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# DO ANTI-CORRUPTION PARTIES MATTER?

The electoral fate and policy impact of the third wave of  
niche parties in central and Eastern Europe

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## ABSTRACT

Niche parties have been increasingly successful during the last 30 years. Parties focusing on immigration and environment have long been in business and their impact on the political discourse as well as on policy outcomes is well established. In this paper I analyze the electoral fates and policy outcomes of the third wave of niche parties, namely those focusing on anti-corruption, whose successes culminated during the 2000s. The focus is exclusively on new and splinter parties from Central and Eastern Europe and the questions to be answered are: To what extent are these parties successful in obtaining relevant positions in the government to be able to effectively fight corruption? What impact do they have on anti-corruption measures, thereby influencing the level of corruption? How successful are these parties in the following elections? In short, to what extent do anti-corruption parties matter? The results are rather mixed, but indicate that the more influential positions those parties have in government, the better are their anti-corruption performances, which implies that they are serious and competent enough to tackle those issues, despite their newness and lack of experience. Not surprisingly, the incumbent anti-corruption parties fare worse than those in opposition in subsequent elections, but quite a few still remain popular. Finally, all but one party abandoned their anti-corruption rhetoric in their second election, which implies that anti-corruption is a different type of issue, compared to the ones used by previous niche parties.

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# Introduction

New parties have been exceptionally successful during the last decade in Central and Eastern Europe. Parliamentary elections in Bulgaria in 2001 and 2009, in Latvia in 2002, in Estonia in 2003 and in Lithuania in 2004 were all won by genuinely new parties formed shortly before the elections. A common feature for these and several other, slightly less successful new parties, is that they focus on fighting corruption and stress a self-image of honesty, integrity and competence (Bennich-Björkman et al., 2012; Sikk, 2011). Although not single-issue parties, most of them could arguably be described as niche parties, i.e. parties that focus on a limited number of non-economic issues (Wagner, 2010) and since their main issue happen to be anti-corruption, they will henceforth be called “anti-corruption parties” or ACPs.<sup>1</sup>

These parties have sometimes been denounced, not least by their opponents, but also from independent observers, as unserious populists, just trying to capitalize on the widespread distrust of the established political parties in general and on the voters’ dislike of corruption in particular. Regardless of the seriousness of these new parties, it is a fact that corruption is a very serious phenomenon in the countries concerned and that the established parties, not only have had at best limited success in curbing corruption, but also that several incumbent parties in Central and Eastern Europe have been involved or accused of being involved in corruption scandals themselves (Bågenholm, 2010). There are thus good reasons why voters to an increasing extent have turned their back at the established parties and instead thrown their lot with politically inexperienced newcomers with no previous track record. The new parties’ elites did not lack relevant experience altogether however. In some cases the leaders had some previous political experience and in others, including the most successful cases, they had proven their skills and competence in other sectors, such as business and media or as public officials.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a different view, see Sikk, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> For example Einars Repse from Latvian New Era was the former head of the Central Bank, Juhan Parts from the Estonian Res Publica was the former State Auditor and Simeon Saksoburggotski was the former Bulgarian king and successful businessman.

Fighting corruption is easier said than done, however, and there is no recipe for a quick-fix to be found, regardless of the honesty and competence of the political actors. In contrast to many other issues, corruption has been assumed to be particularly difficult to tackle (Rothstein, 2011, 118-119). In order to influence policy, new parties moreover have to seek compromises with established parties. Thus, we cannot assume that corruption will be curbed even if the incumbents have an honest ambition to do so. But neither should we assume that ambitious actors are completely unable to make any difference just because of the collective action logic of corruption (Persson, Rothstein & Teorell, forthcoming). The political parties are obvious key players in fighting corruption and if the ones who have the skills, ambitions and administrative resources at their disposal fail, it is difficult to see how corruption could be reduced at all. Thus, the question whether “anti-corruption parties” matter, i.e. whether they have any impact on curbing corruption, is an open one, which will be examined in this paper.

The empirical analysis includes all new parties which campaigned on an anti-corruption agenda and that entered parliaments in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin wall and aims at answering the following questions:

- What happens to the ACPs after they have entered parliament? Do they become part of the government or not and which portfolios do they get?
- What do the ACPs accomplish in office? Do they influence anti-corruption policy and are they able to reduce the level of corruption?
- To what extent do the ACPs maintain their anti-corruption stance and voter support in the following elections?

## Three waves of niche parties

Understanding the relationship and interaction between voters and parties has a long history in political science. One of the more well-known hypotheses within this field is the freezing hypothesis, advanced by Lipset and Rokkan in the late 1960s (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Their main observation was that the party systems in Western democracies had more or less remained unchanged from the introduction of universal male suffrage in the early 20th century until the time of their writing in the late 1960s. Stability and predictability were key words, as the electorate tended to vote according to old cleavage structures and return more or less the same parties to parliament. During the 1970s and 1980s it became obvious that the party systems were becoming less stable, among other things because of changes in the old cleavage structures, leading to a decline in party identification (Mair, Müller & Plasser, 2004: 3-5) and in the class based voting (Lane & Ersson, 1994: 94), which was the most prominent voting behavior in Europe (Lipset, 2001: 5). This in turn affected the behavior of both the political parties and the voters, changes which came to reinforce these tendencies even stronger. As the political parties changed their strategies to attract voters, the voters responded by becoming more volatile (Pennings & Lane, 1998: 15) and more prone to vote for new parties that tended to focus on single issues rather than offering a wholesale ideology (Hug, 2001: 2).

In the 1980s two different types of single-issue parties changed the West European party systems. Green parties, emerging in the early 1980s from the environmental movements and the campaigns against the building of nuclear power plants, eventually won representation in a majority of the West European parliaments (Spain and United Kingdom being the two major exceptions) and, after 1990, also in a few East European parliaments. While initially reluctant to cooperation with established parties – due to a fear that cooperation would merely “legitimise the continuation of Old Politics” (Pogunkte 2002: 134) – several Green parties did eventually chose to enter into government coalitions and various forms of organized cooperation, primarily with centre-left parties.

The relationship between the salience of environmental issues and the success of Green parties is of course dynamic. A public demand for Green politics is a necessary precondition for a Green

party to be successful, but the presence of a Green party in parliament is also some sort of guarantee that environmental issues will get their fair share of attention. There is no doubt that the established parties have increased their attention to environmental issues since the early 1980s, although the impact of the Green parties is less clear.

Anti-immigration parties emerged in several West European countries during the 1980s and became increasingly successful in the 1990s. The responses toward these parties have differed. Although most established parties have officially condemned the critique against immigration as populist and xenophobic, it is only in Belgium that the strategy of forming a “cordon sanitaire” has been maintained. In Italy and Austria anti-immigration parties have formed government coalitions with conservative parties, and in other countries they have decided on government formations. The influence of these parties is a highly sensitive issue, but in countries such as Denmark and Italy it is obvious that anti-immigration parties have had an influence both on policy outcome and on way these issues are treated in the public discourse.

In most party systems there is not room for more than one major single issue party on each issue, implying that environment and immigration for examples are not longer available to politicize in most countries. Anti-corruption is in one sense an example of a potentially new issue to politicize on par with the environment or immigration. I define an anti-corruption party as one whose main focus in the election campaign is on fighting corruption, either by addressing the issue in general terms, i.e. that corruption is a serious problem that needs to be combated, or more specifically by accusing the opponents, i.e. the established parties for being corrupt. As will be shown later, ACPs have been successful in most of the post-communist region, with parliamentary representation in nine of the ten new EU-members (Romania being the only exception), whereas they have been more or less absent in Western Europe.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In Western Europe, there are only four new parties which have used anti-corruption rhetoric since the late 1970s, namely Democratic Renewal Party in Portugal in 1985, Political Spring in Greece in 1993, BZÖ in Austria in 2006 and Citizens' Movement in Iceland in 2009 (see Bågenholm, 2010). None of them became part of the government and the two former parties went out of business within a decade after their formation. Thus, the phenomenon under study is primarily a Central and East European one, which can be attributed to both the newness of their party systems and to the generally higher levels of corruption.

Surprisingly enough there is still not much literature on corruption as a campaign issue, and even less so when it comes to cross country comparisons. There is also no study on the behaviour of ACPs in parliament or government. Until recently, only single country or single election studies had been conducted and they all focused on the electoral impact of corruption allegations (Peters & Welch, 1980; Welch & Hibbing, 1997; Dimock & Jacobson, 1995). As one would assume, the results quite consistently show that allegation of corruption affects incumbents negatively, as their re-election rates decrease, but not as dramatically as one may think considering the graveness of the accusations. The results of the first comparative study covering some 13 European countries during a 25 year period pointed in the same direction, but with stronger effects (Bågenholm, 2010). ACPs were found to be much more successful than parties that abstained from using corruption allegations and governments facing corruption charges were much more likely to fall than governments, which did not.

Moreover, corruption allegations have been found to appear rather frequent in European elections, during the past 25 years, but increasingly so in the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe and decreasingly so in Western Europe, implying that there is a strong correlation between the level of corruption and corruption allegation (Bågenholm, 2009). For the purpose of this study, the fact that new or splinter parties using corruption allegation were the single most successful category of parties is naturally of interest. Thus, by politicizing corruption, new parties seem to have found an effective way not only to enter parliament but also government and for established parties in opposition it increases the chances of toppling the government. To be electorally successful or even winning an election is one thing. Managing to keep the electoral promises and make an actual difference in terms of corruption reduction is quite another.

All three generations of niche parties have at least two things in common: first, the politicization of a previously neglected issue, such as environment, immigration or corruption, and, secondly, the lack of previous parliamentary and party political experience (with the exception of certain members who may have been active in other parties). A relevant difference is that anti-immigration parties stand out since their political ideas often are deemed as morally dubious, while one would have to try hard to find politicians who would say anything but that the fight for a cleaner government or cleaner environment is an essentially good thing. This gives green and ACPs an advantage in terms

of a greater black-mail potential since other parties would not have so much to lose from cooperating with them as they would with anti-immigration parties.

Corruption, however, is not just any other issue. In contrast to other issues, anti-corruption is as much about credibility, morality, ethics, honesty, and transparency as it is about the substance of the policy as such, i.e. not about what but how to make policies. In practice, anti-corruption parties stress the importance of valence issues (Green, 2007), i.e. one's own experience (in this case lack of discrediting party political experience) and competence to achieve the things that everyone agrees need to be done and accordingly accuse the opponents for incompetence and for being corrupt. This strategy thus implies a redirection of the focus from the substance of the policies proposed (which most parties and voters agree on anyway) to the mode of policy making and the likelihood of the promises being achieved (Welch & Hibbing, 1997: 228).

Politicizing political corruption is assumingly a delicate matter, as it clearly signals to the voters that there are politicians that not only cannot be trusted, but who are in fact criminals. It gives the voters the impression – right or wrong - that politicians need tight monitoring to behave as we expect them to do. This is the main reason why this particular issue is different from other proposals put forward in the political debate. One would therefore assume that a party that accuses other parties or politicians, or the whole system, of being corrupt should find it hard to find acceptable cooperation partners.

## Design, data and method

In this paper I analyze the electoral results and outcomes as well as their anti-corruption accomplishments of new ACPs in the ten new EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe that have been successful enough to enter parliament. As we are interested in the potential impact they have on the political discourse on corruption and in terms of policy output, it is a natural delimitation to exclude small ACPs that do not clear the electoral threshold. Moreover, established parties

are by definition excluded as the study deals with niche parties only. We define a new party, as either “genuinely” new, i.e. parties having no previous organizational or personal ties to other parties (Sikk, 2005) or splinters, i.e. parties which break away from established ones. Mergers and electoral coalitions do not count as new, however. All parties meeting those criteria are thus analyzed in terms of if and to what extent anti-corruption is part of the electoral strategy. In case such parties fail to win parliamentary seats in the first election they contest, but are successful in their second or third attempt, they are still included in the analyzes, despite not being new anymore. Both green parties and anti-immigration parties tended to increase their voting support gradually in many countries, and only managed to enter parliament after a number of failed attempts.

Time wise the study will cover the whole post-communist period, i.e. since 1990 in the ten new EU member states, which up to this date has held 61 parliamentary elections in total.

As mentioned above, an anti-corruption party is one which focuses on anti-corruption in the election campaign, either in general terms or by accusing the opponents for being corrupt. All parties that do that should not be considered niche parties, however, as its anti-corruption rhetoric is only one of many highlighted issues. I have not yet firmly decided on a clear distinction in this respect and all new parties using anti-corruption rhetoric in their first election campaign have thus been included. The coding of the usage of anti-corruption rhetoric is based mainly on the election report section in *Electoral Studies*, *West European Politics* and *European Journal of Political Research* (for more details see Bågenholm, 2009).

In this paper I analyze electoral results and outcomes as well as policy impact on anti-corruption legislation and corruption level of new ACPs. The first set of indicators, i.e. on electoral results and outcomes, will mainly tell us what we can expect from the ACPs in terms of effective anti-corruption initiatives. Parties in government and in charge of relevant ministries naturally have a much better position to be successful in drafting and implementing anti-corruption measures. In the next stage I look at the performance of the parties, which obtained influential governmental position. I discuss the way this part of the study is carried out in the section below.

## Preliminary findings

In this section I present the preliminary empirical findings on the fortunes of new ACPs. We start with the electoral performances and outcomes, in order to see whether these parties manage to become part of government and to what extent they are able to repeat their successes in subsequent elections. Thereafter I take a closer look at those parties which actually enter governments and what positions they get and how long they stay in power. Finally, I analyze the policy impact of those ACPs which have obtained relevant positions and which have served for a reasonable amount of time in government.

### **Electoral performance and outcome of new parties using anti-corruption rhetoric**

In table 1, all new parties in the new EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe, which used anti-corruption rhetoric in parliamentary election campaigns between 1990 and early 2011 are listed. There are a number of interesting observations that can be made. Firstly, there is a temporal pattern in the success of these parties. All but one of the 18 parties have emerged after the turn of the century, which makes it a recent phenomenon. Corruption, however rampant, did not play an important role in the first couple of election campaigns in the region. Rather, other transition problems were on the agenda, and only after two or three elections, anti-corruption started to emerge as one of the main issues. The other temporal pattern is that the success of this type of parties has occurred in two separate waves; one between 2001 and 2004 and the second between 2008 and 2010. There is moreover a slight geographical pattern, with large scale successes of three parties in the Baltic States during the first wave and a number of Central European cases during the second, which implies that there could be a diffusion effect at work.

The second observation is that ACPs have been successful in all new EU member states, bar Romania. Considering the fact that Romania not only is the poorest of the ten, but also until recently

considered being the most corrupt, this finding is somewhat surprising. Bulgaria stands out in terms of repeated large scale success for ACPs.

In terms of the electoral results, it is also noticeable how many outstanding electoral performances we find in the sample. In fact, the list contains the five most successful new parties in Europe since 1945 and another handful of parties are at the top ten list (see Bågenholm & Johansson Heinö, 2012). Anti-corruption and newness thus seem to be a perfect combination. Perhaps even more striking is the fact that as many as eleven of the 18 parties immediately made it to the government and another three at their second attempt, which leaves only four parties without governmental experience whatsoever. Moreover, four of the parties also obtained the position of prime minister and thus the leading role in the government. The difference in comparison with the other two types of niche-parties, i.e. greens and anti-immigration parties, could not be greater.

Ten parties have contested more than one election and the outcome is mixed, even though it is safe to say that few matched their initial successes. Some incumbents took a severe beating, most notably NDSV in Bulgaria which lost more than half its seats in the second and the rest in the third election. Both Res Publica in Estonia and New Era in Latvia did considerably better and managed to maintain quite substantial levels of electoral support and also to remain in office. They both did so, however, by merging and going into an electoral alliance with other parties. The most successful “second election parties” are those who spent their first electoral period in opposition, such as the Polish Law and Justice (PiS), who repeated their anti-corruption strategy in 2005 and more than tripled their parliamentary seats. The Slovak Direction (SMER) also gained much in their second attempt, but without campaigning on anti-corruption. In fact, Law and Justice happen to be the only party which repeated its anti-corruption strategy. All the other dropped the subject and focused on other issues. If anti-corruption rhetoric is only used in one-off elections, one could naturally question to what extent these parties actually should be labeled as niche-parties. In contrast, neither the green nor the anti-immigration parties have abandoned their niches, even if most of them have broadened their political program to other policy areas as well. There remains to be seen, however, if this pattern will be repeated by the seven ACPs, who still only have contested one election. If they do, it seems reasonable to consider the issue of anti-corruption as different from all other issues, as it only can be used successfully once and preferably by a new party.

TABLE 1: ELECTORAL RESULTS AND OUTCOMES OF NEW PARTIES USING ANTI-CORRUPTION RHETORIC

Party	First election				Second election			Third election		
	Year	%	Seats	Gov.	%	Seats	Gov.	%	Seats	Gov.
<b>Freedom Union (Czech Republic)</b>	1998	8,6	19	No	4,5*	9	Yes	0,3	0	No
<b>National Movement Simeon II (Bulgaria)</b>	2001	42,7	120	YES	19,9	53	Yes	3,0	0	No
<b>Law and Justice (Poland)</b>	2001	9,5	44	No	27,0	155	YES	32,1	166	No
<b>New Era (Latvia)</b>	2002	23,9	26	YES	16,4	18	YES	31,2**	12	YES
<b>Alliance of a New Citizen (Slovakia)</b>	2002	8,0	15	Yes	1,4	0	No	-	-	-
<b>Direction (Slovakia)</b>	2002	13,5	25	No	29,1	50	YES	34,8	62	No
<b>Res Publica (Estonia)</b>	2003	24,6	28	YES	17,9	19***	Yes	20,5	23	Yes
<b>Labour Party (Lithuania)</b>	2004	28,4	39	Yes	9,0	10	No	-	-	-
<b>Liberal Democratic Party (Lithuania)</b>	2004	11,4	10	No	12,7	15	No	-	-	-
<b>Peasants' and New Democratic Party Union (Lithuania)</b>	2004	6,6	10	No	3,7	3	No	-	-	-
<b>National Resurrection Party (Lithuania)</b>	2008	15,1	16	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Zares-New Politics (Slovenia)</b>	2008	9,4	9	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-

<b>Citizens for European Development (Bulgaria)</b>	2009	39,7	116	YES	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Order, Lawfulness, Justice (Bulgaria)</b>	2009	4,1	10	No	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOP 09 (Czech Republic.)</b>	2010	16,7	41	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Public Affairs (Czech Republic.)</b>	2010	10,9	24	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Politics Can Be Different (Hungary)</b>	2010	7,5	16	No	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Freedom and Solidarity (Slovakia)</b>	2010	12,1	22	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-

*\*The figure is the share of seats for the party, which contested the election in a coalition with three other parties.*

*\*\* New Era contested the 2010 election together with three other parties. The number of seats refers to New Era only.*

*\*\*\* RP merged with Pro Patria before the 2006 parliamentary election.*

***Comment:** The parties included in the table are those who used anti-corruption rhetoric in their first contested election. Law and Justice is the only party which repeated that strategy in subsequent elections. Capital letters in the "Gov." column indicate that the party took the position as prime minister.*

***Source:** Bågenholm, 2009 & 2010; Political Yearbooks, European Journal of Political Research; Woldendorp et al, 1998; Müller-Rommel et al, 2004; [www.parties-and-elections.de](http://www.parties-and-elections.de)*

To conclude by getting back to the electoral results, it is a bit early to dismiss the ACPs as failures in the long run. It should be kept in mind that new parties usually have difficulties to remain popular and even more so if they enter government. Only three of the parties in the table have been kicked out of parliament and quite a few of them remain popular among the electorate, despite (or perhaps because) abandoning the anti-corruption rhetoric.

## **Anti-corruption parties in government**

As mentioned above, incumbency is considered a precondition to be able to make a difference in terms of fighting corruption. As shown in table 1, eleven ACPs managed to become part of the government in their first attempt and another three in their second attempt. Moreover, three of the parties managed to remain in office during more than one election period. Being in office is naturally important, but the positions within the government should be as important in order to fight corruption.

Table 2 lists the governmental status and positions obtained by all new parties using anti-corruption rhetoric. I have left out those parties – Freedom Union and SMER - which did not succeed to enter government in their first attempt and which did not use anti-corruption rhetoric when they did in their second attempt. Law and Justice, on the other hand, is included since it used anti-corruption rhetoric also in their second attempt, in which it was successful.

The number of parties in government thus amounts to twelve and all but the Resurrection Party in Lithuania were in control of several important ministries. As mentioned above, there are several cases of ACPs taking the leading role in government and in one instance – GERB in Bulgaria 2009 – did such a party take the sole governing responsibility.

There are few parties, however, which have managed to stay for a longer consecutive time in office. PiS' term in office was cut short by new elections in 2007, New Era and Res Publica went in and out of government during their first mandate periods, due to cooperation problems and the Labour Party left government after only two years. NDSV, in contrast, sat for two full terms, although as a junior partner during the second period. In its third election NDSV however failed to pass the electoral threshold and as currently without parliamentary representation. Its place was taken by the newly formed party, Citizens for a European Development (GERB), which won a landslide victory on a harsh anti-corruption agenda.

Both New Era and Res Publica have, however, had several years in total in office and should have been able to influence anti-corruption policies substantially. It should be pointed out however, that Res Publica merged with an established conservative party in 2006, in order to secure their parliamentary representation. After a few years in opposition, New Era also returned to government in Latvia, following the collapse of the Latvian economy amidst the global financial crisis in 2009.

Finally, in the spring of 2010, newly formed ACPs won parliamentary representation in Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In both Slovakia and the Czech Republic, these parties (no less than two in the Czech Republic) became part of centre-right coalition governments which proclaimed the fight against corruption to be one of the primary targets. There are good reasons to believe that most of these recent successful parties will remain in office during their first election term.

Another prevalent feature is the many ministerial resignations, some of which are due to shady dealings, but others to more politically acceptable reasons. We can conclude this section by saying that there are a number of instances in which the ACPs have had adequate preconditions to pursue their anti-corruption projects.

TABLE 2: NEW ANTI-CORRUPTION PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT

Party	Years in office	No of ministers (%)	Status in government (changes during election period)	Ministries
<b>National Movement Simon II, NDSV (Bulgaria)</b>	2001-2005	All but four	Main partner in two party majority coalition	
<b>National Movement Simon II, NDSV (Bulgaria)</b>	2005-2009	5 (29)	Junior partner in three party majority coalition	Education; Justice*; State admin. and administrative reform; Defense*; European Integration*
<b>Alliance of a New Citizen, ANO (Slovakia)</b>	2002-2006	3 (19)	Junior partner in four party majority coalition. (Minority coalition after 2004).	Economy*; Health; Culture*
<b>Law and Justice, PiS (Poland)</b>	2005-2007	11 (61)**	One party minority government. (From June 2006, three party majority coalition)	Prime minister*; Interior; Transport and construction; Economy; Justice; Defense; Environment; Culture; Agriculture; Lab. and soc. policy.
<b>New Era (Latvia)</b>	2002-2004	8 (44)	Main partner in four party majority coalition. (Resigned in February 2004)	Prime minister; Interior; Finance; Justice; Education; Regional development; Health*; Culture
<b>New Era (Latvia)</b>	2004-2006	6 (33)	Main partner in four party majority coalition (From December 2004. Resigned again April 2006)	Economy; E-government.; Justice; Social integration; Education; Defense*
<b>New Era (Latvia)</b>	2009-2010	4 (27)	Main partner in five party majority coalition (From March 2009)	Prime minister; Interior; Finance; Economy.
<b>New Era (Latvia)</b>	2010-	4 (27)	Main partner in five party majority coalition	Prime minister; Interior; Finance; Economy.
<b>Res Publica (Estonia)</b>	2003-2005	5 (36)	Main partner in three party majority coalition. (Resigned in March 2005)	Prime Minister; Education; Justice; Finance*; Social affairs
<b>Res Publica*** (Estonia)</b>	2007-2011	5 (36) 6 (46)	Partner in three party majority coalition. (Minority coalition from April 2009)	Education; Defense; Reg. affairs; Agriculture; Economy & comm. + Internal affairs from April 2009

<b>Labour Party (Lithuania)</b>	2004-2006	5 (36)	Main partner in four party majority coalition. (Resigned in mid 2006)	Health; Culture; Interior; Economy*; Justice.
<b>National Resurrection Party (Lithuania)</b>	2008-	2 (13)	Junior in four majority party coalition	Culture*; Environment
<b>Zares-New Politics (Slovenia)</b>	2008-	4 (21)	Junior in four party majority coalition (2nd)	Culture; Economy*; Public administration; Higher education.
<b>GERB (Bulgaria)</b>	2009-	17 (100)	Single party minority government	All
<b>TOP 09 (Czech Republic)</b>	2010-	5 (33)	Junior partner in three party majority coalition	Foreign; Finance; Labour and social affairs; Health; Culture
<b>Public Affairs (Czech Republic)</b>	2010-	4 (27)	Junior partner in three party majority coalition	Interior; Transport; Education; Local development
<b>Freedom and Solidarity (Slovakia)</b>	2010-	4 (29)	Junior partner in four party majority coalition	Labour, social affairs and farming; Defense; Economy and construction; Culture and tourism

\* Denotes personal changes within the same party

\*\* Seven ministers were independents

\*\*\* Res Publica merged with Pro Patria before the 2007 elections.

**Comment:** The table includes all parties that entered government after using anti-corruption rhetoric in their first election campaign. The parties that did not repeat their anti-corruption rhetoric in the second and third elections (NDSV, New Era and Res Publica) are still included. Freedom Union and Direction are not included, since they failed to enter government when using anti-corruption rhetoric.

**Source:** Political Yearbooks, European Journal of Political Research.

## Anti-corruption performance and outcome

It is very difficult to accurately assess the precise impact of one particular party on a broad policy area as anti-corruption, and even more so if the ambition is to compare outcomes in several countries. I have used two interlinked indicators to measure the performance of ACPs; firstly, assess-

ments of the governments anti-corruption reform measures in terms of both adoption, implementation and perceived results and secondly assessments of the level of corruption. The first indicator measure the ambition and effectiveness and the second the over all outcome, which is what actually counts in the long run.

The assessments on the performance of the governments have been gathered from the Freedom House publication *Nation in Transit*, which annually evaluate all post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe on a number of indicators, of which corruption is one. On the basis of the assessments, the countries receive a corruption score ranging from 1 to 7. The ambition has not been to collect as much information as possible on all different legislative initiatives and their perceived effects, but rather to find some short summarizing remarks on each country each year, in order to see whether the governments containing ACPs tend to fare any better than governments that do not. This is admittedly a crude way to analyze such a broad and complex policy area, but it still gives a clear indication whether the ACPs make a difference in terms of anti-corruption legislation or not.

In this preliminary empirical test, I include six countries, during the 2002-2008 period, namely Bulgaria, Latvia, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland. In Romania, new ACPs have as yet not even won parliamentary representation and in Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary, their successes are too recent to be able to adequately analyze at this stage. Bulgaria is the only country in the sample without any variation in the independent variable, as NDSV was in power for the entire period, albeit as a junior partner after 2005. The rest have had periods both with and without ACPs in power.

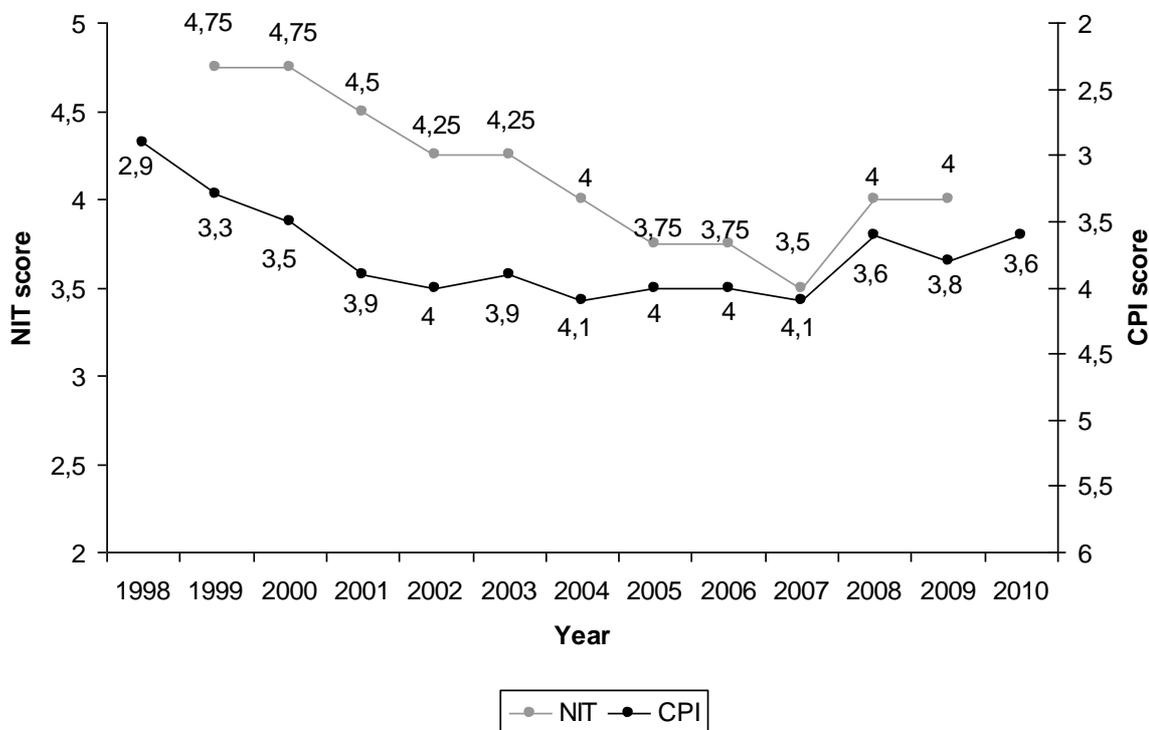
## **Bulgaria**

The case of Bulgaria would naturally be more valid if the period prior to the NDSV's term in office had been analyzed. At the moment there is nothing with which to compare the anti-corruption initiatives, but I still think that the assessments can give us an indication as to what extent anti-corruption ambition existed or not.

In 2001, the former king Simeon Saksoburggotski's newly founded NDVS, won a hefty 42,7 percent of the votes - the best performance of a new party ever in post-war Europe. As they only got exactly half of the seats, they had to form a coalition with the small Turkish minority party, but NDSV controlled all relevant ministries. In 2005 NDSV fared much worse, but still manage to win almost 20 percent of the votes. They continued in government, which however was dominated by the Bulgarian Socialist Party. As mentioned above, NDSV lost parliamentary representation in 2009, after winning only 3 percent of the votes.

From the reports, it is quite clear that there has been such an ambition throughout the period under study. Several important anti-corruption measures are mentioned each year, not least the establishment of an Anti-corruption Commission for the coordination of anti-corruption efforts and the adoption of a National Strategy and Implementation Plan for fighting corruption in 2001 and 2002 respectively and the appointment of a National ombudsman in 2005, all which previously had been absent. Thus, it seems that the new government was taking fresh and innovative initiatives, which were considered effective, even though it is continuously pointed out that there are much more to do both in terms of implementation and also when it comes to effectively deal with the organized crime and reforming the judiciary system in order to increase the number of anti-corruption prosecutions. As is visible from the table below, the Bulgarian governments were rewarded with improved anti-corruption scores continuously until 2007, after which a reversal has occurred. That was due to the revelation of major corruption scandals, which showed that the problem had become much more prevalent and that the measures taken were not sufficiently effective.

FIGURE 1: CORRUPTION LEVELS IN BULGARIA 1998-2010



**Comment:** The left hand scale shows the Nation in Transit corruption scores, which range between 1 (little or no corruption) and 7 (high corruption). The right hand scale shows the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, which ranges between 0 (high corruption) and 10 (no corruption). The scale has been reversed for the sake of comparability.

**Source:** Nation in Transit, country reports on Bulgaria 2003-2010 ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)); Corruption Perception Indexes 1998-2010 ([www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)).

The trend is confirmed by Transparency International's annual evaluations (right hand scale), which also shows a marked decrease in the level of corruption from 1998 onwards, followed by a stabilization and then a quite substantial decrease.

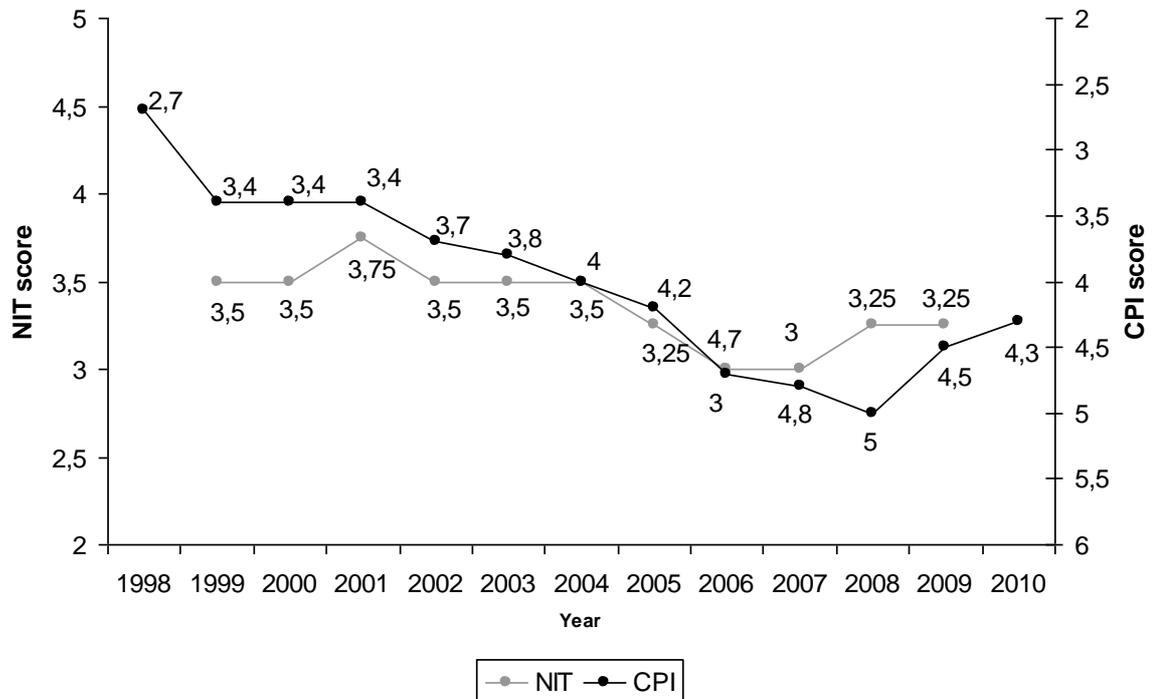
All in all, it seems reasonable to consider the anti-corruption efforts taken and the impact on the level of corruption by NDSV as rather strong, even though the point of departure was relatively modest. Clear improvements are recorded and they are primarily attributed to measures taken by the government, which until 2005 was totally dominated by NDSV. When their influence decreased the level of corruption began to rise again, which is not to say that it would have if NDSV had remained in charge.

## Latvia

In 2002, New Era, led by former head of the Central Bank, Einars Repse, won the parliamentary elections in Latvia, after a campaign focused on anti-corruption, honesty and competence. As shown in table 2, New Era had two turns in office during the first election period, but also the second one ended before the term was up. Following the 2006 election, New Era was at first left outside the government, but was brought in again, in the midst of the financial crises in 2009.

The first corruption report coincides with the shift in government in 2002, which again makes the comparison with previous governments difficult. It is clear however, that also New Era made a jump start in the fight against corruption, with the establishment of the Anti-corruption Bureau (KNAB) for example. A number of other anti-corruption initiatives were taken, but it was also pointed out that implementation had been ineffective, which reasonably must be attributed to the former government, as the new one took office in late autumn. The new government's ambition is lauded and the shortcomings in terms of actual results blamed on the difficult Latvian context. During its first year in operation, KNAB was criticized for not being optimally organized, but from 2005 on, the body was praised for its efficiency and not least for its determination to go after high level politicians, which rarely had occurred before. In addition, several other measures to curb corruption was initiated, which rendered the country with continuously improved scores from 2001 onward, with only a minor set back by the very end of the period under study. In the NIT score, the high point is reached by the end of New Era's term in office, whereas the improvements continue for still a few years according to the CPI. Judging from the great improvements recorded, it seems thus safe to say that New Era made an anti-corruption mark in terms of legislation, implementation and institution building, which has benefitted subsequent governments as well.

FIGURE 2: CORRUPTION LEVELS IN LATVIA 1998-2010



**Comment:** The left hand scale shows the Nation in Transit corruption scores, which range between 1 (little or no corruption) and 7 (high corruption). The right hand scale shows the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, which ranges between 0 (high corruption) and 10 (no corruption). The scale has been reversed for the sake of comparability.

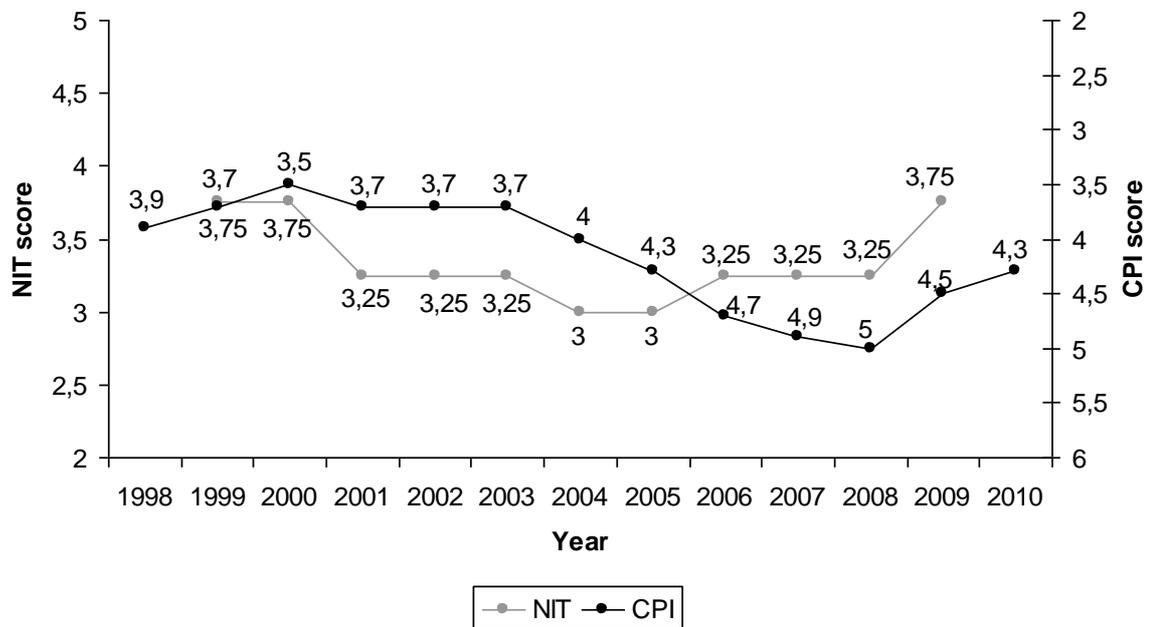
**Source:** Nation in Transit, country reports on Latvia 2003-2010 ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)); Corruption Perception Indexes 1998-2010 ([www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)).

## Slovakia

In contrast to the previous cases, the ACP of Slovakia (ANO) did not have a prominent position in the government during the 2002-06 period, even though its leader, Pavol Rusko, held the position as Minister of Economy. Up until 2005, several relevant anti-corruption measures were adopted, which resulted in slightly improved scores. In 2005 two high level corruption scandals emerged, one of which resulted in Rusko's resignation. That was naturally a severe blow to ANO's image as an ACP and eventually led to its demise, but the government continued its efforts to curb corruption. The elections in 2006 resulted in a new government, led by SMER, which fought the 2002

elections on anti-corruption issues, but not in 2006. From the reports, it is obvious that the new government did not prioritize anti-corruption efforts to the same extent as the former one or even lacking ambitions in this respect altogether. No new legislation was introduced and there was no anti-corruption plan adopted. The NIT score accordingly worsened and quite drastically so in 2009, whereas the CPI score lags a little behind, with improvements recorded until 2008.

FIGURE 3: CORRUPTION LEVELS IN SLOVAKIA 1998-2010



**Comment:** The left hand scale shows the Nation in Transit corruption scores, which range between 1 (little or no corruption) and 7 (high corruption). The right hand scale shows the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, which ranges between 0 (high corruption) and 10 (no corruption). The scale has been reversed for the sake of comparability.

**Source:** Nation in Transit, country reports on Slovakia 2003-2010 ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)); Corruption Perception Indexes 1998-2010 ([www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)).

It thus seems the government was successful during the period 2002 to 2006, but to what extent ANO should be credited is less clear. Rusko's resignation implies that it should not, but by putting the issues of corruption on the agenda in 2002, both ANO and SMER may very well have triggered

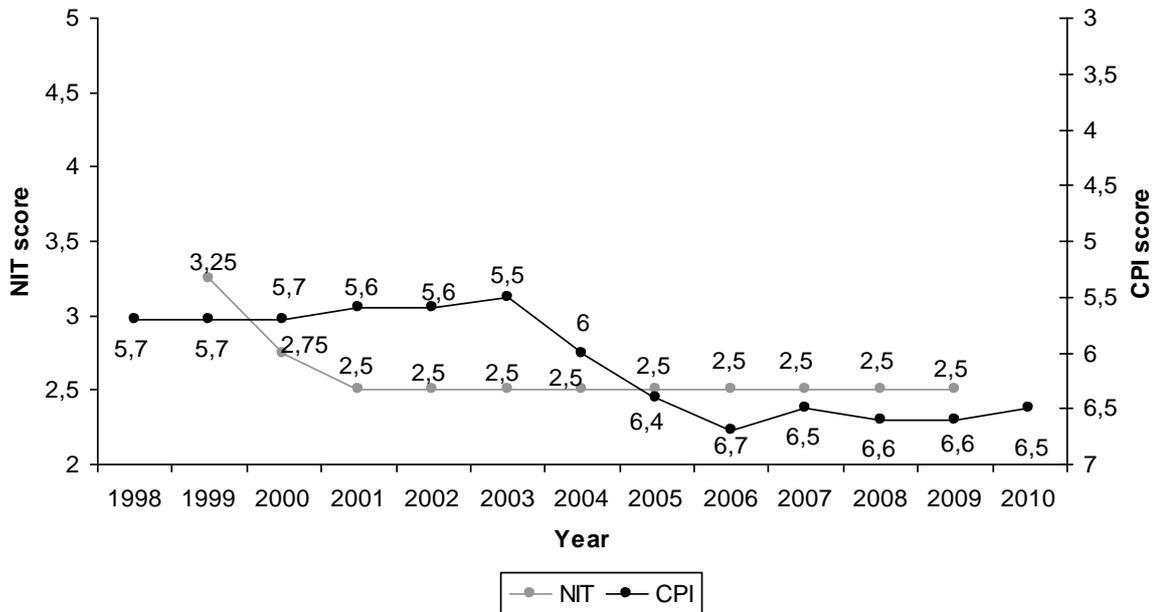
the established parties to take actions. It is obvious though that the following government has been much less successful, despite the presence of a party which in the previous election at least campaigned on anti-corruption.

## Estonia

In Estonia, Res Publica effectively won the March 2003 elections and its leader, former state auditor, Juhan Parts, became Prime Minister. Two years later Res Publica withdrew from government and remained in opposition during the rest of the election period. In 2006 Res Publica merged with the right wing Pro Patria. Together they managed to win office again after the 2007 elections and have since then remained in government.

The reports on Estonia are less informative than the others, perhaps due to the fact that Estonia is one of the least corrupt countries in the region and that the problem is of a much lesser magnitude. It is thus clear that previous governments had been quite active and successful in fighting corruption, even though implementation was lagging behind. The fact that Res Publica won the elections on an anti-corruption platform also reveals that the electorate was less impressed by the performance of the predecessors. Nevertheless, the new government is praised for its new initiatives and the efforts taken are perceived as less politicized, i.e. edged at political adversaries, in comparison with the rest of the region. The success of the Res Publica administration is clearly visible in the CPI score, which improves considerably after the election, despite the fact that the levels were already low at the starting point. It is also noticeable that the years outside government did not harm the level of corruption, which has remained very low since 2006. The NIT score on the other hand show little variation, but also on a relatively low level.

FIGURE 4: CORRUPTION LEVELS IN ESTONIA 1998-2010



**Comment:** The left hand scale shows the Nation in Transit corruption scores, which range between 1 (little or no corruption) and 7 (high corruption). The right hand scale shows the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, which ranges between 0 (high corruption) and 10 (no corruption). The scale has been reversed for the sake of comparability.

**Source:** Nation in Transit, country reports on Estonia 2003-2010 ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)); Corruption Perception Indexes 1998-2010 ([www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)).

Again, the conclusion must be that Res Publica was successful as a corruption fighter and also a trustworthy one, as it managed to attract a substantial part of the electorate in two subsequent election and despite being in office during the financial crisis.

### Lithuania

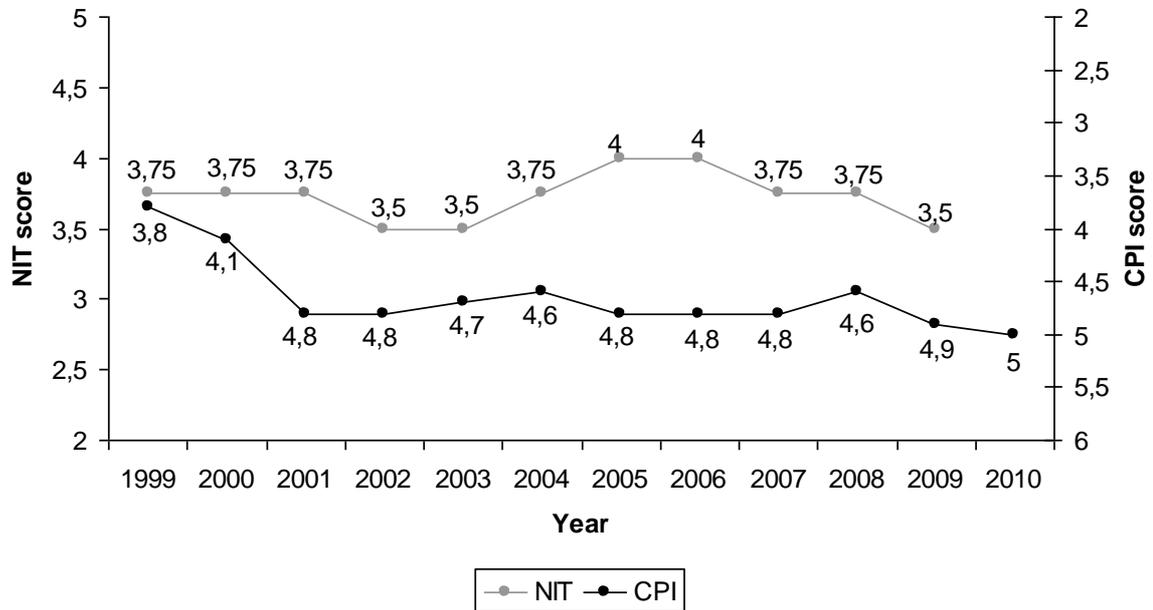
In Lithuania the breakthrough for new ACPs came in 2004, when the Labour Party (DP), led by multi millionaire businessman Viktor Uspaskic, won 28 percent of the votes. DP was of a slightly different character than the other ACPs, however, by clearly positioning itself on the left and also by focusing on other issues, mainly socio-economic ones, to a higher extent. Despite being the

largest party in parliament, the position as head of government went to a coalition partner and Uspaskic himself took the position as Minister of Economy. The DP's spell in office was quite short. Already in June 2005 Uspaskic had to resign on corruption related grounds and the following year DP left the government for similar reasons. Thus the DP had a short period to leave its anti-corruption mark. The population did not reward the party in the 2009 elections, which saw their share of the votes slip to nine percent.

In the reports prior to the 2004 elections it is concluded that much of the anti-corruption legislative framework is in place, but that the enforcement is lacking. The European Commission was also critical, but the score nevertheless improved somewhat, due to new legislative initiatives. In 2004 and 2005 a number of high profiled corruption scandals emerged, which showed that much remained to be done in terms of effectiveness and that competence on how to deal with these issues were lacking. The NIT score accordingly worsened, reaching its highest level ever. The CPI score paradoxically improved during the same period, reaching all time low levels.

Considering the reasons behind both Uspaskic's resignation and the DP's withdrawal from the government, in combination with the worsening NIT score, the only reasonable conclusion is that the Labour Party was a failure in terms of fighting corruption, and the voters seemed to agree on that.

FIGURE 5: CORRUPTION LEVELS IN LITHUANIA 1999-2010



**Comment:** The left hand scale shows the Nation in Transit corruption scores, which range between 1 (little or no corruption) and 7 (high corruption). The right hand scale shows the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, which ranges between 0 (high corruption) and 10 (no corruption). The scale has been reversed for the sake of comparability.

**Source:** Nation in Transit, country reports on Lithuania 2003-2010 ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)); Corruption Perception Indexes 1999-2010 ([www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)).

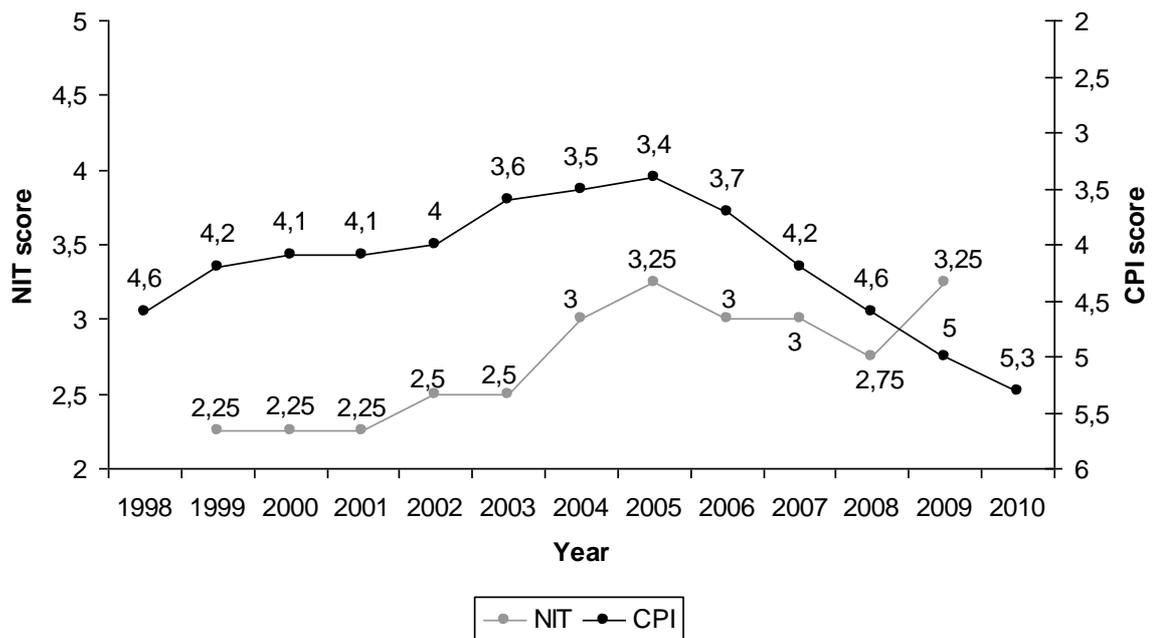
## Poland

Poland had to wait until 2005 before a new ACP was included in the government. Law and Justice (PiS) had made it to the parliament already in the previous elections, but it was left outside the left of centre government. Although PiS increased its votes in the 2007 elections, it was outnumbered by its liberal rivals, the Civic Platform, which chose the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) as coalition partner. From the scores below, it is quite obvious that the left wing government's term in office (2001-05) was a huge failure in terms of fighting corruption. The scores worsened each year, peaking in 2005, after which substantial improvements followed, both during PiS's term in office, but also during the first part of the following government's. The outcome of 2009 is as shown clearly divisive, with a sharp decline according to NIT and the complete opposite according to CPI.

The reasons for the sharp decline from 2001 on, is attributed to an increased rate of high level scandals, in combination with inefficient legislation and poor implementation. In 2005, as one of their first measures, the new government set up the Central Anti-corruption Agency and during the following year a number of legislative measures were adopted.

Even though the implementation record was much weaker, it shows that the PiS put the curbing of corruption high on the agenda, in contrast to their predecessors. Thus, it seems that also the PiS was relatively successful in tackling corruption.

Figure 6: Corruption levels in Poland 1998-2010



**Comment:** The left hand scale shows the Nation in Transit corruption scores, which range between 1 (little or no corruption) and 7 (high corruption). The right hand scale shows the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, which ranges between 0 (high corruption) and 10 (no corruption). The scale has been reversed for the sake of comparability.

**Source:** Nation in Transit, country reports on Poland 2003-2010 ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)); Corruption Perception Indexes 1999-2010 ([www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)).

## Conclusions

Several conclusions have already been drawn in the sections above and will not be repeated again. Even if the results are somewhat mixed, the answer to the question in the title of this paper should still be yes. Anti-corruption parties seem to matter and particularly so for the electorally most successful ones. During the reigns of NDSV, Res Publica, New Era and PiS, the corruption scores improved considerably and the progress was mainly attributed to the measures taken by the governments. They were moreover all also relatively successful in their second elections, which implies that the electorate at least to some extent appreciated their actions. ANO and the Labour Party seem to have been much less successful and moreover involved in corruption scandals while in office.

As mentioned above it is naturally difficult to draw firm conclusions on the exact impact of ACPs and in particular in relation to other parties' influence. During the period under study, the European Union also put a substantial pressure on the applicant states to comply with the accession criteria, among which was the fight against corruption. Since the incumbency of most ACPs coincided with the final phase of the accession negotiations, it may very well be the case that any incumbent party would have been as successful. What speaks against that theory is the fact that the corruption situation actually got worse in several countries, such as Hungary and Poland. It thus seems that the ACPs made a difference, despite their complete lack of previous political experience.

What is striking, however, is that only one of the parties repeated its anti-corruption strategy in the second election, which implies that the issue of corruption is difficult to exploit twice and in particular so if parties have been incumbent. Whatever the sustainability of the parties' anti-corruption strategies, I still think it is valid to speak of them in terms of niche parties, even if it is only in one election. Newly established parties tend to fill the vacuum, when the anti-corruption parties abandon their strategies and there are several cases that within a short while can be evaluated. The fact that ACPs change their focus does not necessarily mean that they abandon their anti-corruption ambitions, as has been obvious in the case of New Era and Res Publica.

Corruption is considered to be one of the most, if not the most important issue among the Central and Eastern European electorates. Corruption is moreover a wide spread phenomenon in all those countries, which makes the expectations on parties promising to eradicate corruption extremely high. To root out corruption is unfortunately extremely difficult and there is no standard manual to consult. All this implies that ACPs are extremely vulnerable and naturally even more so if they have been given the chance in government, a position rarely obtained by green and anti-immigration parties. As the problem of corruption will still persist, the guess is that new waves of new ACPs will follow, rather than the resurrection of the old ones.

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