



Similar Challenges, Different Outcomes?

The Development of Political Financing Regimes in Post-Communist Space

Sergiu Lipcean

Ph.D. thesis defence on 12 April 2019

Abstract

This thesis analyses the evolution of political financing regimes (PFR) across post-communist polities from the outset of transition through the lenses of their restrictiveness. Unlike existing comparative research, that defines restrictiveness of party and campaign funding almost exclusively in terms of regulatory scope, this dissertation argues that restrictiveness emerges from the interplay between regulatory scope and intensity. While scope pertains to the gamut of financing regulations, intensity relates to their stringency. This analytical framework is then employed to assess the variation in restrictiveness along the key dimensions of PFR such as private financing, public funding, spending, transparency and enforcement. More specifically, I show that restrictiveness of regulatory provisions on each dimension does not emanate from the mere availability of various restrictions, liabilities or entitlements such as donation and spending limits, reporting and disclosure obligations, oversight and sanctioning rules or the provision of public funding. Instead, it stems from different levels of regulatory intensity, typified by how much: (i) a donor can contribute, (ii) a party or candidate can spend, (iii) public funding is provided, (iv) information is reported and disclosed, (v) autonomy and powers supervisory body holds and (vi) punishment is foreseen for financial wrongdoings.

Based on this approach, I construct an original dataset of restrictiveness for 27 post-communist regimes for each regulatory dimension containing indicators that capture the nature of regulatory regimes considerably better than aggregate composite indexes. The analysis of regulatory developments reveals that despite a global shift from laissez-faire towards quite elaborate financing rules, post-communist regimes have varied significantly regarding the pace and magnitude of regulatory reform for both party statutory and election financing. Furthermore, the convergence of PFR in terms of regulatory scope was not followed by a similar process in terms of regulatory stringency. Quite the contrary, the variation in donation limits decreased neither cross-nationally nor over time, although the incentive structure of fundraising was favourable to parties and candidates, who could rely on a narrow donor base to cover their financial needs. Likewise, the gap between countries providing the most lavish and the scarcest state support to parties and candidates substantially increased once the pool of countries that introduced public funding has expanded over time. Spending caps, on the other hand, turned out to be excessively restrictive in most cases, which

have clearly undermined the fairness of electoral competition and actors' compliance by the rules. Transparency and enforcement represent the two dimensions where, regardless of the diversity of institutional configurations, post-communist regimes have resembled each other mostly.



Jury: Stefano Bartolini (EUI, supervisor), Dorothee Bohle (EUI), Sergiu Lipcean (candidate), Ingrid van Biezen (Leiden University), Marcin Walecki (OSCE/ODIHR).

Bio

Sergiu Lipcean obtained his PhD in Political and Social Sciences from the European University Institute in April 2019. He analyses the restrictiveness of political financing regimes in post-communist space over twenty years since the outset of transition from the communist rule. Prior to his PhD, he studied political sciences at National School of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest and University of Bologna.

His research interests are focused on party and electoral politics, democratization, relationship between money and politics and political corruption.