked directly to European integration. On the other hand, the number and influence of EU linked parties in new member states of CEE is sizable and is likely to play an increasingly larger role (Lewis, 2007:16). There is very extensive and rapidly growing literature on Europeanization of political parties in CEE region. Many authors concentrate on the 'return to Europe' mentality that created a political consensus powerful enough to undertake required democratization reforms (Pridham 2001;

Hloušek and Pšeja 2009; Whitefield and Rohrschneider 2009; Berge and Poguntke 2013). That is however only one side of the story.

There is also a healthy dose of criticism, suggesting that much of the political system transformation was in fact a type of 'Potemkin Europeanization' (Jacoby, 1999:62), which created a temporary 'camouflage effect' as a result of overreliance on conditionality rather than socialization (Mikulova, 2014:164). Therefore, it is not surprising that the overall consensus made room for another common thread - the rise of Euroscepticism across CEE countries, particularly in the post accession phase. Some studies have distinguished between hard and soft Euroscepticism (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002:28), while others emphasized its multidimensional institutional and identity-based aspects (Riishøj, 2007:503; Vasilopoulou, 2013:155). Thus, studying how these various aspects of Europeanization affect the Moldovan political party system will reveal important insights about the nature of political Europeanization in a non candidate country.

1.3 Research Gap and Methodology

As political party Europeanization is a relatively new field of research, covering primarily EU member states and, to a lesser extent, candidate countries, it should come as no surprise that there is hardly any published work of the topic pertaining to Moldova. Nonetheless, there is a growing literature on Europeanization and conflict resolution, addressing the Transnistrian settlement process (Popescu, 2004; Iftode, 2012; Steglich, 2011). Some authors have looked at Europeanization in Moldova through the lenses of nation building (March, 2007), while others have addressed a specific policy areas such as migration (Marcu, 2014), education (Nesterenco, 2013; Zichner, 2013) or media (Nicolae, 2009). However, there has been seemingly no attempt to examine the impact of Europeanization on Moldovan political parties; despite the fact that the

country is a parliamentary democracy and Europeanization discourse has long become a focal point of electoral campaigns. Notably, the last six coalition governments have all been manifestly pro-European, taking on the names: the 'Alliance for European Integration' and the 'Pro-European Coalition'. This study comes to fill in this gap in the literature by assessing the degree of political party Europeanization as well as its impact on European integration policy. Moldova was chosen as a case study because it was perceived as a success story of Europeanization among the Eastern Partnership members (Boonstra, 2011; Sobják, 2013). Hence, study could be replicated for countries that present a most similar case such as Georgia and Ukraine, and could potentially be useful for understanding developments in the remaining three Eastern Partnership countries Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and beyond.

The study looks at whether Moldova's increased ties with the EU, stemming from the country's declared commitment towards European integration, have had an impact on national political parties. In this regard, Ladrech (2009:6) provides a useful framework for analyzing Europeanization of political parties, suggesting five units of analysis: a) programmatic change as reflected in party manifestos; b) organizational change and structural adaptation; c) patterns of party competition; d) party-government relations; and e) relations beyond the national political system primarily with fellow European party federations.

This research follows a social constructivist approach, with an emphasis on actor-centred constructivism. Hence, Europeanization of Moldovan political parties will be conceptualized by employing March and Olsens's 'logic of appropriateness' (2006:8). Given Moldova's non-candidate status, some of Ladrech's (2009:6) criteria apply better than others. We focused on just three criteria: 'programmatic change' (how committed parties are to EU integration in their party manifestos and electoral platforms), 'relations beyond the national political system' (how

connected parties are with fellow party families in the EU) as well as 'patterns of party competition' (how important EU becomes in national elections and how it impacts coalition behaviour) (ibid.). In fact, the third criterion has been amended to also include coalition behaviour, which represents a methodological innovation and an expansion of the initial framework. It allows us to account for Moldova's multi-party proportional representation system and significant party fragmentation, which is addressed at length in section 2.2.

The remaining two criteria suggested by Ladrech are less relevant for Moldova's case, as there have been hardly any significant changes in terms of party organization or the pattern of party-government relations (Volnitchi, 2015). Consequently, this research looks into how Europeanization of national parties is reflected in terms of growing salience of European issues and how parties adapt their positions towards Europe, including in terms of coalition behaviour. Herein, Europeanization is defined as a process of reorientation towards Europe (Ladrech, 1994: 69; Enyedi and Lewis, 2007: 247) and operationalized in terms of changes in party platforms, relations with European party federations and coalition behaviour (Ladrech, 2009:4).

For this, qualitative content analysis of party manifestos will be used. This research is grounded on the notion "that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments" (Myers, 2008:38). Rejecting "the objectivist view that meaning resides within the world independently of consciousness" (Collins, 2010:38), the study considers human agents as dependent on "their social environment and its collectively shared systems of meanings" (Risse, 2004:145). From a constructivist perspective, the EU has a profound impact on behavioural practices, becoming part and parcel of the 'social furniture' which social and political actors routinely interact with (Risse, 2004:148). However, actors are not selflessly embedded in the social structures, but can use

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discourse in a strategic way to further their goals. The strain of 'actor-centred' constructivism offers a persuasive explanation for such developments (Georgakakis and Weisbein, 2010; Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004; Saurugger, 2013) by addressing the complexity of policy-making processes in the EU, including though the prism of legitimation (Saurugger, 2013:898).

Hence, an interpretivist approach will be employed to analyze the questionnaires filled in by eleven Members of Parliament (from the total of 101) during the summer of 2015. Furthermore, electoral platforms of the five major political parties have been analyzed. A set of key words (European Union, EU integration, European values, return to Europe, etc) were used to build data sets, establishing frequencies of these terms in order to assess the degree of variation among political parties. The study relies on the Manifesto Project coding methodology. Three analytical variables (per108 - European Union: Positive; per202 – Democracy; per304 - Corruption) are used to evaluate change in party manifestoes. Parties will then be ranked in terms of how strongly their main policy documents reflect their commitment to European integration, including EU norms and values.

At the same time, research will address the status of relations among Moldovan political parties and their fellow European party federations. Herein, the questionnaires filled in by politicians will also be instrumental in revealing the level of engagement and benefits Moldovan parties gain resulting from institutional ties with fellow European party federations. Ultimately, the research will focus on how important the EU becomes in the context of national elections, how this impacts coalition behaviour, as there have been ten governments in power over the last decade, despite only five parliamentary elections.

The study begins with the 2005 elections, because a series of internal and external watershed events laid the ground work for Moldova's Europeanization. Domestically, it was the failed Kozak memorandum[1] of 2003 that severed relation with Russia and pushed the ruling Communist party to change the country's foreign policy course towards the EU, leading to a stronger political dialog and the adoption of the EU-Moldova Action Plan in 2005 (Buscaneanu, 2008:18). On the external front, it was the launch of the ENP in 2003, and, more importantly, Romania joining the EU in, which ensured that Moldova would share a border with the EU.

Based on the findings, relevant inferences will be drawn from comparing and explaining the differences among political parties in terms of their level of Europeanization, based on three criteria: programmatic change, relations with European party federations and coalition behaviour. It would allow for generalizations about the nature of the broader political consensus, or lack thereof, regarding European integration in light of each party's level of Europeanization. In light of a single case study, the research is limited in terms of its generalization capacity. Furthermore, party platforms vary in terms of how elaborate they are in outlining their commitments and their positions on different aspects of European integration. This may be mitigated to an extent by employing discourse analysis and, even more so, by making use of the questionnaires conducted with party officials. Thus, the study presents an innovative and comprehensive research agenda that can be applied to comparative studies of political parties in the European neighbourhood, particularly in Eastern Partnership countries.

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[1] Kozak Memorandum (officially Russian Draft Memorandum on the Basic Principles of the State Structure of a United State in Moldova) was a 2003 Russian proposal to establish an asymmetrical federation in Moldova, providing a settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. The memorandum was rejected by the Moldovan side.

Chapter 2. Europeanization of Moldovan Political Parties

Having declared its independence form USSR on August 27, 1991, the Republic of Moldova is a relatively new country. From its very inception the country has struggled with secessionist movements, economic shocks, political instability and endemic corruption. A concept coined two decades ago describes well Moldova's predicament after independence and remains relevant to this day. According to Lucan Way, "Moldova is best understood not as a struggling or unconsolidated democracy but instead as a case of failed authoritarianism or 'pluralism by default'" (2003: 454). However, Moldovan political party system remains volatile and prone to crises (Volnitchi, 2010; 2015). Thus, analyzing the effects of Europeanization is all the more important.

The following sections provide an account of Europeanization of the Moldovan political system, with a primary focus on the country's leading political parties. The first section offers an overview of the political system and a historic evolution of national political parties. Section two details the findings resulting from the qualitative analysis of party manifestos, revealing the nature and degree of party Europeanization. Finally, section three looks at coalition behaviour and the impact of political party Europeanization on the country's European integration policy.

2.1. Background on Moldovan Political Parties

Ever since the constitutional reform of year 2000, Moldova has been a parliamentary republic. Legislative elections take place within a proportional representation system based on closed national party lists in one national constituency. Independent candidates have never made it into Parliament as the 2% threshold proved insurmountable. Thus, political parties are the only

vehicles for political representation at the national level. In light of the proportional electoral system, there is significant political fragmentation (Cernencu and Botan, 2009:44). As of May 2016, there are 44 registered political parties. Out of the 24 parties that participated in the last parliamentary election only 5 passed the 6% threshold (table 1) (Volnitchi, 2015). Fifteen extra-parliamentary parties can be described as active, while another 23 are dormant and often referred to as 'plankton parties' (Botan, 2010; Florea, 2013). The last six five years have witnessed a boom in new party registrations, with 17 parties established in this period alone.

In order to illustrate the fragmentation, politicization, and personalization of the political system in Moldova, a brief historical evolution is needed. For the last decade, the five political parties in Parliament have been at the core of the Moldovan party system: Socialists, Communists, Democrats, Liberal Democrats and Liberals (Volnitchi, 2015). However, despite being shielded by a relatively high parliamentary threshold of 6%, according to the latest polls, these parties are being challenged by newly created political groupings (IRI, 2015, 2016), fuelling the already high levels of political instability (Calus, 2015).

The study focuses on these five parties as the units of observation. In January 2016, two of these parties (PDM and PL), with a helping hand from several lawmakers, who defected from other parties, have (re)created for the sixth time in six years a governing coalition. All five previous coalitions had a manifestly pro-European discourse as parties ran on a clear European integration agenda. In fact, Liberals ran with the slogan: "With PL to the NATO and EU family!" While Liberal Democrats promised to "Go forward towards a European future." Democrats chose to simply "Grow Moldova!" (ADEPT, 2014). Democrats have always been more cautious not to overinvest in their relationship with Europe at the expense of severing relations with Russia and alienating the more pro-Russian electorate.

Opposition parties, both Communists and Socialists, are against the idea of European integration, but to a varying degree. Communists tend to be somewhat more lenient, while Socialists are staunchly opposed; preferring integration into the Russia led Eurasian Economic Union (Volnitchi, 2015). Thus, unlike other countries in the region, Moldova's Europhile vs. anti-European or Eurosceptic axis folds well into the right vs. left ideological spectrum, with some important exceptions. This is largely because, similarly to some post-communist countries (Enyedi, 2007; Lewis, 2007), a Moldovan political party's position on the ideological spectrum is determined to a large extent by its assessment of the Soviet past and by the party's current foreign policy stance. This has prompted leading Moldovan political scientists and former Ambassador Oleg Serebrian to label local political parties as geo-political (Serebrian as cited by Botan, 2009). Yet, if the East vs. West geopolitical fault line was more abstract before, the antagonism has become manifest in the last decade, following the conflicts in Georgia 2008 and, particularly, Ukraine 2014.

In line with the foreign policy deterministic tradition, even in the case of Moldova's non-candidate status, political parties have clearly established their position on European integration, creating two opposing camps, thus limiting their own space for manoeuvre (Mair, 2007:159). Moldova's framework of cooperation with the EU started from a PCA. It evolved towards an EU-Moldova Action Plan and the current EU-Moldova AA. In light of this progress, an entire legislative agenda had to be approved by Parliament, directly constraining the policy options of the political parties in power. This is one example of the lock-in effect of Europeanization. Policy constrains increased as the country moves from the rather flexible PCA, towards the more institutionalized EU-Moldova Action Plan. The Action Plan was an operational instrument for the implementation of the ENP (Buscaneanu, 2008:16). After several extensions, the Action Plan

was replaced in 2014 by the much more ambitious EU-Moldova Association Agreement, which laid the ground work for economic integration and political association with the EU. Strong implementation mechanisms were introduced to ensure compliance with the numerous binding provisions and regulatory prescriptions, especially with regards to the DCFTA. Thus, policy choices became constrained by the path dependent process of Europeanization.

Another clear impact of Europeanization on the local party system was the creation of new parties solely devoted to European integration. The currently inactive European Party was founded in 2005. European Action Movement Party was created in 2007, only to be merged with PL in 2011. Most notably, former Prime Minister Iurie Leanca defected from PLDM and launched his own political project in 2015 – European People's Party of Moldova (Teleradio-Moldova, 2015). However, despite the generally accepted view in Moldovan society that a party is either pro-European or anti-European, this simple categorization requires more nuance to better explain party positions on sensitive matters, particularly when it comes to forming coalitions, which can sometimes defy the simple political logic driven by a foreign policy deterministic viewpoint.

2.2. Nature and Degree of Europeanization among Political Parties

As local parties evolved, so did their views on Moldova's ties with Europe. This section maps out the pan-European ties of Moldovan political parties, while also presenting the findings of the qualitative analysis of party platforms, assessing how this evolution contributes to the Europeanization of political discourse. The findings indicate increasing Europeanization of political parties, both in terms of discourse and institutional integration into European party federations. Yet, when contrasted with actual progress on the European integration agenda, the reality presents a puzzling picture.

Most of the leading political parties have established formal ties with fellow European party federations (table 1). Still, only Liberals and Communists are full members of their respective European party groups, the rest are either associate or observer members or have no formal links at all. This is another indication of convergence, albeit a slow and tedious one. Interestingly, accusations of threatening the course of EU integration have already become a weapon of political competition. In fact, the last three parliamentary campaigns have been transformed by the ruling pro-EU coalition into a referendum on Moldova's EU integration (Botan, 2014). This is only partially a result of Europeanization, and more a deliberate strategy by ruling parties to deflect public attention from the poor state of the economy. Nonetheless, the fact that pro-EU discourse has become so ubiquitous is an indication of indirect Europeanization, as evidenced earlier in candidate countries of CEE (Sedelmeier, 2006; Lewis, 2007; Ladrech, 2009). Political parties are strategic in employing the 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen, 2006:8) when constructing their Europeanization discourse using it as a legitimation devise. Further research will examine these preliminary findings in more detail by employing a rigorous methodological toolkit.

Table 1. *European and international affiliation of the five parties elected to Parliament in 2014.*

Party name/ Year founded	Position on the Spectrum/ Ideology	European Affiliation Year/Status	International Affiliation Year/Status
Liberal Party (PL), 1993	Right, Conservative Liberalism, Pro-Europeanism	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), 2010 – Member	None
Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM), 2008	Centre-right, Liberal Conservatism, Pro-Europeanism	European People's Party (EPP), 2011 – Observer	International Democrat Union, 2011– Observer, 2014 – Full member
Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) 1997	Centre-left, Social democracy, Pro-Europeanism	Party of European Socialists (PES), 2010 – Observer; 2015 – Associate Member	Socialist International, 2007 – Observer; 2008 – Consultative member; 2012 – Full member
Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) 1994	Left, Marxism–Leninism, Democratic Socialism, Euro-scepticism	Party of the European Left (EL), 2007–Full Member	Union of Communist Parties – Communist Party of the Soviet Union Full Member
Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), 1997	Left, Democratic Socialism, Anti-Europeanism	None	International Union of Socialist Oriented Parties - Eurasian Socialist Congress

This research has coded and analysed 17 party platforms (176 pages), spanning five parliamentary elections, covering eight political parties and electoral blocks. The data clearly shows that there has been a steady increase in Europeanization of party platforms, across the political spectrum. However, there are important exceptions during the 2009 and 2010 elections

as well as large variations across parties and across election cycles. Hence, the data does not quite speak for itself and needs interpretation by means of a conceptual framework. Social constructivism and historical institutionalism will be employed to provide an explanation for this puzzle, but first we need to present the data.

The electoral manifestos of the three main contenders in the 2005 elections indicate a clear interest and support of European integration agenda across party lines. Predictably, Communist incumbents were less inclined to talk about issues of corruption and democracy in their campaign manifesto, whereas the opposition Democratic Moldova Bloc and the Christian Democrats placed these firmly on the agenda.

The year 2009 was a critical juncture in recent Moldovan political history. Communists won a majority in the April parliamentary elections, but fell one vote short of the 61 votes required to elect a president, triggering early elections (Volnitchi, 2010:70). Meanwhile, the so called 'Twitter Revolution'[2] (Kramer and Hill, 2009; Hale, 2013:3) assured victory for the opposition during the July early elections. Electoral manifestos reflected the turbulence of the political landscape. Communists have toned down their pro-EU message, suspecting the EU of supporting the opposition. Surprisingly, Democrats, earlier part of BMD, appeared even less pro-European, largely because they were trying to court PCRM's voters. Our Moldova Alliance, the main force in the former BMD, presented a stronger pro-European case, similar to the Liberal Democrats, which soon became the leading political force on the right and absorbed AMN in 2011. Finally, the Liberals emphasised Moldova's European identity and promoted unilateral adoption of European standards and legislative harmonization in all policy areas.

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[2] Twitter Revolution – April 2009 civil unrest in Moldova in reaction to claims of mass electoral fraud in the April 5 parliamentary elections, won by the governing PCRM.

Even though opposition parties united in a ruling coalition against the Communists, the AEI failed to elect a president and another early election followed in November 2010. Communists, now in opposition to the AEI, toned down their pro-European rhetoric. Unlike 2009, Democrats boosted their pro-EU discourse, trying to prove their pro-European credentials. Having been the senior coalition partner, Liberals Democrats could rest on their laurels as the standard bearer of pro-EU discourse, having the most Europeanized platform.

Regular parliamentary elections in November 2014 have produced the meteoric rise of the anti-European Party of Socialists, which is against European integration and promotes the alternative Russia driven Eurasian Union in its platform (Volnitchi, 2015:66). Interestingly, faced for the first time with a powerful contender running on a clear anti-European message, Communists did not become less pro-European, but rather slightly more. Whereas, Democrats chose the opposites tactic, with a slightly less Europeanized platform compared to 2010. Liberal Democrats, no longer taking their European credentials for granted, put up their most Europeanized platform yet. These developments are important as they affect coalition behaviour and political ties with European party federations.

Interestingly, it is the two ends of the political spectrum - Communists and Liberals that are full members of the European Left and ALDE, respectively. Communists had an absolute majority in Parliament when they were welcomed to EL in 2007 – no other party from the European Left had such achievements at the time. Consequently, two PCRM members were elected to the EL Executive Board, (ADEPT, 2016). However, given its limited power within EU institutions, EL could do little to influence developments in Moldova.

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In contrast, during 2011-2015 ALDE Party President Sir Graham Watson has been very active in supporting his fellow Liberals in Moldova. Watson has been European Parliament's rapporteur on Moldova from 2009-2014. During the ALDE 2013 Congress, Watson assured PL Chairperson Mihai Ghimpu, "I'm confident that your efforts and the party's efforts are aimed at the European integration. I wish you success and I assure you of my further support and involvement" (IPN, 2013). As PL was not included in the government coalition following 2014 elections, Sir Watson reacted thusly: "It suggests that corruption and nepotism will increase and that the country has strayed from the path of European reform" (ALDE, 2015).

Even if Liberals appear to have the strongest ties with fellow EU parties, Liberal Democrats have been more instrumental in capitalizing on their relations with the most influential European party – EPP. Amidst a political crisis within the ruling collation about who should get the nomination for prime minister, longest serving EPP President Wilfried Martens fully endorsed his fellow EPP member Vlad Filat.[3] Liberal Democrats also received much sought support from fellow EPP politicians such as Angela Merkel, who paid a visit to Moldova in August 2012. Also, the third European People's Party Eastern Partnership Leaders' Summit took place in Chisinau in July 2013 (EPP, 2013), widely seen as an endorsement of PLDM's role in advancing Moldova's European aspirations.

The Democratic Party became an associate member of the Party of European Socialists at the PES 2015 Congress in Budapest, after being and observer since 2010. In fact, PES President Sergei Stanishev and the S&D Group Vice-President Knut Fleckenstein campaigned for the Democratic Party prior to the 2014 legislative elections (PES, 2014). Afterwards Stanishev

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[3] "The decision of the President of the Republic, Nicolae Timofti, to ask again the PLDM Chairman to form the government, is the only credible one which can secure the European integration path of Moldova. Vlad Filat enjoys the full support and trust of the whole EPP political family," (Wilfried Martens, cited in Palihovici, 2013).

endorsed the coalition that ADLE President Watson had criticized. "Thanks to the Democratic Party, Moldova is on the right track towards European integration, and the PES family stands by them and offers all our support and experience to facilitate the EU accession process" said the PES President (PES, 2015).

This section has shown how Moldovan political parties have become more Europeanized, as evidenced by their ties with fellow European party federations (table 1) and increased support for EU integration reflected in electoral platforms (table 2). However, in order to assess the impact of political party Europeanization, the study provides an interpretative account of 11 questioners with prominent members of Parliament, including four out of eleven members of the Committee on Foreign Policy and European Integration. Ultimately, the study will assess how all of the above-mentioned factors influence coalition behaviour and European integration policy.

Table 2. *Europeanization of Party Manifestos*[4]

	Criteria mentions per page of electoral manifestos by party in previous five legislative elections																	
Elections	2005			2009 (April/July)					2010				2014				
Parties	PCRM	BMD	PPCD	PCRM	PDM	AMN	PLDM	PL	PCRM	PDM	PLDM	PL	PSRM	PCRM	PDM	PLDM	PL
EU positive	9	9	16	9	3	10	7	45	2	26	4	48	-7	2	22	42	50
Democracy	0	5	4	3	0	5	2	6	1	7	0	18	0	4	1	1	16
Corruption	1	0	4	2	1	1	1	9	1	10	3	10	4	7	5	14	4
Total/party	**10**	**14**	**24**	**14**	**4**	**16**	**10**	**60**	**4**	**43**	**7**	**76**	**-3**	**13**	**28**	**57**	**70**
Total/year		48				104					130				165		
Seats won	*56*	*34*	*11*	*60/48*	*-/13*	*11/7*	*15/18*	*15/15*	*42*	*15*	*32*	*12*	*25*	*21*	*19*	*23*	*13*
	Criteria per page of electoral manifesto																
Nr. of pages	2	5	10	3	8	4	4	19	4	23	2	23	9	11	14	11	24
EU positive	4,5	1,8	1,6	3	0,37	2,5	1,75	2,36	0,5	1,1	2	2	-0,77	0,18	1,57	3,8	2,1
Democracy	0	1	0,4	1	0	1,25	0,5	0,3	0,25	0,3	0	0,78	0	0,36	0,07	0,09	0,66
Corruption	0,5	0	0,4	0,66	0,12	0,25	0,25	0,47	0,25	0,4	1,5	0,4	0,4	0,6	0,35	1,27	0,16
Total	**5**	**2,8**	**2,4**	**4,66**	**0,5**	**4**	**2,5**	**3,15**	**1**	**1,8**	**3,5**	**3,3**	**-0,33**	**1,18**	**2**	**5,18**	**2,9**

[4] Note: Parties are arranged based on their left-right position on the political spectrum. Communists (since 2014 Socialists) are closest to the left; while earlier Christian Democrats and now Liberals are closest to the right. Despite political science tradition, Moldovan Socialists are somewhat more leftist than their fellow Communists, largely because Socialists are an offshoot of the Communists and brand themselves as more 'purely' leftists. The lower half of the table presents the numbers of evaluation criteria (EU positive; democracy; corruption) mentions per page of each party's electoral manifesto. This is simply for the purposes of comparing manifestos of unequal size, but the result is rather screwed in case of shorter platforms.

2.3 Impact of Political Party Europeanization

After scrutinizing the nature and degree of political party Europeanization by the means of analyzing party manifestos and the level of engagement with fellow European party groups, the dissertation looks into how politicians themselves perceive the Europeanization of their parties. This will offer a more comprehensive image of the phenomenon while also helping to assess its impact. Furthermore, the study will then analyze coalition behaviour in order to discern the impact of political party Europeanization on the country's European integration policy.

The eleven Respondents represent almost eleven percent of the 101 seats in Parliament (list 1). There is at least one representative from each of the parties that passed the 6% threshold during the 2014 election. Representatives of the more pro-European parties were understandably more forthcoming than the anti-Europeans. Even so, responses varied even among members of the same party. All but the Socialists evaluated European integration as very important to their parties, with the caveat that the Euro-sceptic Communists prefer to term 'European modernization', instead of integration.

Thus, when asked "How much attention is given to EU related issues within your party," all but the Socialists answered "high" of "very high" degree of attention. When asked how this degree of attention changed in the last decade, the answers indicated an increasing salience of EU related topics across parties, with the exception of the Socialists and, to a lesser extent, the Communists. However, when asked to evaluate the degree of change in their respective party's manifestos with regards to the party's position towards the EU over the last decade, there was large variation among representatives even of the same party and results were often at odds with the findings of the qualitative analysis of party manifestos (table 2). Communists and, to a lesser extent, Liberal Democrats, saw no or very little change, when, in fact, their party's manifestos

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indicate a significant increase in support for EU integration, particularly in the case of PLDM (table 2). Still, all the respondents who indicated change described it as overwhelmingly positive towards the EU, except for the Socialists, who view the change as heading very much into the anti-European direction, which is consistent with our own findings.

Speaking of their ties with fellow EU parties, respondents evaluated those relations as important or very important. Even the Socialists, having no formal European affiliation, said those kind of relations would be somewhat important. When asked to list and rank the benefits their parties receive from European affiliation, Communists ranked socialization and networking as most important, followed by technical assistance, lobbying and domestic electoral legitimacy. Democrats cited technical assistance as most important, followed by lobbying, networking and electoral legitimacy. Liberal democrats indicated lobbying as paramount, followed by networking and legitimacy, with assistance coming in last. Similarly, Liberals find lobbying as key, followed by assistance and legitimacy, being less fond of networking (table 3).

Table 3. *How respondents perceive the benefits their parties receive from European affiliation (1 – most important; 5 – least important).*

Party / Benefit	PCRM	PDM	PLDM	PL	Total
Political support (lobby within EU structures)	4	1.5	1	1	17
Socialization and network building	2	2	2.75	2.5	24
Technical assistance (capacity building)	3.5	1	3.75	2	26
Domestic electoral legitimacy	4.5	2.5	2.75	2	29

Importantly, respondents form the three centre right parties indicated that ties with their respective European party families are influencing political and policy actions taken by their respective parties. One respondent indicated that important policy documents, including the governing program, was drafted with EPP support (Respondent Nr. 3). Another respondent emphasized the expertise provided by EPP in EU integration policy implementation and awareness raising (Respondent Nr. 4). Yet another one stressed the importance of technical assistance during the visa liberalization reform process (Respondent Nr. 2). Others have also underlined the importance of information, training and expertise provided by their fellow European party federations.

When asked to identify the most politically divisive issue on the EU integration agenda, the vast majority of respondents named the Law on Ensuring Equality passed in 2012, which for the first time, introduced 'sexual orientation' as a protected basis in employment relations. The adoption of the law was one of the conditions included in the visa liberalization Action Plan within EU-Moldova visa dialogue (Hriptievschi, 2016:5). The AA signed in 2014 is the second most cited source of political discord, with visa liberalization process coming in third. Curiously, when asked about their parties' most important achievements with regards to European integration policy, the very same issues are listed, with particular emphasis on visa liberalization and the EU-Moldova AA. Even the Communists were proud of having started Moldova's 'European modernization' process (Respondent 9, 10) as it was the Communist government that laid the groundwork for Moldova's EU integration, including renaming the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Policy in 2005 by adding 'and European Integration' to their names (Florea, 2016), contributing to the start of the Europeanization discourse in the country.

Both Socialists and Communists voiced sovereignty related concerns following the Association Agreement. One Respondent explained that the EU integration process itself is politicized and contested; creating prerequisites for alternative political forces to emerge, inferring the rise of the anti-European Socialist and populist Our Party (Respondent Nr. 3). Interestingly, there is some discord among the centre right parties with regards to sharing the laurels of visa liberalization, as evidenced by one Respondent's criticism of a fellow pro-EU party's attempt to monopolies this achievement. This leads us to conclude that, despite Mair's prediction of consensus driven de-politicization of the European issue (2000:48), there is hardly the case in Moldova, quite to the contrary.

Furthermore, behaviour of governing coalitions in the last seven years is indicative of a high level of politicization of the European issue, which contributed to political instability and undermined the reform process. As there is no unified and authoritative theory of coalition behaviour, despite William Riker's rationalist efforts over half a century ago in "The Theory of Political Coalitions (1962), game theory, social psychology, and political perspectives remain the most common (Murnighan, 1978; Laver and Shepsle, 1990; Van Beest and Scheepers, 2013), followed by more contextual understandings of coalition behaviour, including the underlying psychological processes and structural aspects (Browne and Franklin, 1986:471; Van Beest and Scheepers, 2013:51). As this research is largely underpinned by social constructivism, the social psychology approach to coalition behaviour appears most fitting. The emphasis on resources bound by 'conditional power' - even the most resourceful actor looses out when other less resourceful members coalesce (Murnighan, 1978:1145), as well as 'anger communication' as a bargaining tool (Van Beest and Scheepers, 2013:52) make social psychology approach relevant in the Moldovan context.

The 2005 parliamentary elections resulted in a single party Communist government; as did the April 2009 election (see table 4). However, unlike in 2005, four years later PCRM's 'conditional power' gave way, since, following early elections of July 2009, four opposition parties joined forces under the EU integration banner as well as due to their anti-Communist 'anger message' (Volnitchi, 2010:145). This governing coalition was named very ambitiously: Alliance for European Integration (BBC, 2009), hence contributing to and capitalizing on the Europeanization discourse. Similarly, despite the ubiquitous Europeanization discourse and Moldova's progress in its EU integration ambitions (ex. visa free regime and AA), several major corruption scandals[5] toppled three governments within a year (table 4), unmasking the true face of Moldovan political Europeanization. The political instability and mass protests that followed prompted the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Thorbjorn Jagland (2015) to call for bringing Moldova back from the brink.

Table 4. Ruling coalitions in Moldova (2001-present).

Governing Coalitions	Timeframe	Coalition Parties (seats)	Prime Ministers (party)
PCRM Governments	April 19, 2001 – September 25, 2009	One party governments	Vasile Tarlev I,II; Zinaida Grecianii I, II
Alliance for European Integration I	August 8, 2009 – December 30, 2010	PLDM (18), PL (15), PD (13), AMN (7)	Vlad Filat I (PLDM)
Alliance for European Integration II	December 30, 2010 – Febraury13, 2013	PLDM (32), PD (15), PL (12)	Vlad Filat II (PLDM)

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[5] In January 2013 an attempted cover-up of a fatal accident during a hunting spree attended by senior officials, including judges and the prosecutor general, "unveiled the frightening magnitude of Moldovan high-level corruption and state capture" (Tudoroiu, 2015:660). This was followed in 2015 by the so-called 'billion dollar scandal' when the equivalent of 15% of the country's GDP disappeared from three major banks without a timely reaction from regulators and law enforcement (Whewell, 2015).

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Pro-European Coalition	May, 30 2013 – January 23, 2015	PLDM (31), PD (15), PRL*[6] (7)	Iurie Leanca (PLDM)
Alliance for European Moldova (minority government)	January 23, 2015 – June 22, 2015	PLDM (23), PD (19)	Chiril Gaburici (PLDM)
Alliance for European Integration III	July 23, 2015 – January 20, 2016	PLDM (20), PD (19), PL (13)	Valeriu Strelet (PLDM)
No name ad hoc coalition	January 20, 2016 – Present	PD (19), SDP*[7] (14), PL (13)	Pavel Filip (PD)

Notably, Moldovan political parties have raised public expectations about European integration through their public discourse, while at the same time communicating a negative 'angry message' about those who are more sceptical or even against EU integration. On the one hand, in an attempt to galvanize support, this rhetoric sends clear signals about post-electoral coalitions (along pro or anti-EU cleavage), which "can influence voters' behaviour especially in a situation of limited information and high uncertainty such as it is in the case of a new party" (Falcó-Gimeno and Munoz, 2015:22). While, at the same time, it creates exaggerated expectations among the electorate, who are led to believe that political parties are indeed committed to European norms, rules and values. Yet, if we look at democracy, corruption and rule of law indicators, they all suggest stagnation at best, but even regress in the past few years (table 5), particularly when it comes to corruption (graph 1).

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[6] Note: PLR – On April 12, 2013, seven MPs defected from the Liberal Party to form the Pro-European Coalition and later created the Liberal Reformist Party on December 31, 2013.

[7] Note: SDP – On December 21, 2015, 14 MPs defected from the Party of Communists and formed, together with the Democratic Party, the Social-Democrat Platform.

Table 5. Nations in Transit Category and Democracy Scores (Freedom House, 2016).[8]

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
National Democratic Governance	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.75
Electoral Process	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.25	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Civil Society	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25
Independent Media	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Local Democratic Governance	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.50
Judicial Independence	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.75	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.75	4.75	4.75
Corruption	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00
Democracy Score	**4.96**	**5.00**	**5.07**	**5.14**	**4.96**	**4.89**	**4.82**	**4.86**	**4.86**	**4.89**

Graph 1. Moldova - Corruption Perception Index 2005-2015. (Transparency Int., 2015)[9]
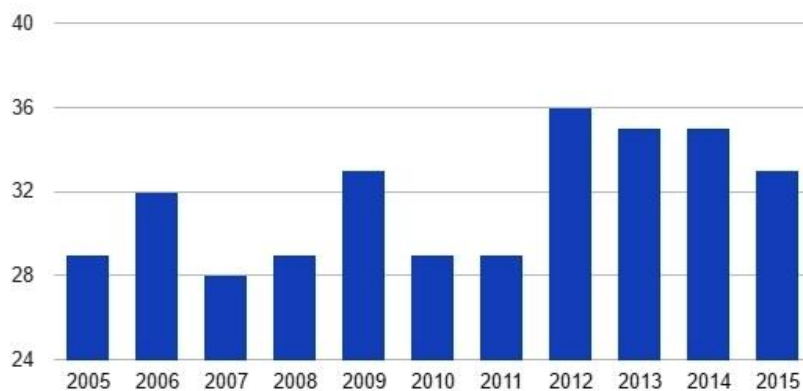
[8] Note: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers. The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year.

[9] Note: Moldova Corruption Perceptions Index, 100 = no corruption. Transparency International provides data for Moldova from 2001 to 2015. The average value for Moldova during that period was 29.8 points with a minimum of 21 points in 2002 and a maximum of 36 points in 2012.

Notably, despite one major scandal following another, Moldova's then Prime Minister Iurie Leanca promised in July 2014 that Moldova would submit a membership application to the EU by the end of 2015 (Euronews, 2014). The same promise was echoed by then Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Natalia Gherman (Mediafax, 2014) and President Nicolae Timofti just days before the November 30, 2014 parliamentary elections (Teleradio-Moldova, 2014). After winning the election, they all had to backtrack, pushing the timetable further down the road (DW, 2015).

On the day thousands of Moldovans marched through Chisinau on March 27, 2016 to demand Moldova be reunited with Romania, Marian Lupu chairman of the Democratic party, the senior coalition partner, promised to submit the EU membership application in late 2019, when Romania holds the presidency of the Council of the EU for the first time (Realitatea, 2016). Iurie Leanca, who is now in opposition, contends that, if submitted too soon, the best Moldova can hope for is for its "application to go into the lowest drawer and be forgotten" (Agora, 2016). Needless to say, a membership application is not on the cards in the near future.

Hence, European integration was used as a legitimation device and as electoral ammunition rather than a real policy commitment as indicated in the party platforms. Empirical evidence provided in this chapter demonstrates a growing level of Europeanization among Moldovan political parties. However, it is not matched by tangible improvements in the country's democracy, human rights or anti-corruption rankings. Neither does it considerably further Moldova's European integration goal. This leads us to conclude that Moldova presents a case of "Potemkin Europeanization" (Mikulova, 2014). Actor-centred constructivism offers a persuasive explanation, emphasising that actors are not selflessly embedded in the social structures, but can use discourse in a strategic way to further their goals. Rather than becoming socialised, political

parties employ the Europeanization discourse strategically. On the domestic front, this raises important questions about the parties' legitimacy, and, on the other hand, it calls into question the prowess of socialization and lesson learning in the absence of EU membership perspective. Externally, it casts doubt over EU's normative power in a highly contested geopolitical region.

Conclusion

Our findings indicate an increased level of Europeanization among political parties, evidenced by the analysis of party platforms. Another facet of party Europeanization is reflected in the growing ties with fellow European party federations and is supported by Respondents' responses. Despite empirical evidence of party Europeanization, the chronic instability of governing coalitions and the incidence of high level corruption, including concerns over regulatory capture (Tudoroiu, 2015:660), suggest little evidence of internalization of EU values, leading us to conclude that Moldova represents a case of "Potemkin Europeanization" (Jacoby, 1999; Mikulova, 2014). Political parties appear to employ Europeanization discourse strategically as a legitimation device, putting up a facade, with limited indications of political socialization. Still, Respondents' responses (table 3) indicated some degree of political socialization and norm internalization, but their attitudes seemed more inclined towards immediate benefits, such as political support in the form of lobbying and technical assistance.

Thus, in line with actor-centred constructivist approach, actors (political parties) evolved and made strategic use of Europeanization to achieve their objectives – win elections and stay in power. Hence, "ideas and norms do not solely constitute the environment in which actors are embedded (constitutive logic), but are also tools consciously used by these same actors to attain their goals (causal logic)" (Saurugger, 2013:890). Actor-centred constructivism allows us to better understand "how agency and interaction produce and reproduce structures" (Wendt, 1995:305). Moldovan parties and their leaders have become instrumental in employing Europeanization discourse as a legitimation device, while capitalising on the existing social and political structure, doing little to change the structure in a meaningful way. The unanimous

commitment to submit an EU membership application by the end of 2015, as voiced by the country's leadership prior to the 2014 parliamentary elections, only to be retracted, epitomized the strategic use of Europeanization discourse (Euronews, 2014; DW, 2015).

One possible explanation for the low impact of party Europeanization is the high 'degree of misfit' (Börzel and Risse, 2003:4). Europeanization is inconvenient to certain powerful actors within political parties who benefit from the existing social structure, including political corruption. High degree of misfit creates high adaptation pressures; hence the cost of approximation is prohibitive for self-interested politicians, as long as there is no clear incentive of membership. This creates a catch 22 situation in which reforms are too slow without the promise of membership and the promise is not coming because reforms are too slow. A separate, but related explanation has to do with geopolitics. The EU and the Russia driven Eurasian Union have become competitors in the region. Countries like Moldova are increasingly faced with a choice between the two. Genuine Europeanization of political parties is slow because the integration project promoted by Russia is more lenient in its accession criteria and the overall cost of approximation is small, given the low degree of misfit.

Finally, the study offers useful insight into political party Europeanization in Moldova that can be further enhanced by additional research, including by comparing the Moldovan case to countries in a similar position, such as Georgia and the Ukraine, but also other EU neighbours aspiring to join the Union. On a macro level, the study also raises important questions about the effectiveness of good governance assistance and EU's normative power in a highly contested geopolitical environment.

Appendices

List 1. Questionnaire respondents:[10]

1. Respondent 1 – PLDM Vice President, Committee for National Security, Defence and Public Order

2. Respondent 2 – PLDM Vice President, Committee for Social Protection, Health and Family

3. Respondent 3 – PLDM, Committee for Economy, Budget and Finance

4. Respondent 4 – PLDM, Committee for Human Rights and Inter-Ethnic Relations

5. Respondent 5 – PL Secretary General, Committee on Foreign Policy and European Integration

6. Respondent 6 – PL, Committee on Foreign Policy and European Integration

7. Respondent 7 – PDM Vice President, Committee for Economy, Budget and Finance

8. Respondent 8 – PDM, Legal Committee for Appointments and Immunities

9. Respondent 9 – PCRM, Committee on Foreign Policy and European Integration

10. Respondent 10 – PCRM, Committee for Human Rights and Inter-Ethnic Relations

11. Respondent 11 – PSRM, Committee on Foreign Policy and European Integration

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[10] Note: After defecting from their factions, respondents 3, 4 and 9 are currently unaffiliated MPs. Respondents 5 and 7 were later transferred to the Committee for agriculture and food industry and Committee on Foreign Policy and European Integration respectively.

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