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Post-Soviet Authoritarianism

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Abstract. The authoritarian regimes in post-Soviet states emerged and consolidated in an absence of strong traditions of civil society and the fact that the anticommunist revolution of 1991 in the Soviet Union was not predated by a “revolution of values.” The democratic transit in the newly independent states failed and democratic changes were suspended, among other things, because the new ruling layers that had monopolized power and property in post-Soviet states never wanted continued market and democratic reforms. In short, the authoritarian regimes, on the one hand, owe their stability to the power/property institution, the *nomenklatura* as the ruling stratum and the patronage state. On the other, authoritarianism in the post-Soviet space was kept within certain limits by power equilibrium between regional elites and de-*nomenklaturization* of the political elite while an absence of political and social actors that need democratic transformations was and remains the highest barrier on the way toward such transformations.

Keywords: post-Soviet space, authoritarianism, neo-authoritarianism, *nomenklatura*, the power/property institution, the neo-patrimonial state.

Variety of Political Forms in the Post-Soviet Space

Starting with the 2000s, the subject of authoritarianism in post-Soviet countries¹ has been figuring prominently in scholarly publications. It was at that time, and contrary to the expectations very popular in the early 1990s of the coming triumph of democracy in the former Soviet republics, this type of political regime moved to the fore to dominate in this part of the world. Having acquired

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independence, some of the republics never tried to abandon the authoritarian forms of governance. This is true of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Others, having initiated democratization and having failed to cope with the serious difficulties on the road to market reforms and democratic national states, moved back to authoritarianism. Some of them covered the road back pretty fast (Azerbaijan, Belarus and Tajikistan) while others (Armenia, Russia) needed many years. Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine wavered some time between authoritarianism and democracy: the so-called color revolutions of 2003-2005 had defused the attempts to restore authoritarianism in these republics. Another round of attempts to restore authoritarian rule took place in Georgia where Mikhail Saakashvili tried to establish authoritarian regime during his second presidential term; in Kyrgyzstan, by President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in 2005-2010; in Ukraine, by President Viktor Yanukovich in 2010-2014. The Republic of Moldova due to several factors was a single one to acquire sustainable electoral democracy in the 1990s.

The academic community related this fairly big group of post-Soviet countries that either smoothly slid into authoritarianism or for a long time vacillated between authoritarian rule and democracy to a so-called “grey zone” [4]. It was practically at the same time that the concept of “hybrid” regimes as a combination of elements of democracy and authoritarianism came into circulation to define these transitory forms [14]. Further events demonstrated that the transitory group in the post-Soviet space was highly unstable. Some of the countries continued moving toward authoritarianism through the “regime of dominant power” [4, p. 54]; others tried to cope with huge problems to start moving toward democratic governance. In the final count, authoritarian regimes became dominant across the former Soviet territory.

According to the assessments of the international Freedom House (FH) organization in 2016 “the consolidated authoritarian regimes” existed in seven countries—Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Russia (the countries are arranged according to the “index of authoritarianism” from the largest to the smallest.) The FH analysts referred two countries (Kyrgyzstan and Armenia) to “semi-consolidated authoritarian regimes” while three state (Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia) were placed in the group of countries with “transitory governments or hybrid regimes” [21]. This classification is contestable, to say the least: Moldova hardly belongs to the states with “transitory governments or hybrid regimes” while Kyrgyzstan having become a parliamentary republic is moving toward electoral democracy rather than remaining in the category of “semi-consolidated authoritarian regimes.” Some of the FH assessments are challengeable yet the general conclusion can be accepted: authoritarianism is deeply rooted in the post-Soviet space. Here we have tried to analyze the causes of this phenomenon and, hence, the variants of political evolution of post-Soviet states.

The highly varied definitions of the post-Soviet political regimes in academic writings stem from methodological pluralism (for more detail see [15]), typical of the studies of authoritarianism at the present stage. The variety of approaches

to this phenomenon, the typologies and definitions of authoritarian regimes are determined, to a great extent, by the variety of forms of contemporary authoritarianism and their great difference from the traditional models of the twentieth century. We have selected the actor approach to the subject of our studies based on the mono-subjective nature of power and decision-making as the main criterion even though in real life the ruling “mono-subject” is not necessarily represented by one person; it may have a much more complicated structure.

Transformations in Post-Soviet States: National Specifics

The initial positions of national state construction in the former Soviet republics were very different that explains, in the final analysis, the variety of social and economic systems and political regimes. Some of the post-Soviet states tried to appeal to the traditions of their short-lived statehoods established on the ruins of the Russian Empire and that, therefore, were seventy-year old. Others had to build their statehoods from scratch. Some states wanted to leave the Soviet Union and were readying for this move; others (the Central Asian states and Belarus) were not ready for independence and, at first, feared this prospect.

Some countries acquired fairly influential national-democratic movements led by the politically active minority including members of national intelligentsia and, to a lesser extent, of the emerging business community (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan and Ukraine) determined to push aside the former ruling class—the Soviet *nomenklatura* (party and economic bureaucrats)—for the sake of market and democratic reforms patterned on the economic and political systems of the developed Western countries. This made possible the changes in the ruling class and progress of the newly independent states along the road of market and democratic reforms in the first years of independence. Azerbaijan that had lived through a war with Armenia and two state coups and Tajikistan plunged in a bloody civil war folded up their democratic reforms; in both countries the *nomenklatura* regained power under the guise of the “party of order.”

In other countries where the national-democratic movements were either weak (Belarus and Kazakhstan) or absent (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) the *nomenklatura* remained in power in the whirlpool of regime change. In July 1994, in Belarus the new and so far the only president Aleksandr Lukashenko was elected at the crest of the wave of anti-*nomenklatura* and anti-corruption sentiments widespread in the republic at that time. At first, the new president had pretended to side with the masses that stood opposed to the interests of the *nomenklatura*. Later, he learned to rely on it to preserve his authoritarian regime.

In the three countries where national-democratic movements were weak or absent (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) the *nomenklatura* promptly replaced the communist ideology with the nationalist one and proclaimed the national statehood as its aim. In Kazakhstan, due to its geopolitical specifics and poly-ethnic structure (in which the titular nation was slightly bigger than

the other ethnicities) the ideology of Eurasianism gained popularity. Belarus was the only state that in the 1990s was moving toward integration with Russia; from time to time it tested different ideologies—the neo-Soviet (Union) and neo-socialist. Three countries of this group (Belarus, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) had not privatized the basic assets of their national economics and, therefore, did not need market reforms. Kazakhstan, on the other hand, carried out large-scale privatization of national economics that set the market mechanisms in motion.

Why the Democratic Transition Failed

By the late 1990s, however, due to two interconnected reasons all countries folded up market and democratic reforms, including those that had already started them, because, in the first place, of the deep social crisis that spread far and wide across the post-Soviet states. As distinct from the leading countries of Central and Eastern Europe in which the “revolution of values” in the minds had predated the downfall of the communist order in 1989 and made their progress along the road of democratic changes possible, in the post-Soviet republics, with the exception of the Baltic states, there was no “revolution of values.” It was a very narrow stratum of the elite intellectuals that, being fully aware that the socialist system had no future in human history, rejected it at the axiological level. The masses were displeased with the Soviet social order for different reasons: they realized with an increasing clarity that it could not satisfy their consumer demands.

By the late 1980s, when the crisis of the Soviet system became clear, the Soviet Union had already acquired a consumer society (the process had been launched by the reforms of Nikita Khrushchev.) Gorbachev’s *perestroika* and the policy of *glasnost* widened the horizons; people became aware that Soviet socialism (or real socialism in the parlance of the times) was losing the social and economic competition with contemporary capitalism. This explains the dissatisfaction with the Soviet state widespread at the time: the Soviet leaders proved unable to fulfill their own promises and to radically improve the nation’s material well-being. The anti-communist revolution of 1991 was, in a broad sense of the word, a “revolution of consumers” wishing to enjoy the same boons as the people in the developed Western countries. Democracy was nothing more than an instrument of achieving this end [13, p. 186]. The majority that preferred to wait and see hailed the new “democratic” power as soon as the victory of the revolution had been confirmed in a hope to finally realize their consumer expectations.

Civil society could not appear and could not survive in the Soviet Union: the totalitarian system controlled all and everything thus making concerted civil actions impossible. Paternalist feelings predominated: the socially and politically passive absolute majority looked at the state as a source and “distributor” of material wealth and was prepared, therefore, to accept anything power was doing and adjust to it. No wonder, at the turn of the 1990s when high consumer expectations, crushed by the inevitable economic decline of the transformation period, could no longer be satisfied, society in all post-Soviet countries lost interest

in democratic changes. The rising wave of dissatisfaction with the results demonstrated by the governments of the newly independent states washed away an interest in the problems of state organization and the way state power functioned. People opted for the behavior models rooted in the Soviet past: individual strategies of survival and adaptation to the dramatic changes in their lives rather than collective struggle for their rights.

Later, when the active democratic minority had been squeezed out from power and big politics in post-Soviet countries, the national-democratic movements declined or even left the stage of history leaving behind a wide gap between the new ruling circles and society. Having escaped control and having achieved monopoly on the basic assets of national economies through privatization, people in power abandoned reforms as unnecessary [3, pp. 204-205]. The new ruling circles won and took all. The progressist lineal development strategy was suspended by the easily explained desire of the narrow elite groups to consolidate the social order (based on their de facto power and property ownership) in which the masses were excluded from political decision-making. Authoritarianism was restored, albeit on a different basis and due to the conservative nature of the new social order, in those post-Soviet states that had at first opted for democratization. The vector of their further evolution depended on the degree of cohesion of the ruling elite, regional specifics and the level of regions' impact on the federal government and the extent to which civil society was prepared and able to influence power.

Having grasped the meaning of the new realities in the post-Soviet countries, the academic circles abandoned their old ideas that had taken shape within the transitological approaches to produce a huge number of new assessments and interpretations of the social order in the post-Soviet space ranging from deviations of sorts from democracy caused by the negative Soviet heritage to sustainable "hybrid" social and political models.

To sum up: the winners' reluctance to go on with changes as well as their isolation from society were the key factors behind the revival of authoritarianism in the newly independent states. An analysis of authoritarian restoration demands that the role the *nomenklatura* in the transformation processes should be discussed in greater detail.

The *Nomenklatura* as the Main Factor of the Revival of Authoritarianism

There is an opinion of long standing in the academic circles that, having realized that the market and decentralization (two factors of Gorbachev's *perestroika*) might prove to be highly profitable, the Soviet party and economic *nomenklatura* (up to and including its factions in the Union republics) joined the process as one of the driving forces of the anticommunist revolution of 1991. When the Soviet Union had fallen apart, the first secretaries of the Communist parties of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine became first presidents of the newly independent states. The *nomenklatura* played the key role in

liquidating the Soviet and consolidating a new social and political order even though the starting conditions differed from country to country. This was one of the common features of post-communist transformations in the newly independent states. On the whole, this confirmed what Leon Trotsky had predicted in his time: "One may argue that the big bureaucrat cares little what are the prevailing forms of property, provided only they guarantee him the necessary income. This argument ignores not only the instability of the bureaucrat's own rights, but also the question of his descendants. The new cult of the family has not fallen out of the clouds. Privileges have only half their worth, if they cannot be transmitted to one's children. But the right of testament is inseparable from the right of property" [16, p. 254]. Trotsky's followers from among the members of the international Trotskyite movement (the Fourth International) insisted from the very first days of *perestroika* that the *nomenklatura* of the Communist parties would push the socialist countries back to capitalism.

At different stages of post-communist transformations and in different newly independent states with different political specifics the place and role of the *nomenklatura* in post-communist transformations were different. In Russia the *nomenklatura* demonstrated a lot of energy while regaining power after the August 1991 revolution when the cabinet of young reformers who steered the country toward the market had been formed. It was Russia's "democratic" power that initiated the process; it was argued that Soviet bureaucrats knew the former economic system well enough to apply their managerial skills to market reforms [7, p. 226]. From the late 1992, when the cabinet of Viktor Chernomyrdin had been knocked together, the flow of the former *nomenklatura* to its former posts became a flood.

In Ukraine, throughout the 1990s the *nomenklatura* preserved its key positions in politics and the economy despite the fairly high wave of national-democratic movements in the first years of the decade. We have already written that in Azerbaijan and Moldova the *nomenklatura* promptly regained its leading positions in the transformation processes. While in the former, after the obvious failures of the first elected democratic leaders led by Abulfaz Elchibey the national-democratic forces were pushed out from governing the country and completely marginalized, in Moldova they preserved, for a long time, their positions in parliament and were involved, albeit with limited powers, in the distribution of power. This explains why the democratic reforms in Azerbaijan were folded up to give space to an authoritarian regime while in Moldova the democratic institutions and procedures, competitive elections in the first place, survived.

In Armenia, "re-*nomenklaturization*" of the structures of power began when President Levon Ter-Petrosyan (who had come to power in the early 1990s as a democratic leader) lost the 1998 elections. Somewhat earlier the same happened in Kyrgyzstan where the *nomenklatura* clans organized on the principles of kinship or origin promptly regained power despite the democratic reforms launched by President Askar Akayev (deposed in 2005 he had to flee the country.) In Tajikistan the Kulob regional *nomenklatura* clan came to power as soon as the civil war had ended.

It should be said that in the post-Soviet states not only the “reformist” factions of the Communist *nomenklatura* (those that had abandoned the idea of preserving the Soviet system) but also non-*nomenklatura* groups (national intelligentsia, bureaucrats of lower levels and the emerging business community) joined ranks as new elites of the post-Soviet states. The level of their representation directly depended on the impact of the people’s democratic and other grassroots organizations of civil society on the process. It was the *nomenklatura* that affected, to the greatest or even critical extent, the makeup of the new ruling class, its political ideas, its values and behavior patterns.

The *nomenklatura* won the battle for leadership it was waging against the leaders of the national-democratic movements for two reasons.

First, when the Soviet republics proclaimed independence, it controlled the basic assets of national economies as well as financial and administrative resources.

Second, unlike the intellectuals who found themselves in power structures, the *nomenklatura* had skills and contacts indispensable at the times of economic crises and state paralysis.

Confronted by these problems at different levels of power, the national-democrats proved unable to promptly and efficiently respond to the emerging challenges. No wonder, at first the fact that the former *nomenklatura* was regaining power bred hopes that stability and manageability would be restored.

In the course of time the composition of the ruling circles in the post-Soviet countries was changing: members of different social groups were gradually rising to the top layers. In the latter half of the 1990s, the countries that had privatized the basic assets of their national economies acquired an influential group of big business known as *oligarchs*. This happened in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Moldova. The relationships between the oligarchs and top bureaucracy ranged from partnership (Ukraine and Russia under Boris Yeltsin) to complete subjugation by the state (Kazakhstan and Russia from the latter half of the 2000s onwards.) The share of the former Soviet party and economic *nomenklatura* that had done a lot to make the victory of the anti-communist revolution of 1991 possible remained high. In 2001, in Russia it comprised 77% of the political elite and 41% of the business elite [5].

Throughout the quarter of a century that has elapsed since the Soviet Union’s disintegration the social makeup of the ruling elite in post-Soviet countries changed to a certain extent or considerably. This did not mean, however, that the role of *nomenklatura* and its political heritage in the policies of the newly independent states was gradually contracting. It helped root its culture of governance and the philosophy of politics and practice of geopolitical domination in the new ruling classes, in power relations. This heritage that has become stable in the new political environment included the idea of rigid power verticals, the desire to weaken and marginalize (or, if possible, to get rid of) any political and civil forces independent of the state and arrange the power relationships on the patron/client principles. The power/property institution and the “patronage” (patrimonial) state are the main elements of the post-Soviet heritage reproduced in post-Soviet realities.

The Key Role of the Power/Property Institution

Despite the fact that the power/property institution is fairly deeply rooted in Russia's history (for more detail see [10]) the Soviet heritage played the main or even decisive role in the social, economic and political order of the newly independent states. From the very beginning the Soviet project proceeded from the idea that the means of production should belong to the state and that the ownership on the means of production as the economic cornerstone of the Soviet order should be under full control of the Communist Party that identified itself with the new state. These ideas were born by two processes typical of the world capitalist economics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: monopolization and the emergence of state-monopoly capitalism that rested on the might of the state fused with the economic might of private capitalist industrial and financial monopolies. This became especially obvious during World War I. Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state, believed that it was but the first step toward socialism. In 1917, he wrote: "...socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly *which is made to serve the interests of the whole people* and has to that extent *ceased* to be capitalist monopoly" [6, p. 362]. The Bolshevik leaders liked the prospect of concentrating power and property in the hands of their government that, they believed, should divide justly the social product among all members of society and govern the country's development in the interests of the "toiling classes." In the 1930s, the system took its final and comprehensive shape and was spread across the entire territory, up to and including the former colonies of the Russian Empire, the Union republics of the Soviet Union.

This system relied on the unlimited power of the Communist Party that created a new ruling class—the *nomenklatura* that united in its ranks the privileged groups of bureaucracy endowed with the powers to govern the country and manage its economy at its different levels. Mikhail Voslensky hit the point: "What matters to the *Nomenklatura* is not property but power" [18, p. 72]. Unlimited and uncontrolled power in the country where nearly all property belonged de facto to the state allowed the *nomenklatura* to dispose of it as the only class of property owners. Milovan Djilas offered his precise definition of this phenomenon: "Contemporary Communism is not only a party of a certain type, or a bureaucracy which has sprung from monopolistic ownership and excessive state interference in the economy. More than anything else, the essential aspect of contemporary Communism is the new class of owners and exploiters" [1, p. 58].

In the power/property institution power was primary while property came second as a derivative of power hence the hierarchy of functions of political leadership and management of material production that predetermined the structural specifics of the *nomenklatura*. The central structures (*apparat*) of the Communist Party was the real owner endowed with supreme historical responsibility for its use; it realized controlling functions, while directors of industrial enterprises

and other managers (the so-called “economic *nomenklatura*”) were in charge of the property and its practical use [12, p. 77].

In the post-Soviet countries that privatized property on a grand scale the power/property institution was restored as soon as, at the turn of the 2000s, privatization had been completed. In different states this institution assumed different economic and legal forms and, what is especially important for the subject of this article, gave rise to different configurations of the relationships of power. In Ukraine, the so-called oligarchs and top bureaucracy acted as partners; in Armenia state power was limited by big business. In the 2010s, a unique situation took shape in Moldova with its democratic institutions: local oligarchs became power here. In Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan state bureaucracy moved to the command positions in their relations with business. Property was controlled by the forces in power. In the countries where the basic assets remained state property the power/property institution was adjusted to the new market conditions while state bureaucracy continued to control it very much as before.

The gradual slide to authoritarianism of the countries with no history of authoritarian rule made these distinctions relatively unimportant. The fact that the power/property institution was present in these countries became a crucial social and economic factor that predetermined this slide, the regime of “dominant power” being the first phase of authoritarianism.

The Patronage State

The patronage state is another cornerstone of the post-Soviet political order that, in its turn, rests on the patron/client relationships in power based on kinship and origin from the same regions, belonging to the same profession and having legitimacy in the eyes of the majority. These relations stem from political domination of the *nomenklatura*. The groups and clans of the *nomenklatura* that contest an access to all sorts of resources look at these relationships “superimposed” on the laws and other legal forms of “interaction” within the political system as guarantees of their power and consequence. They are patterned on the principle: the status, access to the rent and other material boons in exchange of loyalty to a bureaucrat (or a group) on a higher step of the ladder and the readiness to fulfill his (their) instructions, even if illegal.

While in the socialist system the patron/client relationships envisaged, within certain limits, the responsibility of *nomenklatura* for the well-being of the common people for purely ideological considerations, in the post-Soviet times the ruling circles have relieved themselves from this responsibility. Not infrequently, they appealed to the quasi-market ideology according to which each and every one should, allegedly, look after himself and his family. Mancur Olson’s comparison between “stationary bandits and roving bandits” [11, pp. 6-7] is an apt description of the above.

People, on the whole, remain, in many respects a political and anthropological type of “Homo Sovieticus” [20] even if they sometimes are very critical of the

patrimonial state. They, however, do not oppose it because, they are convinced, the state is responsible for their well-being. This explains why wide social strata have rejected the state model based on a negative consensus offered to the people in many of the post-Soviet states in the 1990s. It boiled down to a complete mutual rejection of all obligations—of the state to society and of society to the state. This forced the *nomenklatura* (that at the early stage of independence shook off its social obligations to society) to encourage the illusion that it was working hard to raise the standard of living and to fan expectations that the situation would soon improve thanks to its efforts. This means that the patron/client relationships in power structure as a means of continued domination and the paternalist-minded population strata are mutually complementary; they consolidate the neo-patrimonial state and prevent the rise of forces that could have moved society to a contract state based on mutual obligations of the state and society in which power would be responsible to society and society would control power.

Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Forms of Governance

The history of the post-Soviet states shows that the choice between authoritarianism and democracy is strongly affected by the forms of government registered in their constitutions. The countries with the parliamentary (Moldova) or mixed presidential-parliamentary or parliamentary-presidential forms of governance (Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan) stand a better chance to move toward democracy. Significantly, no country with the presidential form of governance in the post-Soviet space has started moving from authoritarianism to democracy (Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.) Armenia that announced a transfer to the mixed parliamentary-presidential republic so far has not launched the process for want of practical experience.² The choice of either parliamentary or mixed form of government is determined by an absence of vertical integration of the elite or the desire of some of its factions to remain in power contrary to the constitutional norms (Georgia and, recently, Armenia.)

The interconnection between the forms of government and political regimes in the post-Soviet states is not that simple. Indeed, sustainable authoritarian regimes might exist in presidential-parliamentary republics which demonstrate no signs of democratic evolution (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan.) The failed attempt of President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich to establish an authoritarian regime in the country that had been living with the presidential-parliamentary form of government since 2010 pushed the country toward electoral democracy. The experience of the parliamentary republic of Moldova showed that in a situation in which all branches of power are controlled by one and the same party (in 2004-2009 this was the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova) attempts to restore authoritarian order cannot be excluded [17, pp. 603, 614].

The forms of the post-Soviet authoritarian regimes vary from country to country. They are mostly personalized (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) or typologically close clan regimes (Azerbaijan and Tajikistan). The

corporate regime in Armenia with part of the elite united into the Republican Party that remains at the helm can be described as another “pole.” In Russia the regime is a mix of personalized and corporate forms in which the role of corporations belongs to groups of bureaucrats and businesses.

The variety of forms apart, the post-Soviet authoritarianisms have one thing in common: frequently changed institutions. One may be tempted to wrongly describe this as a sign of instability. There are no stable or permanent institutions because the elite does not need them: it is much easier and much more efficient to redistribute property through the patron/client relationships [2] and, what is even more important, through access to the president as the center of decision-making. Not infrequently, institutions are changed together with changed priorities of the elite and the alteration of elite groups and factions at the helm. The institutions are adjusted to the new interests and new tasks as understood by the ruling circles. They can change the election system, the means and methods of forming the parliament or electing the president, set up the upper chamber of the highest representative structure and indulge themselves in other institutional changes. This does not threaten the regime: that much has been abundantly confirmed by the behavior of the authoritarian regimes at the critical moments of their evolution (power transfer in the first place.) At the critical moments stability is preserved not by the formal institutions but by the informal, behind the scene so to speak, understandings between the elites, confirmed by the experience of Turkmenistan in 2006 and Uzbekistan in 2016.

Post-Soviet “Neo-Authoritarianisms”

As we have written above, contemporary authoritarianisms differ greatly from the traditional models of the twentieth century. In the post-Soviet space authoritarian regimes demonstrate mostly modern “modifications” that can be described as neo-authoritarian and that survive thanks to the “dynamic interaction between coercion and corruption, the dominant role of either the former or the latter depends on the domestic political context and the current political, economic and social tasks the regime has to cope with” [8, pp. 96-97]. The regimes of this type are more flexible than the traditional models; they are less ideologized and, not infrequently, change their ideological landmarks [9, p. 171].

These regimes are lavish with official declarations of their devotion to democracy but inevitably stress the national specifics of their countries. They insist on their respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and separation of powers; elections to the organs of representative power are regular and formally competitive with predetermined results in the majority of cases. There is no official state monopoly on the media yet the information space is controlled and regulated by corresponding government structures. The neo-authoritarian regimes are determined to limit, as much as possible, the use of force especially on a mass scale with the exception of cases when the country’s stability is threatened or their power is endangered. They have replaced the use of force and repressions

by mass propaganda and psychological brainwashing realized through state-controlled TV channels.

The political regime of Turkmenistan that took shape under the country's first president Saparmurat Niyazov (Turkmenbashi) (1990-2006) stands apart as an extreme form of autarchy or a sultanist regime in Juan J. Linz's terms. Under the next president Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov the country began its slow drift toward neo-authoritarianism; it acquired, in particular, a multiparty system. This evolution is going on, even if the state remains, partly, in control of petty details of public and private life of its citizens and foreigners related to their way of life and behavior.

Authoritarian Rule and the Development Limits

The authoritarian regimes are fairly firmly rooted in the post-Soviet space yet there are certain limits to their development and the territories they cover. The first group of such limitations consists of factors that limit, in one way or another, the influence the *nomenklatura* as one of the main vehicles of authoritarian trends. We have already mentioned one of them: the development level of civil society and NGOs as its structures, initiatives, public organizations set up to deal with certain problems and address certain tasks. In the countries where this factor was and remains highly visible authoritarianism either runs against stiff opposition (Armenia) or has to retreat to vacate space for alternative development variants (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine).

Discrediting the very idea of the *nomenklatura* governance belongs to the same group of factors: at the dawn of transformations this idea was discredited in many of the former Soviet republics—Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Russia. In Georgia only it became a powerful and consistent factor of bringing new political elite to power. The events that followed the Rose Revolution of 2003 triggered generation change in national politics: members of the former party and economic *nomenklatura* were replaced with people and groups unfamiliar with the Soviet experience of government. They belonged to new political parties, movements and NGOs or were top managers of private companies. Despite these impressive shifts inside the political elite, many of the members of *nomenklatura* preserved their posts in state structures. It was in 2011 that the parliament of Georgia practically unanimously adopted the Freedom Charter that contained the norms of political lustration to be applied to the former officials of the CPSU and the Soviet special services [19].

The same happened, albeit in a somewhat tuned-down form, in Moldova that pushed the political process closer to democratization.

The second group of the limiting factors is associated with the structural specifics of the new ruling class. The geographic and regional patchwork of some countries and conflicts of interests between regional elites do not allow any of the *nomenklatura* clans to subjugate the others and to build up a power vertical, Ukraine being an adequate example. For a long time it remained the arena

of struggle between two strongest regional clans—the Dnepropetrovsk and the Donetsk-Lugansk—with Kiev being the battlefield. The same applies to Kyrgyzstan where sub-ethnic groups of the Northern and Southern Kyrgyzes are locked in power struggle. This configuration of the ruling class presupposes equilibrium between the leading political clans: they have no choice but settle their disagreements publicly which adds weight to the national parliament as a political institution and increases its role in harmonizing their interests. This makes the role of competitive elections more important and adds vehemence to the struggle between different ideological and political platforms: the more or less equal weights of the leading groups on both sides mean that they need additional factors, of which electoral support is one.

Tajikistan can be compared with Ukraine because of its great regional variety. Yet, it is a country with authoritarian rule: as a result of the civil war of 1992-1993 the Kulob clan suppressed all other clans—the Kurban Tyube and the Gharm clans as its enemies in the war—and the Khujand and Leninabad clans, its wartime allies. The emergences of “oligopolies” headed by the biggest businessmen who control large segments of national economies and can strongly affect national politics through their clients in the parliament, the government and the state structures and the controlled media. In this way they remain independent, to a certain extent, of state power. This system is typical of Ukraine; in 1995-2000 it existed in Russia.

An absence of common national identity in some countries where there are several competing identities with different ideas about the past and the future and, what is most important, about their place in the world can be described as the third group of limiting factors. This is typical of Moldova and, to a lesser extent, of Ukraine. The rivaling identities create a space for an open political rivalry and require concerted efforts to achieve national consensus. Democratic institutions, rather than authoritarian rule, are much better suited for this.

What Next?

A Deficit of internal development sources and an absence of social and political forces that need modernization are the main problem of all post-Soviet states, either authoritarian or electoral democracies. This explains why their political systems tend to status quo. It seems that not so much the introduction of traditional democratic procedures (or the consolidation of those already functioning)—competitive elections, plurality in the media, wider public activity spaces—but a reform of the post-Soviet state may become the preliminary condition of social progress. This means that the power/property institution as the main pillar of such states should be removed while the patronage (neo-patrimonial) state should be replaced with a state based on a contract that presupposes mutual responsibility of the state, power and society.

In fact, continued democratic changes in the states where they have begun and brought tangible results and their successful cooperation with the developed

democratic countries may create institutional conditions for a gradual ripening of the subjects of modernization and creating mass demand for it. For the countries of “barren pluralism” and electoral democracy the prospects of successful construction of democracy are closely connected with several tasks of great importance. First, they should defeat corruption of the *nomenklatura* and oligopolies (oligarchs). Second, they should achieve national consensus on the development aims. Third, they should develop new, post-Soviet national identities.

Other countries of the same region may follow a different road. If Russia decreases its economic support they would be forced to turn to the West for economic support that will be inevitably stipulated by the demands to move toward democratization and reforms.

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Notes

- ¹ The Baltic countries—Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia—were left outside the scope of our article. Post-Soviet by their origin they, as distinct from the other newly independent states that appeared in the post-Soviet space, from the very first day of independence, steered toward integration in the Euroatlantic institutions which required deep democratic and market reforms. Today, the functioning of the political institutions of the Baltic states that in 2005 joined the European Union, regulated, to a great extent, by the democratic norms and rules of this organization that moved them away from the other post-Soviet states.
- ² At the referendum of December 2015, Armenia approved the transfer to the parliamentary form of government. We will soon see how this will affect the evolution of its political regime. Here we are writing about its political system as it exists today, before this transfer has been completed.

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