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DEMOCRACY IN POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES OF EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE. GENERAL OUTLINE

The transition from totalitarianism to democracy means change of the basic principles of institutional or political governance, etc., while the selection of political institutions is particularly important in the period of transition to the path of democracy. In consolidated democracies such institutions are usually well entrenched and do not often change. Politicians abide to such political institutions by the acting on the area specified by them. During the period of political transformation, contrary to appearances, the politicians have more opportunities to construct or reconstruct function of the political institutions. However, an active and functional activity of political institutions is determined on the one hand by the missing one model of an ideal democracy appropriate to all countries. On the other hand rationally operating political agencies aim at one system that suits them. Therefore, the final choice of political agencies is a result of reciprocal adjusting of majority of competing political (party) interests [8, s. 36].

The variety of state systems as a part of *the third democratization current* [10] opened many political discussions, e.g.: which of the state governance formulas – presidential, parliamentary, or mixed – is the most reliable and stable for democracy and which will become a premise of the countries' political system, etc.

In political science we distinguish three basic kinds of institutional system: parliamentary, presidential or mixed, in other words half-presidential [9, s. 168–192].

In a parliamentary democracy government is always directly dependent on parliamentary majority (of the coalition forming the majority of the parties): the latter forms and possibly revokes the executive authority [9, s. 168–192].

This is different in the case of the presidential regime-the President is both head of state and government, does not bear the responsibility to the legislative authority. In theory we can talk about the fact that a presidential regime can be a threat to new democracies of post-Communist countries. The following arguments are usually named for [9, s. 168–192]:

1) Victory in the presidential election is always absolute, rather than relative, therefore the candidate (and those who support him), who suffered a setback, cannot accept this fact, and then find a niche in the political system. The presidential election is of particular importance in the heterogenic countries: narrow segments of society may be totally without representation as the candidate of the majority becomes President. On parliamentary system– on the contrary, a policy of cooperation may be expected and the coalition of different parties representing various social segments.

2) Presidential regime stimulates the polarization of the political system (the party) or «double legitimacy» problem arises: the President and the legislative authority compete for the right to be the «real» representative of the interests of the nation, that is why Presidency is often accompanied by an inter-institutional tension, and may even paralyze the political system.

3) Presidential regime is based mostly on the charismatic personality, rather than impersonal institutions. Thus, democracy is not a persistently institutionalized political order but rather this order depends on the will and interests of one person (the delegation democracy);

4) the President may himself constitute an obstacle to economic reforms, if he is guided by the populist principles and not economic logic, etc.

The half-presidential form of governance is a kind of hybrid of the two basic forms of institutional system. After that, the Constitution and the resulting political conditions can affect the fact, who– the head of State, Parliament or both institutions-will have real potential to control the Executive authority. Conversely, the head of State appointed by the Government can have a real, not symbolic authorization to govern the country (e.g. in the post-Communist Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary) [9, s. 168 – 192].

It should also be noted that the political situation really mostly affected the choice of the institutional situation [6] of post-Communist countries. So for example, in countries where the leading political forces have strong leaders, tended to increase the power of the President, though not always successfully (Lithuania, 1992).

And vice versa, where the charismatic personality had less of an impact on the political process, parliamentary political systems were created (e.g. Estonia, Latvia). Such institutional selection in these countries was conditioned by political interests and other factors, such as a pre-war political and institutional system, a model of institutions in a continental Europe, and to some extent also by the State offices shape of the Communist era [7]. (See. map 1.)

Map No. 1. Democratic states in the world – historical comparison.



In 2007 in the world existed 123 democratic states, while in 1972 merely 40.

Source: Democratic states, historical combination and comparison <http://faktopedia.pl/497979>, status on March 14, 2016.

None of the Eastern and Central European states belonging not to the post-Soviet region *de jure* is a Presidential Republic, which means that the head of the State and the Government is not the same person. A version of «the threat to the presidential system» may be checked based on the post-Communist states, however only indirectly. A characteristic feature of such institutional system is that both the autonomous institutions of the authority– the President and the Parliament–have a legal right to revoke the executive authority. In case of

disagreement between the head of the State and the majority of the Parliament shall be increased a probability of political instability and inefficiency of power. The Government is forced to veer between both institutions and stop the changes, otherwise it risks to be revoked [9].

Most of the former Communist States of Europe managed to avoid such a morally ambiguous institutional regime. This is one of the causes of contemporary political stability and successful socio-economic changes in these countries.

Those who pursue institutional changes primarily aim to meet their private interests, which are related to their political career. As long as those interests remain unchanged, political institutions maintain stability, even under conditions of clear unstable policy. Political institutions are changed only when specific reasons become detrimental to those who have real power over them.

It often happens in post-Communist countries that all basic politicians declare loyalty towards the present system, but everyone understands its contents in his own way. This does not necessarily mean ignoring institutions, but rather illustrates that institutional standards should be based on the precedent and traditions. Such statement of the institutions and the political pattern is characteristic for stable democracies. So far, the post-Communist countries variously prospered at the end of this political maturity exam. In the end, it is not worth to forget that only socially legitimate democratic political order that acquired confidence of society is stable [5, s. 26–62].

We face the specific situation in Russia, where exist «controlled» democracy and the increasing authoritarian rule of President Putin. The Russian authorities, apparently separating from the Communist heritage, decided both in domestic and foreign policy to develop their own rules of the game. This is the source of many conflicts in sub-regions, and after that affects badly public confidence of citizens to politicians, as well as manifests poor political culture [5, s. 26–62].

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that there is a consensus to certain minimum characteristic to democracy (political culture, free elections, political pluralism, free media, respect for human rights). However, it still does not exist a universally acknowledged definition of this notion. An even bigger challenge is therefore to measure the level of democracy. Nevertheless, such attempts are made, although they carry in themselves the margin of error due to the specificities of the measured category and a difficulty to grasp certain variables with mathematical accuracy. So for example, according to the ranking drawn up

by the British Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in 2015 (as in 2012) the Czech Republic and Slovenia are in the category of «full democracy» [3]. Poland was attributed to defective democracy and thus took place in this ranking next to the countries of South America (dropped from 40 to 48 place in terms of democracy). This report collates 165 countries. Czech political culture has been assessed far higher than ours, also the functioning of the Czech State developers of the ranking value higher than the functioning of the Polish State. A number of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary), the authors classified as flawed democracy, where in many cases the low (in the opinion of the EIU) level of political culture was decisive. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan EIU placed in the group of hybrid regimes, combining elements of different political systems. Among authoritarian countries were listed Kazakhstan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Only 20 countries have the status of «full democracy.» They are followed by a number of 59 countries, referred to by the term «flawed democracy.» Others are already undemocratic «hidden regimes» (number 37) and «totalitarian regimes.» The latter number is estimated as 51 [1, s. 3–7]. A similar ranking was created by the organization Freedom House, focusing on the level of freedom [4].

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