

Is M. Duverger's 'Disparity Law' the Rosetta Stone of Ukrainian Partology?

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Abstract

In November 24-25 2011 Kyiv hosted International conference "Party system of Ukraine: evolution, tendencies and perspectives of development," organized by I. F. Kuras Institute of Political and Ethno-National Studies at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. The conference assembled a number of scholars from Ukraine and abroad, who are engaged in studying political parties. This was probably the first conference in Ukraine of such level exclusively dedicated to analyzing political parties, their role and place in the political life of Ukraine. The conference was unique and very productive in terms of the level of discussion and geography of participation. It has proved that Ukrainian studies of political parties – partology – has already formed and is dynamically developing. One particular point sparking lively discussion was defining the essence of the notion "political party" and whether it could be rightfully applied to Ukrainian political associations. The article suggests the author's considerations on the essence of the problem, which, in our view, is a central methodological problem (or the Rosetta stone) of the Ukrainian partology. It may be rightfully stated that the solution of the problem will influence all further development of the discipline.

Keywords: *Disparity Law, Political Party, Partology and Political Association*

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In classical political theory political pluralism and real multiparty system are considered essential features of a democratic political system. In twenty years of its existence Ukraine has transformed from totalitarian one-party to multiparty system country. Currently over 200 political parties are registered in Ukraine representing different ideological positions – practically all shades of political spectrum. Having gone all the way from being ‘a poor relation’ of power, political parties of Ukraine have transformed into the main actor on the political arena. However, does it suffice to say that party democracy as the basis of democratic political regime exists in Ukraine? Can we talk about Ukrainian political parties as fully-fledged political institutes at all? Ukrainian researchers of political parties are trying to answer these seemingly simple questions.

Famous French researcher of political parties M. Duverger rightfully stated that relations between power and parties depend to a great extent on the very parties: their power, genesis, structure, autonomy, inter-party democracy, type of leadership etc. Despite a great number of existing definitions of political parties the one suggested by M. Weiner and G. la Palombara in 1966 is considered classical. According to their definition party is:

- 1) a viable organization, i.e. an organization, the average political life expectancy of which is longer than the life expectancy of its leadership;
- 2) a local, well organized and viable organization which supports regular and diverse connections with other organizations of the country;
- 3) a strong wish of state and local leaders of the organization to take and exercise power instead of only influencing it;
- 4) a wish to get people's support through elections or in some other way” (Palombara, 1996, 55-57).

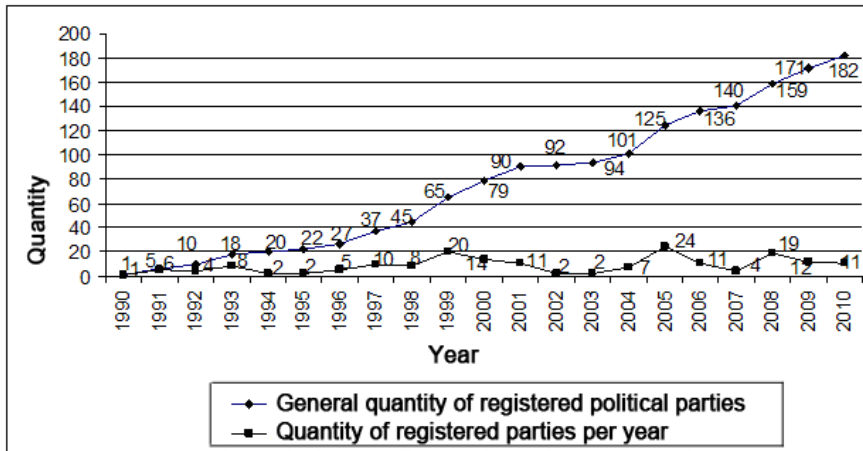
Basing on this definition we may state that Ukrainian political parties are not really consistent with these criteria.

Just few of numerous political parties of Ukraine have clear and understandable ideology, which determines their activity. So, out of existing parties only 30 have programs which include references to certain ideology serving the basis for their activities (Shajgorodsky, 2005, 20). Moreover, not infrequently contradictions can be found in the names, programs and activities of Ukrainian political parties. Another frequent

phenomenon of Ukrainian politics is politicians changing their views and, accordingly, their parties or parliamentary fractions. This shows that ideological basis of the activity of Ukrainian political parties fulfils instrumental rather than principal role. It is even stranger to observe various party unions (coalitions) which often combine representatives of different (sometimes even ideologically polar political forces) – for example a party of large Ukrainian capital – Party of Regions (PR) and Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU). Political parties of Ukraine are mostly parties of leader's type. This means that sympathy or antipathy to leaders mostly form the attitude of average Ukrainians to the party. The belief in political leaders is caused by the dominating type of political culture of the population, when party ideologies, as M. Duverger marked, acquire some of the features of religion bringing a significant component of irrational into politics (i.e. belief).

In case of proportional election system with closed lists people actually vote for political leaders and do not influence the list of candidates for deputies. Average members of the very parties also have insignificant and only mediated influence on forming lists. Eventually this marks the end of voters – their party connection. Therefore, the trust to both political parties and bodies of power which include the elected representatives is lost. If we analyze dynamics of the formation of political parties in Ukraine we may easily notice the tendency to rapid growth of their number right before parliamentary election. So, in 1997 10 political parties appeared, in 2001 – 11 parties and in 2005 – 24 parties (<http://www.minjust.gov.ua/parties>). It is of interest that after defeat in the election few of them live until the next election.

Dynamics of registration of political parties in Ukraine



According to Kolodij (2007) Among the existing political parties there are not more than 20 which, either independently or as a member of some block, have participated in at least three parliamentary elections (p. 83). The new edition of the Law of Ukraine “About election of people’s deputies of Ukraine”, which denies blocks of political parties the right to participate in the election, is quite likely to decrease their number. Simultaneously, the previously existing practice when parties participated in the election as members of a block did not favor strengthening of organizational structures of political parties (<http://www.cvk.gov.ua>).

Another widely accepted practice of political parties’ activity is the phenomenon of the so-called re-branding of parties. It consists in reforming old parties rather than forming new ones with the aim of participating in the election. The reformation may consist in changing the name or leadership (these are, e.g. S. Tigipko’s party “Strong Ukraine” or N. Korolevska’s party “Ukraine – ahead!”). After parliamentary election they do not spark any interest and stop existing or exist in the so-called “frozen” state. Transforming political parties of Ukraine into “machines for voting” prevents them from effectively developing their organizational structures, and, eventually, changes them into virtual ones.

The majority of political parties in Ukraine are not numerous and weakly structured organizations. Sociological surveys were held by Razumkov’s Center during November 25th – December 5th 2001 and

during June 19-25th 2008. They showed that only 4,9% and 4,7% of the participants positioned themselves as members of political parties, which is 1-1,5 million people, i.e. only 4-5% of adult population of the country (Yakymenko, 2001). According to March 26th 2005 census the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine registered 126 parties. 39 of them had registered centres in all regions of Ukraine (31 %), 63 (50%) had registered centres in most regions of Ukraine, and only 6 parties (4,76%) had registered regional centres in less than a half of regions of Ukraine. 18 political parties (14,3%) did not have registered centres in any region of the country.

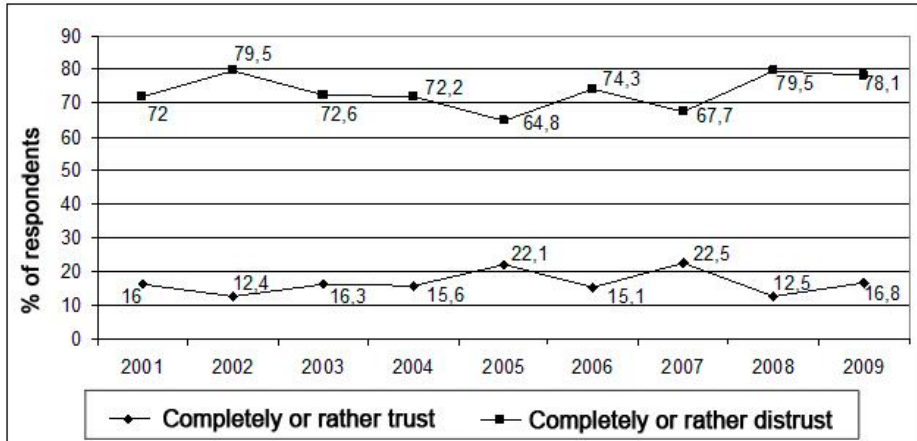
With the implementation of proportional election system in 2006 Ukrainian political parties have tried to register only regional organizations (as it is legally provided) and do not attend to developing their local networks. Even the most developed political parties have only been able to develop their organizational network to the level of districts. According to Rjabec (2001) the number of political parties without a single district or city organization rose from 18 in 2003 to 26 in the election in 2006. Therefore, the system of party representation is useful for those parties and blocks, which do not have a developed organizational infrastructure (quality structuring on the local level), but have a good financial basis for holding a powerful advertising campaign or economic influence in separate regions (election in 2006 demonstrated regional character of support of different parties and blocks).

Apart from that, a significant part of local centres of political parties are fictitious. So, a check of the Ministry of Justice showed that 46 political parties had violated legislation in some way; as a result the registration of 37 political parties was canceled. The most frequent violations included the absence of representation at the place of juridical address and the absence of local juridical organizations in most regions of Ukraine. The Supreme Court of Ukraine annulled the registration of 28 political parties which could not provide the formation and registration of their local organizations in most regions during 6 months from the registration date. In 2008 the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine checked the activity of only 4 political parties, which led to their getting the warning;

in 2009 the same warning was made to 20 political parties (<http://www.parlament.org.ua>).

The level of awareness of the population about the activity of political parties speaks for itself. So, according to the surveys held by Razumkov's centre in December 2009 only 42,1% of respondents heard something about the activities of local organizations of parties in their regions; other 50,6% heard nothing about their activities. According to *the Bulletin of Central Electoral Commission* a rather low level of representation of political parties on the local level is also proved by the results of local election. So, at the local elections in 2006 PR and Block of Yulia Tymoshenko each got 27,5 % places in local councils of all levels, People's Union "Our Ukraine" got 16,9%, Socialist Party of Ukraine – 6,4%, People's Block of Lytvyn – 4,6%, and Communist Party of Ukraine – 3,7%. It is clear that such "electoral" approach to political parties does not favour their transformation into effective and authoritative institutes of political system. According to *the National Security and Defence* report in December 2001 74,9% of respondents claimed that Ukrainian political parties did not fulfill their functions in the society, while in April 2003 this number constituted 77,5%. According to the results of sociological survey held by Razumkov's centre the percentage of respondents who completely distrust and rather distrust political parties fluctuated between 79.5% and 64.8% in the period 2001-2009, and the percentage of respondents who trust or rather trust political parties constituted from 12,4% to 22,5%.

Do you trust political parties? (dynamics, 2001-2009)



In conditions of restricted membership basis and low level of support, absence of state financing and considerable commercialization of politics (especially elections) political parties of Ukraine have actually remained devoid of serious resources. This objectively pushed them to 'co-operation' with large capital. Soon enough most of them found themselves dependent on certain financial-industrial groups (FIG). Another proof of rising commercialization level is expenses for preparation and organization of elections. According to *the Bulletin of Central Election Commission* (2008) the organization of parliamentary election in March 1998 cost 248 million UAH, in March 2002 – 172,2 million UAH, in March 2006 – 512 million UAH and early elections in September 2007 – 347,3 million UAH [13]. The general sum of election funds of parties (blocks) at the 2002 election constituted 32,4 million UAH, in 2006 – 553,6 million UAH, and in 2007 – 581,4 million UAH. It is of importance to remark that according to the data provided by public organization the Committee of Voters of Ukraine the expenses of the party's election fund constitute only 25-30% of all money spent during the election campaign (<http://www.newsru.ua/ukraine>).

According to the data provided by the project 'Public monitoring of financing electoral campaign 2002' about 40% of general expenses of political parties for electoral campaign were taken from shadowy funds. Experts estimate that real expenses for electoral campaign in 2002 constituted 52,9 million UAH, in 2006 – 10 billion USD, in 2007 – 1-1,5

billion USD. It is clear that such money could not have been received from democratic sources. During electoral campaign in 2006 and early election campaign in 2007 unofficial expenses constituted about 75 % of all money spent. However, usually these numbers show the expenses of three or four parties (Obushny, 2007, 10). On the other hand, the results of recent elections show that a considerable number of electoral process subjects participate in the election only formally due to the lack of financial resources. So, at the 1998 election there were 30 subjects of electoral process 13 of which (43,3%) got less than 1% of votes. The same tendency characterizes the next election. At the election in 2002 there were 33 participants registered, 20 of which (60,6%) got less than 1% of votes. These numbers for the elections in 2006 constituted 45 and 34 (75,5%), and for the early elections in 2007 – 20 and 13 (65%) accordingly. Such situation proves that the mechanism of forming the highest representative organ of the state is to a great extent determined by the level of financial support of the interest rather than interests themselves.

That is why sociological survey held in December 2001 showed that 45% of respondents thought that political parties served the interests of financial and business structures; 30,5% of respondents were convinced that they serve the interests of political leaders. In April 2003 the numbers of respondents to the same questions constituted 55,7% and 45,6% accordingly (the *National Security and Defence*, 2003, 20). The lack of transparency of political financing leads to actual merging of political forces with representatives of shadow and criminal business, which, in its turn, hinders democratic transformations in Ukraine. On the other hand, coming to power respective political forces get access to the sources of illegal income and the possibility of legalizing “dirty money”. This is reflected in the results of the expert survey held by Razumkov's Centre in 2009. The question ‘To what extent do people's deputies defend the interests...?’ was answered in the following way: 95,7% of experts stated that people's deputies defend the interests of large business, 87% – of shadow business (the *National Security and Defence*, 2009, 48).

Moreover, the same Centre held a nationwide survey on the 20-28th of July 2009, according to which 39,3% of respondents stated that political parties are fully corrupted. Other 72,9% think that concealing sources of financing by political parties (blocks) testifies to their being corrupted; 72,5% of respondents think that corruption is manifested in selling and buying places in electoral lists of political parties (blocks) (Duverger, 2000, 48). Accordingly, the very function of a party as a political institution gets deformed, as it does not direct its activity onto representation or defense of interests of citizens but rather onto satisfying narrow corporative interests of their financial donors. Therefore, orientation of political parties on voter's interests is often purely symbolic, which violates the basis principles of representative democracy.

“If the disparity law is really formulated”, – M. Duverger (2000) stated, – the traditional understanding of democracy will be objected, as ... ruling bodies of parties formed by their members tend to dominate over parliamentaries who got their authority from voters. It would be fine if the political status of the former and the latter was approximately similar, and the members of the party could be seen as the most conscious part or an avant-garde of voters. However, the disparity law would ruin this illusion showing that essential differences in the behaviour of these two groups absolutely exclude the possibility of one of them to function as an analogue of the other. To measure this disparity means to measure the extent to which oligarchy penetrates into the regimes which we call democratic” (20).

Therefore, the central methodological problem of Ukrainian partologists is the question if we have to deal with political parties which are only being formed and trying to develop into independent subjects of political life (protoparties) or with pseudoparties (simulacras) which only serve the political interests of economically dominant groups. Answering this question will, similarly to the Rosetta stone, determine the further direction of the development of Ukrainian theory of political parties.

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