UA: UKRAINE ANALYTICA

CLIFF-HANGERS

GEORGIA
TURBULENCE
NATIONALISM
SECURITY
SECTARIANISM
AUTHORITARIANISM
DEMOCRACY
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UA: UKRAINE ANALYTICA

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HOW AUTHORITARIANISM AND NATIONALISM AFFECT EUROPEAN SECURITY

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UA: Ukraine Analytica

For several decades already, the fundamental approach to European regional security has been built upon democratic values and institutions. Peace between some democratic states may not necessarily be the result of their being democratic. It can be due to a high level of economic interdependence or the structure of alliances or any other factors. Growing authoritarianism at both supranational and national levels impacts regional security in several important ways, as it weakens the effects of democratic peace and partially restores the security dilemma, but also makes states internally weaker. There are also reasons to believe that nationalism is on the rise in Europe once again.

Introduction

European security is going through difficult times. Major foundations, upon which the regional security system has been built and has been functioning since the Cold War, have been severely damaged in recent years. Institutions have become weaker; while geopolitical tensions have significantly increased. There is no normative unity and no clear understanding of what's right and wrong in international politics. Hard power has become a valuable and effective asset; while traditional alliances and international organizations are experiencing difficulties in elaborating any joint policy.

Russia's revisionist foreign policy is a threat; but not the only one. Moreover, it is perceived differently in various European capitals, which results in the broad space for bargaining Moscow currently enjoys. While Russia is promoting its agenda and concerns, Europe is often lacking its own ones. Trans-Atlantic relations are not in perfect shape. China's growing geopolitical activity is also adding another nuance to a changing international landscape.

These developments are accompanied by changes at institutional and ideological levels. European society is also transforming – partly in response to security threats. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these processes. In particular, there is a growing problem with democracy and nationalism in Europe. While the former is in retreat, the latter is gaining momentum. This combination is important not only for the internal politics of some European countries. It can also bring about considerable effects on security.

These effects may lead to deteriorating bilateral relations, internal crises, and overall damage to the regional security system.

Democratic Peace Theory

For several decades already, the fundamental approach to European regional security has been built upon democratic values

and institutions. It has been assumed that more democracy would bring about a more durable and sustainable peace. The lasting peace in Europe is often attributed to the high proportion of democratic states in the region; while the lack, weakening or even retreat of democracy is often seen as a potential threat. Behind this reasoning there is the theory of democratic peace.

Democratic peace theory (DPT) holds that on a bilateral level, democracies are exceptionally rarely engaged in wars. This is a striking regularity. Jack Levy once called the democratic peace phenomenon 'the closest thing we have to an empirical law in the study of international relations'[1].

> *there is a growing problem with democracy and nationalism in Europe. While the former is in retreat, the latter is gaining momentum*

DPT puts forward several possible explanations as to why democracies are at peace with each other. The structural approach is focused on institutions and decision-making machinery. Democracy implies a government's dependence on public opinion, which is rarely supportive of a war, especially a long-lasting or unjust one. It also would prefer low-intensity military conflicts over major wars; and wars with a high probability of a quick victory over any other type.

The major problem with this explanation is that democracies do fight wars, albeit not with each other. Thus, another possible way to reason within the structural approach is linked to perceptions and expectations. Democratic governments trust each other, and because of that they can usually avoid preventive wars, which break out because of the security dilemma[2].

The alternative explanation is the normative one. This focuses on common norms, which guide democratic states' approaches to conflicts. It is assumed that common procedures and rules expand the area for compromise, and diminish the probability of violence. An additional effect appears on the bilateral level: democracies are not only more inclined to non-violent decisions, but also expect the same of other democracies. Common norms and values, thus, shape networks of alliances and help define potential threats – because the neoliberal approach generally assumes states to be after a balance of threats more than a balance of power. Norms and institutions may also create a joint effect by reinforcing positive expectations. Transparent democratic procedures decrease strategic uncertainty – and the probability of war.

DPT has been one of the key elements of the neoliberal approach to international politics. For several decades it was the conceptual basis for building and enhancing European security. Democratization seemed important. EU and NATO membership, in particular, have been conditioned by a functional and sustainable democracy. Along with that, democracy was seen as the best framework for dealing with new types of threats, such as internal conflicts, separatism, and transnational challenges. Democratic institutions have been credited with preventing discrimination and the institutional weakness of states, which are the key triggers of internal instability.

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1   Levy J., *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, "Journal of Interdisciplinary History", 1989, 18 (4): 653-673.

2   See forthcoming Kapitonenko M. *International Relations Theory*, 2022, New York: Routledge.

Post-conflict settlements have also been carried out primarily through strategic democratization.

More than thirty years after Levy's statement, there is growing scepticism about democratic peace. When it comes to statistics, it turns out that the omission of additional variables can significantly distort the whole picture[3]. Peace between some democratic states may not necessarily be the result of their being democratic. It can be due to a high level of economic interdependence, for instance, or the structure of alliances, or several other factors.

There is also growing scepticism about democracy. It may no longer be considered by everyone as the best political regime possible, a natural destination point of political evolution. Currently there is growing competition from non-democratic regimes of all kinds; and democracy itself is demonstrating various types of deviations.

However, there is still a significant correlation between joint democracy on a bilateral level and peace. There is also the historical record of Europe, once the most belligerent continent, which has been enjoying decades of peace – most likely due to democratic institutions and values. Thus, the lack of democracy looks like a troubling signal. It may cause further deterioration of Europe's security, especially under the current turbulent circumstances.

Europe's Turbulent Security

(Geo)political developments in the world are rapidly changing Europe's security environment. The rise of authoritarianism and nationalism may be one of the ways states are responding to the new challenges.

The recent blow to the international order caused by Russia's annexation of Crimea has been accompanied by several other challenges, which together generate a quite different strategic environment for Europe – a much more complicated one.

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The EU has become somewhat smaller. With the UK gone, there has been a significant drop in power projection capabilities, normative influence and, probably, attractiveness. The EU's great power status has been to a large extent conditioned by its ability to be a centre of gravity for its member states and for numerous neighbours. In recent years, that has begun to be questioned. Internal problems, of which Brexit is just one, have deepened. Europe is not quite united, especially on political and international issues. There have always been differences in the agendas of, say, Spain and Poland, but today these are often insurmountable. The recently debated Nord Stream-2 project may be seen as an illustration of the point, and certainly not the only one.

Europe has become less secure. There are not only more challenges and risks at regional, bilateral and national levels;

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3   Imai K., Lo J., *Robustness of Empirical Evidence for the Democratic Peace: A Nonparametric Sensitivity Analysis*, "International Organization", 2021, 75: 901-919.

but it also seems that Europe has lost its understanding of what security should look like. The previous mode of thinking about security, enhanced by established norms, values, institutions and interdependence, is not working properly. Institutions and interdependence still exist, as well as the rules of the game, but they are not providing as much security for all as is needed. Issues of structural violence, social injustice and inequalities, along with old-fashioned geopolitical clashes, are surfacing far more often than before.

Europe has been affected by global geopolitical developments – and it does not seem to have a grand strategy for the new circumstances. The EU is not a classic major power; it is a very specific international actor. At some point, that specificity could have been seen as a competitive advantage over the old-fashioned nation-states. The Union was an image of the future and a new type of framework for settling political issues.

But international politics is harking back to the age of the classics. Nation-states are gaining momentum, and countries like the US, China, Japan, Russia, the UK, Germany and France are recollecting some traditions and habits of realpolitik and classic geopolitics. Some of these actors are EU members, and they have to bear several identities simultaneously. Germany may have different foreign policy agendas as a state and as a part of the EU. That makes the EU politically fragmented and vulnerable; and it is doubtful whether the issues can be resolved by repeated appeals to unity.

The mounting pressure of the US-China rivalry is becoming a key factor. On the one hand, this will multiply the risks to internal cohesion on issues of international politics, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, heavily involved in Chinese geopolitical initiatives. On the other hand, the EU as a whole may find less room for maneuver globally.

Russia may seem to some to be a game-changer under such circumstances. But that temptation should be dealt with carefully. Exploring Russia's potential to counter China and the US – another manifestation of classic geopolitics – would require important preliminary steps, including settling conflicts on post-Soviet space. At the same time, Russia's revisionism will continue to be a problem for European security, a problem demanding a much more nuanced response than just applying sanctions.

European security, which has been far from a success story since 2014, or even earlier, is facing another fundamental challenge. Shifts at the global level of international politics are generating more risks than opportunities. Restoring the EU's normative attractiveness and turning it into a power asset; finding a proper response to US-Chinese rivalry and a proper balance in relations with Russia; deescalating or resolving running military conflicts – this is a menu which requires much more attention to detail on issues of foreign policy and international security at all levels.

Effects of Declining Democracy

Numerous reports suggest that Europe is experiencing some problems with democracy[4]. These problems are manifested at both supranational and national levels. The authoritarian trend may be observed both in the EU and in certain member states.

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4   See, for example, *Report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe "State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law. A Democratic Renewal for Europe," 2021; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.* "The Global State of Democracy. Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era", 2021.

At the supranational level, rising authoritarianism is mostly about an excessive concentration of power in institutions, and lack of democratic control or legitimacy. It is reflected in more centralized decision-making in the EU itself, with less accountability and constraint upon executive authorities. Certain areas, such as healthcare or finance, eventually generate crises, which are used for further centralization of decision-making at the expense of democratic procedures. This, in turn, may provide the big powers with additional leverage, since their impact on European institutions is significantly larger than that on smaller states. The age-old and well-known problem of the democracy deficit in the EU can be made more complicated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, increasing authoritarianism at the national level is also possible. This implies fewer liberties and some limitations on civil rights, more populist rhetoric, often accompanied by anti-European connotations and nationalistic claims, which are waiting to be addressed further. Governments within European countries may find it increasingly convenient to criticize Brussels for anything perceived as bad and credit themselves for all good outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to these trends, which have manifested themselves since about 2008. At that time, democracies all over the world, Europe included, were weakened by the economic impact of the global financial crisis. Since then, a number of countries have found it economically impossible to maintain democratic regimes. Now, in 2021, these effects have been reinforced by the limitations on the freedom of speech and by disinformation stemming from the pandemic.

As a result, there is an expanding list of not-so-democratic countries in Europe – in addition to already existing authoritarian

regimes. The latter have been firmly installed in the cases of Russia and Belarus, and consolidated recently. Turkey has been going along the path of tightening the grip of its political regime. Democracies in such post-Soviet countries as Ukraine or Moldova, even if one can label them as such, are weak and difficult to sustain. These countries are poor, unstable and vulnerable to external pressures. Democracy usually appears in these countries as a symptom of a general weakness of state institutions or a result of yet another revolution.

> **Growing authoritarianism at both supranational and national levels impacts regional security in several important ways. First, it weakens the effects of democratic peace and partially restores the security dilemma in relations between states. Second, it makes states internally weaker**

But along with these problematic cases, there is also unexpected trouble in countries like Hungary, Poland, Romania or Slovenia. These have not turned into non-democracies overnight; but something has happened to raise suspicions and concerns. From a formal perspective, they still qualify: there are competitive political systems, elected governments, as well as free and fair elections. However, some civil liberties appear to have become limited; opposition is often discriminated against, and the rule of law may be under question. Such regimes may experience the merger of branches of power, the marginalizing of parliaments, misuse of structural power, tightening of the state's control over the media. As a result, opposition parties in such regimes have significantly lower chances

of winning the next elections. Sometimes this type of deviation from democracy is referred to as a 'hybrid regime', 'competitive authoritarianism'[5] or 'nascent autocracies'[6].

Growing authoritarianism at both supranational and national levels impacts regional security in several important ways. First, it weakens the effects of democratic peace and partially restores the security dilemma in relations between states. Second, it makes states internally weaker. Lack of democracy generates institutional fragility and may lead to discrimination, which in turn increases the probability of internal unrest. Third, the existing frameworks for dealing with political conflicts may become non-functional. The political culture, values and approaches, which brought about a durable peace in Europe, may be damaged, since democracy is fundamental to all of them.

A less democratic Europe is likely to become a less secure one. Hardly will it once again be an arena of major military conflicts; but its effectiveness in dealing with transnational, internal and new types of threats will be diminished.

Effects of Rising Nationalism

Europe is certainly not nationalistic in the way it used to be in the 19th and first half of the 20th century. European norms are important and shared; and European unity is preserved, no matter how often it is questioned. With very rare exceptions, nationalists do not hold presidencies or control governments. The rights of minorities are protected and the borders between states are largely symbolic.

However, there are still reasons to believe that nationalism is on the rise in Europe once again. The United Kingdom set a precedent by leaving the EU. Xenophobia in different countries is getting stronger, against the backdrop of numerous refugee crises. Nationalist and right-wing parties are enjoying stronger support. Globalization, immigration and supranational identities are increasingly criticized.

The Right-wing Identity and Democracy political group in the European Parliament consists of about 70 MEPs. Nationalist parties enjoyed considerable support at the recent elections in countries like Hungary, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, and Belgium. They are also quite visible and active in Italy, France, Spain, and the Netherlands. Nationalist ideology is often accompanied by populism and Euroscepticism, which means that every next election in the countries where nationalists are strong can significantly change the political landscape in Europe.

Nationalism has always been influential. This is an exceptionally sustainable ideology, which probably made the strongest impact on international politics in the last two hundred years.

But nationalism was not always the same. A product of modernity, it has been transforming and has manifested itself in different historical contexts. The nationalism of the early 19th century was in many ways different from the nationalism at the time of World War II or in the era of decolonization. However, in most cases nationalism is linked to a modern sovereign state. The concept of nation corresponds to the norms and standards of a Westphalian order.

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5   Levitsky S., Way L. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. 2010, New York: Cambridge University Press.

6   Kelemen R. *Europe's Other Democratic Deficit: National Authoritarianism in Europe's Democratic Union*, "Government and Opposition", 2017, 52(2): 211-238.

Usually the rise of nationalism accompanied dramatic geopolitical shifts and the emergence of new states after various empires collapsed. It was accompanied by the creation of national symbols, and featured clashes over minorities, quarrels over interpretations of history and occasional irredentism. As a rule, any rise of nationalism promoted a more assertive foreign policy and weakened the multilateral institutions of international politics.

> **The nationalism we witness in Europe today is focused on several key tasks. First, it aims to make the national level of decision-making important again. Euroscepticism is integral to modern European nationalists**

The nationalism we witness in Europe today is focused on several key tasks. First, it aims to make the national level of decision-making important again. Euroscepticism is integral to modern European nationalists. They want power to be returned to the state, and they want national capitals to have more political weight than Brussels. Second, it is about more strict measures against immigration. This used to be a long-term problem on the European agenda, with some countries taking more risks than others. The influx of immigrants generates social, economic and cultural problems, as well as maybe triggering transnational challenges. No less important is the fact that dealing with immigrants is a conceptual issue, since it is linked to equal rights, non-discrimination, and fundamental freedoms. A balance is difficult to achieve; thus, the more radical stance of nationalists may seem more and more appealing.

The nationalist agenda also contains the issue of minorities. They not only want the rights of ethnic minorities to be protected in other countries, but occasionally use minorities as an instrument of political competition at home and pressure abroad. Raising the problems of ethnicity, history, religion or language creates a chain reaction and promotes nationalism in neighbouring countries as well. That is why the effects of nationalism on security may be felt when only a few countries adopt these policies. These policies can trigger changes in the neighbourhood as well.

Nationalism changes perceptions of neighbours. As an ideology, it puts heavy emphasis on minorities, history, symbols and territory. Economic nationalism may lead to protectionism and disrupted trade and, eventually, to decreased interdependence. It also weakens common institutions and prioritizes national agendas. As a result, the security system is being transformed toward a more traditional inter-state structure.

Conclusion

Europe nowadays finds itself in an increasingly problematic international environment. The challenges posed by Russian revisionism, the crisis in Trans-Atlantic relations, and the rise of China have not been properly addressed. The risks generated by the unstable situation in the neighbourhood also remain considerable. Security concerns have gained additional significance.

European security is a product of the interaction of states, societies and supranational institutions in various areas. They may respond to changes in the security environment in their own ways. As a result, transformations may be seen

at different levels. At some of these levels a changing international order may demand more nationalism and less democracy from Europe. What we see in some European countries and at the level of the EU as well reflects shifts in the perception of threats. The demand for more nationalist policies and the weakening of democratic institutions may be interconnected.

But following up on that demand may turn out to be a bad strategic choice for Europe. Less democracy could lead to less trust and more zero-sum thinking; while more nationalism may turn out badly for the common good.

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AUTHORITARIANISM AND NATIONALISM CHALLENGES IN POST-SOVIET SPACE: IS THERE A CORRELATION BETWEEN THEM?

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Political regimes in the former Soviet republics have evolved towards authoritarianism and vice versa. Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine became democratic; later – Georgia and Moldova; Azerbaijan and Armenia are semi-authoritarian; Russia, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan are authoritarian; Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan became neo-totalitarian, with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan following them. In this article the author will try to answer the questions as to whether the main form of manifestation of nationalist contradictions in the republics of the former USSR is political confrontation, and if nationalist tendencies increase with the growth of authoritarian tendencies. The study found that there are fewer ethno-nationalist conflicts in Central Asian countries than in their more "democratic" neighbours; conflicts in autocracies are more likely to occur within the ethnic majority.

Democratization in the Post-Soviet Space: What Do They Have in Common?

«Democracy is a kind of time-limited leadership. This is a regime in which voters can regularly demand from the rulers a report on the work done, periodically forcing them to change their political course», – said the famous American political scientist Juan Linz.[1] Indeed, politicians who have held senior positions for many years become prone to abuse, conservatism, and corruption, lose motivation to change their course under the influence of voters, and as a result lose sight of reality. That is why one of the indicators of democratic transition is variability of power and, more importantly, the scenario of its transmission. In the late 1980s, as the processes that led to the collapse of the USSR intensified and national democratic movements grew, the leaders of the communist parties of the union's republics faced a difficult choice: to remain loyal to the union's leadership and internationalism, competing for power with nationalist leaders, or to try to adopt the slogans of the opposition (primarily democratization, independence, national revival)[2]. There were two main scenarios of

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1 J. J. Linz, *Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference?*, [in:] J. J. Linz and A. Valenzuela(eds.), *The Crisis of Presidential Democracy: The Latin American Evidence*, The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore 1994, p. 7.

2 О. Г. Карпович, *Теория и практика демонтажа современных политических режимов* [O. Karpovich, Theory and Practise of the modern political regimes' deconstruction]. Москва, 2015, с. 18.

coming to power for the first leaders of the independent states:

1) election as head of the Republican Communist Party;

2) victory in the first election as a leader of the opposition (or as leader of the national democratic movement, or a representative of the party nomenklatura, who opposed the current leadership of the republic).

Among the leaders who retained power after the collapse of the USSR were Leonid Kravchuk (Ukraine), Mircea Snegur (Moldova), Ayaz Mutalib (Azerbaijan), Saparmurat Niyazov (Turkmenistan), Islam Karimov (Uzbekistan), Nursultan Nazarbayev (Kazakhstan), Kakhor Makhkamov and then Rahmon Nabiyev (Tajikistan). The common factor among all these republics was their lack of resources in the national democratic movement to overthrow communist leaders, on the one hand, and the reorientation of these leaders themselves to national democratic values, on the other.

> **one of the indicators of democratic transition is variability of power and, more importantly, the scenario of its transmission**

In Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Georgia, and Armenia, the leaders of the republican communist parties have lost power. The new leaders of Russia and Kyrgyzstan were part of the middle level republican political elite. Former dissidents became the leaders of Georgia and Armenia[3]. All the

first presidents of the union republics, which were still part of the USSR, gained power as a result of elections – first in parliament and then at the national level. The institution of presidential elections played a small role there; more important were the internal elite conflicts between the «conservatives» and the «reformers» in relation to the ongoing liberalization of the regime.

The political scientists of the first decade of the XXI century identified four main types of political regimes formed in the former Soviet republics:

1) democratic: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine;

2) semi-authoritarian: Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova;

3) authoritarian: Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan;

4) neo-totalitarian: Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The difficult situation in these post-communist countries was also dictated by the fact that they had a large number of competing new political parties and interest groups; their confrontation greatly paralyzed the legislative process. This combined with the complications associated with the unclear nature of relations in government. Conflicts between the executive and the legislature have been common in post-communist countries and have had the worst impact on economic reform. For these reasons, the pace of economic transformation has slowed down significantly.

If we talk about those common processes for all post-Soviet countries, we can highlight the following:

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3   Г. И. Вайнштейн, *Закономерности и проблемы посткоммунистических трансформаций* [G. Vainshtein, Patterns and Problems of the Post-Communist Transformations], [in:] *Политические институты на рубеже тысячелетий*, Дубна, 2001, с.166.

1) Measures were taken to restore the political mechanisms that operated under socialism and hindered the progress of society in public life. The actual significance of such measures was to prevent the weakening of the dominant positions of the elite, the emergence of real opposition to the system and protest movements in the population;

2) There was support for and intensification of excessive property inequality, and preservation of a low-income population. There was a partial adjustment such as raising the minimum wage, but in actual fact, the socio-economic and political mechanisms of legal and illegal distribution of public funds worked in favour of the elite;

3) Resisting the efforts of various parts of the state apparatus and of many groups of the political class as a means of implementing measures to develop civilized market relations, to intensify reasonably limited, economically justified state regulation, to apply freedom from the selfish pressure of both bureaucracy and the oligarchs;

4) Often obviously ill-considered and ineffective implementation of reform measures, which threatened to provide the opposite results from those intended;

5) The formation of nationalist ideology under the influence of such factors as rejection from Russia, which was perceived as a symbol of the USSR and therefore of national oppression, and pro-Western orientation. The West actively helped nationalist movements during the «late perestroika» period, and was later perceived as the main backer of the new regimes. In addition, the new regimes apparently relied on major economic assistance from the West. The third factor was the influence of the diasporas, which played the role of custodians of national identity, and where they were to be found – even close to the national borders of the new states (Turkey for Azerbaijan, Romania for Moldova, Poland for Ukraine and Belarus)4.

Transfer of Power Scenarios: «Successor» and «Coup»

The most interesting process in the post-Soviet space is the process of transfer of power, which can be reduced to two scenarios (apart from the Baltic countries): coup (revolution) or «successor choice» (successor).

The «successor» scenario in the CIS was tested for the first time in Russia. On December 31, 1999, a phrase that went down in history was heard on television: "I'm leaving. I did everything I could.» President Boris Yeltsin quit his post early and placed the presidency in charge of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who has held the post since August 1999. As a result, Putin won the first round of the presidential election, gaining almost 53% of the vote. It is noteworthy that Putin himself used a similar scenario for the transference of power. He did not remain president for a third term, and decided to nominate First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev for the presidency. The latter won the election with 71% of the vote[5]. The difference from Yeltsin's scenario was that Putin, while handing over power to Medvedev, remained in politics and took a key position as head of the Russian government. A «duumvirate» was formed.

Other successful cases of the successor scenario have been Azerbaijan in 2003, Armenia in 2006, and Kazakhstan in

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4   O. Г. Карпович, *Теория и практика демонтажа современных политических режимов*. [O. Karpoichv, Theory and Practice of the modern political regimes' deconstruction], Москва 2015, c. 22.

5   Г. И. Вайнштейн, *Закономерности и проблемы посткоммунистических трансформаций* [G. Vainshtein, Patterns and Problems of the Post-Communist Transformations] [in:] *Политические институты на рубеже тысячелетий*, Дубна, 2001, c.166.

2019. For example, Heydar Aliyev, who ruled the country under Soviet rule, returned to power in Azerbaijan in 1993. He was elected president twice, in 1993 and 1998. In the late 1990s, Aliyev began to have serious health problems, which led him to consider a successor. Heydar Aliyev, already seriously ill, ran for a third term in the 2003 presidential election (in violation of the current constitution), but later withdrew it in favour of his son Ilham Aliyev. Ilham Aliyev won the election with 77% of the vote and became the first successor to the president in the CIS, in the literal monarchical sense.[6] In 2008, Ilham Aliyev was re-elected to a second term, and in March 2009, following a referendum, the constitutional norm banning the incumbent president from being elected for more than two consecutive terms was repealed.

> **The most interesting process in the post-Soviet space is the process of transfer of power, which can be reduced to two scenarios (apart from the Baltic countries): coup (revolution) or "successor choice" (successor)**

In Kazakhstan, in 2019, Nursultan Nazarbayev handed over the presidency to Kasim-Zhomart Tokayev. At that time, Senate Chairman Tokayev automatically headed the country. A few months later, he won the early presidential election, gaining the support of 71% of voters.[7] However, Tokayev did not wield the full power of his predecessor. Nazarbayev retained the post of chairman

of the Security Council and chairman of the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan. In addition, he continued to lead the ruling *Nur Otan* party and remained a member of Kazakhstan's Constitutional Council. This state of affairs has led to the fact that no decision of the head of state could be made without the consent of *Elbasy* (The Leader of the Nation).

In Kyrgyzstan until 2005, in Turkmenistan until 2006, and in Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, incumbent presidents handed over power to themselves. Various political and legal methods were adopted for this purpose.

One option to extend the term was to nullify the presidential term, sometimes in combination with replacing the election with referendums in order to extend the term. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the first president, Askar Akayev, was elected in 1991 and 1995. But in 1998, the Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan decided not to count Akayev's first presidential term, as he had been elected under the old constitution of 1978, not the new one of 1993. Thus, Akayev was able to be elected for a third presidential term[8].

Another way to recalculate the deadlines was to adopt a new Constitution. Two years after Alexander Lukashenko's victory in the first presidential election, a new Constitution was adopted in Belarus specifically for this purpose. This provided for a five-year presidency, but calculated the term of office of the current president from the date of its entry into force, i.e. since 1996. Thus, Lukashenko extended his term for two years, and then, in 2001, through elections for a

6   *Azerbaijan Reportю* "RFERL", 18 October 2003. [https://www.rferl.org/a/1340743.html]

7   T. Vaal, M. Gordeyeva, *Nazarbayev's handpicked successor Tokayev elected Kazakh president.* "Reuters", 10 June 2019. [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kazakhstan-election-idUSKCN1TB0JA]

8   А. А. Быков, *О русофобии в постсоветском пространстве [About Russophobia in the Post-Soviet Space]*, "Социологические исследования", 2000, №4, сс. 128-130.

new five-year term. Following a referendum in 2004, the provision limiting presidential powers to two terms disappeared from the Constitution altogether. Vladimir Putin used the same scenario in Russia in 2021.

Four cases of «successor» can be distinguished from the cases of «succession»: Russia in 2000, Armenia in 2008, Azerbaijan in 2003, and Turkmenistan in 2007. The remaining cases are extensions of the current presidencies.

The second scenario of the transfer of power in the post-Soviet space is often called a «coup» – a (violent) change of government under the influence of mass demonstrations, sometimes involving armed conflict, violation of the Constitution, and the laws of the country.

In Azerbaijan, in 1991, the communist elite managed to stay in power solely due to the introduction of Soviet troops into Baku. The defeat of Azeri troops in the armed conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh was also a major factor. This led to the strengthening of the opposition Popular Front and the resignation of President Ayaz Mutalibov in 1992. A split in the political elite prevented the immediate election of a new president, and in May 1992, Mutalibov sought to regain the presidency through supporters in parliament. However, two days later he was overthrown by supporters of the Popular Front and the nationalist organization the «Grey Wolves». In June, the leader of the Popular Front, former dissident Abulfaz Aliyev, was elected president and earned the title of *Elchibey*, the Father of the People. Once again, the defeat of the Azeris in Karabakh became a factor for internal instability[9]. As a result of the revolt of Colonel Suret Huseynov, Elchibey was forced to flee the capital. The Azeri parliament decided to deprive Elchibey of his presidential powers and hand them over to parliamentary speaker Heydar Aliyev, who was then elected president.

The events in Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, and Kyrgyzstan in 2005 were named the "colour revolutions". All of them took place in countries with extremely fragmented elites and deep ethno-cultural divisions – the latter led to coups. The main task of the so-called elites became to control economic life and financial flows, in connection with which the ideology of post-Soviet regimes was constructed, which led to a sharp weakening of nationalism and even a struggle against it. Nationalist movements were seen as political competitors. But the interests of the clans conflicted with the needs of the nation and the nation-state. The development of the country required regime change. The main mechanism for changing the mode and dismantling the system were the so-called "colour revolutions" – the term often understood as the intervention of external forces in the development of post-Soviet countries, but external forces in this case only helped (in their own geopolitical interests) the natural processes.[10] The reason behind the coups and the main factor in mobilizing citizens were accusations of election fraud addressed to the authorities.

In Georgia, the 2003 "coup" was not the country's first one: the adventurism of the country's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, in attempting to forcibly «subdue» Abkhazia and South Ossetia led to mass discontent and the overthrow of the president. Former party leader Eduard Shevardnadze, who was elected president

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9   *Гражданское общество Центральной Азии после 25 лет независимости: призыв к солидарности* [Civil Society in Central Asia after 25 years of independence: call for solidarity]. "OSCE", 21 September 2016. [http://www.osce.org/ru/odihr/266236?download=true]

10 С. Непесов, *К вопросу о цветных революциях [On the question of the colour revolutions]*. "UA-reporter", 29 November 2016. [http://ua-reporter.com/content/208441]

twice in 1995 and 2000, became head of state. Accusations of rigging the November 2003 parliamentary elections led to a march in Tbilisi led by opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili, the seizure of parliament and the resignation of President Shevardnadze. In January 2004, Saakashvili was elected president with 96% of the vote, and in January 2008, after a briefly resigning, he won early presidential elections.[11]

> ❝ *power in the post-Soviet space is more than just power. This power is perceived by the elites as power-property, i.e. power inextricably linked with ownership of the main economic assets of the state*

In Ukraine, in 2004, the situation was similar: President Leonid Kuchma's attempt to impose his successor, Viktor Yanukovych on the country, led to mass protests against the results of the presidential election. Ukraine was an exception to a number of the colour revolutions: here the decision to cancel the election was made by the Supreme Court, not by striking citizens. However, the judges themselves grossly violated the Constitution, calling not for a new election but for a third round of elections, which was not required by law. Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko won the third round in a real competitive election.

Common to all these scenarios was a serious violation of laws and constitutions by the ruling elite itself and the refusal of those who lost to recognize the election results. The political course of the states in question has never changed as a result of the elections – it

has changed for reasons beyond the control of the voters. The transfer of power has always turned into a problem for the ruling elites, which was solved with the help of a successor, and if this failed, the power changed through coups. There are several reasons for this course of events in the post-Soviet space.

First, this is due to the fact that power in the post-Soviet space is more than just power. This power is perceived by the elites as power-property, i.e. power inextricably linked with ownership of the main economic assets of the state. This leads to the fact that the country itself is seen by leaders as their property, which must be inherited by their successors. The loss of power in the post-Soviet states means not only the loss of political power in itself (as in the West), but also the loss of the leader's and all his relatives' income, prosperity, and sometimes freedom. That is why the struggle for power is becoming more severe, due to the refusal of the elites to voluntarily transfer power according to the rules, and to make political compromises.

Second, there is a weakness within political institutions, including the institution of elections. Disrespect for the rule of law, constant rewriting of laws and the Constitution – this is what distinguishes almost all post-Soviet political regimes. This discredits political institutions: the losing party does not recognize the results because it does not believe in the possibility of a future victory. The low-ranking role of parties has also turned politics into a struggle of clans, groups, or individuals, depriving it of institutional expression.

Third, the process of transferring power according to the rules in the context of the transformation of the political regime, led

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11 *Saakashvili claims Georgia victory*, "CNN", 5 January 2004.
[https://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/europe/01/04/georgia.election/index.html]

the ruling elites to a frightening thought, that the election could have uncontrolled political participation and lead to unpredictable results.

Fourth, coups lead to a disregard for objective political conditions and political traditions by state leaders. It should be understood that what is possible in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan is impossible in Georgia or Ukraine. The societies are too different, the degree of fragmentation of the elites is too different, and differences in the structure of the economy and the level of income of the citizens are too great. It is obvious that the elites have not yet been able to propose a clear democratic project, or to ensure the stability of authoritarianism – so both options often fail.

Deviant Cases of Post-Soviet Democratization: Is There A Connection Between Authoritarianism and Nationalism?

Among the former Soviet republics is Belarus, which is trying to combine the reproduction and preservation of the regime of state management of the economy, and the strengthening of a rigid authoritarian political regime, with the slow development of market relations. Equally special is the path of evolution of Belarussian nationalism, which was historically based on the Lithuanian myth – the idea of succession in Belarus in relation to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The first conscious Belarussian Francis Benedict Bogushevich in his book «*Dudka białaruskaja*» (1891)[12] ties Belarus to the GDL. The second important marker of the Belarussian identity was an assertion of the ethno-genetic alienation of Belarussians from Russians and Ukrainians. Finally, the Belarussian literary language became the third marker, and introduction or rejection of it gradually became the flag of the Belarussian opposition.

> **The countries of Central Asia differ significantly in their specificity: their political systems ranged from rigid authoritarianism to neo-totalitarianism. In the economic and social systems of these states, semi-feudal methods, and patriarchal forms of leadership, as well as the methods of capitalism in the last century play a significant role**

Since coming to power in 1994, Alexander Lukashenko has seen nationalists as his main opponents. By the end of 1996, the national symbols were banned – the state symbols of the BSSR returned to the country.[13] BPF leader Zenon Pozniak was forced to flee abroad. In 2014, nationalism in the republic suddenly became a very fashionable topic; there were many circles and societies for the study of the language, history, and culture of Belarus. Embroidered shirts with national Belarussian ornamentation became sharply fashionable. A monument to the medieval prince Algerd was erected in Vitebsk. These activities prepared the way for the organized opposition rallies in 2021.

The countries of Central Asia differ significantly in their specificity: their political systems ranged from rigid authoritarianism to neo-totalitarianism. In

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12 К. Аверьянов-Минский, В. Мальцев, *Белорусский национализм против русского мира* [K. Averianov-Minskiy, Belarussian nationalism against Russian world], MMO «CIS-EMO»: Москва, 2015, с. 34.

13 К. Аверьянов-Минский, В. Мальцев, *Белорусский национализм против русского мира* [K. Averianov-Minskiy, Belarussian nationalism against Russian world], MMO «CIS-EMO»: Москва, 2015, с. 109.

the economic and social systems of these states, semi-feudal methods, and patriarchal forms of leadership, as well as the methods of capitalism in the last century play a significant role.

There are fewer ethno-nationalist conflicts in these autocracies than in their more «democratic» neighbours. Conflicts occur between groups within the ethnic majority. The outbreak of violence in Zhanaozen in 2011 was a conflict between two Kazakh economic classes – the class of managers who ran the oil and gas companies in Zhanaozen, and the class of workers. The outbreak of violence in Andijan in 2005 was a conflict between the centre and the regions, between the Uzbeks of the Fergana Valley, who sought greater autonomy, and the Tashkent leadership, which does not tolerate deviations from centralized autocratic rule.[14]

In contrast, the outbreaks of violence in 2010 and 2012 in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were conflicts fuelled by nationalism. It is believed that Tajik and Kyrgyz nationalism is neither inclusive nor predominantly externally oriented. On the contrary, it targets ethnic minorities within these countries: Uzbeks in the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions of Kyrgyzstan, and Pamirs in the Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan.

If Kyrgyzstan were similar to Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan, the government would not feel the need to co-opt the nationalistic rhetoric of its opponents. But Kyrgyzstan is neither a strong autocracy nor an institutional democracy. Instead, it is in a grey area where four root causes of instability – a weak

presidential party, few patronage resources, a tendency to protest, and deep ethnic and regional hostility – are forcing the central government to attack all external critics of Kyrgyz nationalism.

Tajikistan has the same traits of state weakness that weakened Kyrgyz's autocratic rule. President Emomali Rahmon was able to create a dominant presidential party, misleadingly called the People's Democratic Party. But like his Kyrgyz counterpart, Rahmon has limited resources for patronage, suffers from deep regional and ethnic animosities, and is occasionally ready for protest against central government. Here, just as in Kyrgyzstan, the root causes of instability gave rise to nationalism[15]. Although Rahmon did not face the same degree of opposition as the Kyrgyz president, he is still forced to demonstrate his Tajik nationalist vision.

Modern Uzbek nationalism bears the imprint of the idea of pan-Turkism. The main internal contradiction of Uzbek nationalism is the contradiction between the ethnic interpretation of the nation and its actual non-ethnic nature. All elements of national ideology are strung on it: the attitude to national demarcation, the problem of the Uzbek diaspora and ethnic minorities, the ambiguous attitude to Tajiks. Take Karimov's work «Uzbekistan on the threshold of the XXI century». On the one hand, the President of Uzbekistan writes in detail about the antiquity of the Uzbek people and the revival of Uzbek statehood. On the other hand, the author criticizes the policy «pursued by the Russian Empire and continued to be pursued by the Soviet government to create

14 Т. Исламов, А. Миллер, *Национализм в СССР и Восточной Европе* [T. Islamov, Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe], "ECSOMAN", 1991. [http://ecsocman.hse.ru/data/243/219/1217/12-Islamov.pdf]

15 *Emomali Rahmon: The Accidental Leader Who Has Stayed in Power for Decades.* "RFERL", 13 October 2020. [https://www.rferl.org/a/emomali-rahmon-the-accidental-leader-who-has-stayed-in-power-for-decades/30890337.html]

territorial and administrative borders of the republics in Central Asia.»[16] In some parts of the book it is possible to understand that Karimov is more satisfied with the previous situation when ethnic groups were not divided by national borders and existed in a kind of symbiosis with each other. There is an obvious conflict between these two positions: either the natural result of the development of Uzbek statehood is Uzbekistan, formed under the Bolsheviks in 1924-1925, or the Bolsheviks, on the contrary, violated the logic of «statehood» in Central Asia and imposed a dividing up of the nation.

> **Compared with the beginning of the XXI century, certain political regimes in the former Soviet republics have evolved toward authoritarianism and vice versa – from semi-authoritarian to democratic**

In Kazakhstan, the factor of time, and changes in the demographic and social situation of the country need to be considered. The numerical and specific share of ethnic Kazakhs has increased, they dominate the civil service, and social and cultural differences in the ethnic environment have become enormous. Nationalists could not unite behind any idea because they are too different. Among them is *Dos Kushim*, a long-time nationalist known for his intelligent thoughts and calm character, the leader of the *Ult Tagdyri movement*. Then there is Heroichan Kistaubayev, a former member of the opposition PEC party, later

Algae. Kistaubayev thinks soberly and is of the opinion that no one in the current government will give way to nationalists and their ideas.

Conclusions

Compared with the beginning of the XXI century, certain political regimes in the former Soviet republics have evolved toward authoritarianism and vice versa – from semi-authoritarian to democratic. Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine remained democratic, and they were joined by Georgia and Moldova. Azerbaijan and Armenia remained semi-authoritarian, while Russia, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan are authoritarian.

Kazakhstan and Tajikistan joined the neo-totalitarian Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The latter are in many ways close to «classical totalitarianism» (The Third Reich, the USSR), in particular through the strengthening of the cult of personality over the past ten years. Thus, in Kazakhstan, in 2010, Nazarbayev was officially awarded the title of «leader of the nation» (*Elbasy*, literally «head of the people») and a special status of «first president of Kazakhstan» with a number of privileges. Among others, the day of his first popular election to the presidency of Kazakhstan, December 1, was declared a holiday, and in 2019, the capital Astana was renamed Nur-Sultan after him. In 2015, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon was awarded the official title of «Founder of Peace and National Unity – Leader of the Nation,» etc.

The process of transferring power in the post-Soviet space is reduced to two scenarios: a coup (revolution) or a «successor»). Common to both scenarios

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16 И. Каримов, *Узбекистан на пороге XXI века: угрозы безопасности, условия и гарантии прогресса* [I. Karimov, Uzbekistan on the eve of the XXI century: security threats, conditions and guarantees for success], Узбекистан, 1997, с. 17.

was the almost widespread violation of laws and constitutions by the ruling elite itself, and the refusal of those who lost to recognize the election results. The political course of the states in question has never changed as a result of elections. The transfer of power has always turned into a problem for the ruling elites, which was solved with the help of a successor, and if this failed, the power changed through coups.

There are fewer ethno-nationalistic conflicts in Central Asian autocracies than in their more «democratic» neighbours. Conflicts – to the extent that they exist in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – occur between groups within the ethnic majority. Thus, the hypothesis that nationalist tendencies are intensifying the growth of authoritarian tendencies, and vice versa, has been only partially confirmed.

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IS THE KREMLIN'S TAKEOVER
OF BELARUS COMPLETE?

Maria Avdeeva
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After rallies swept across Belarus amid public resistance to the election rigging that the Belarussians put up against the Lukashenko regime, there was a moment when it seemed that the protest was just an inch from victory. It was at this moment that Russian President Putin offered Belarus President Lukashenko a helping hand. However, Russia's support wasn't free of charge. Since August 2020, Lukashenko has been gradually swapping what's left of Belarussian sovereignty for Moscow's assistance. Now the Kremlin controls the neighbouring country's economic, military, and information spheres. Since then, Russia has beefed up its military presence in Belarus, turning it into a military foothold. To this end, propaganda tools were widely applied.

The presidential elections in Belarus on 9 August 2020, in which Alexander Lukashenko sought his sixth term in office were not recognized as free and fair and were followed by an unprecedented wave of protests across the country. The protests quickly grew into a nationwide pro-democracy movement, threatening to destabilize the Belarus ruler's regime. Russian President Vladimir Putin could not accept the overthrow of a close post-Soviet ally at the hands of a democratic uprising. Instead, Putin sent planeloads of propagandists to Minsk, gave Lukashenko a financial lifeline, and openly stated his willingness to send Russian troops into Belarus if things got "out of hand". Since that time, Lukashenko's dependence on Putin's support has only strengthened. On 4 November 2021, Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko signed a package of integration agreements following three years of talks[1]. The framework of this package, the "28 Union Programs" became the legal basis for the Russian absorption of Belarus[2]. Moscow does not see Belarus as an independent state, and step by step has increased the dependence of Belarus on Russian support. Kremlin influence has aimed at pulling Belarus deeper into the Russian orbit[3]. The Kremlin is exploiting Lukashenko's massive need for political

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1 *Совместное заявление Председателя Правительства Российской Федерации и Премьер-министра Республики Беларусь о текущем развитии и дальнейших шагах по углублению интеграционных процессов в рамках Союзного государства* [Joint statement by the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus on the current development and further steps to deepen integration processes within the Union State], The Russian Government, 2021, [http://government.ru/news/43234/].

2 A. Shraibman, *Is Russia the future of Belarus?*, "Foreign and Security Policy", 19 November 2021, [https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/foreign-and-security-policy/is-russia-the-future-of-belarus-5555/].

3 A. Yeliseyeu, *Not-so-good neighbours. Russian Influence in Belarus*, "U.S. Helsinki Commission", 20 November 2019, [https://www.csce.gov/international-impact/events/not-so-good-neighbors].

and economic support, systematically increasing Belarus' dependence on Russia. At the same time, Moscow has been running disinformation operations to further worsen and prevent any thaw in Lukashenko's relations with the West.

The Objective of Putin's Support for Lukashenko

For the past 26 years, President Lukashenko's legitimacy has been based on public trust. After the fraudulent elections of August 2020, followed by the political repressions, he lost this element of trust. And now his main goal is to retain power at any cost by unleashing terror against the Belarussian people and civil society, while blackmailing and threatening EU countries and the «collective West». It seems as if he does not take into consideration the political and economic consequences for Belarus, and he deliberately exacerbates tensions.

Playing along with Lukashenko in his attempts to shift public focus from the protests to the alleged external threats, Moscow is trying to cement a pro-Russian vector of Belarus' development. By not recognizing his nation as a political actor and seeking to retain power at the cost of making humiliating concessions to the Kremlin, Lukashenko poses a direct threat to Belarus' sovereignty. The harshness of Lukashenko's repressions is beneficial to Russian propaganda, based on the principle "the worse, the better". There are no "red lines" that Moscow would not allow Lukashenko to cross when carrying out internal repressions. The Kremlin will not hinder Lukashenko as long as his actions do not directly threaten Russia.

In turn, the Kremlin has become a partner in crime to Lukashenko. It has taken over the reputational costs associated with him, caused by internal repressions, the hijacking of the Ryanair flight in May 2021[4], and the hybrid attack on the EU by using migrants[5]. Russia is trying to get as much benefit as possible, so as to create the maximum dependence of Belarus on Russia.

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By and large, it does not matter for Russia whether it is Lukashenko who will be in power in the future. The main goal is a compliant leader, who does not allow the western vector of Belarus' development. Stopping Belarus from defecting to the West is a priority for the Kremlin.

Moreover, the Russian Federation is using Belarus in escalating the conflict with the West. It is becoming an instrument of Russia's hybrid war against the West, and at the same time a point of trade. The Kremlin is playing a role in multiple simultaneous

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4   A. Troianovski, I. Nechepurenko, *EU imposes sanctions on Belarus over 'hijacked' Ryanair flight*, "The New York Times", 23 May 2021, [https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/23/world/europe/ryanair-belarus.html].

5   B. Hall, S. Fleming, J. Shotter, *How migration became a weapon in a 'hybrid war'*, "Financial Times", 5 December 2021, [https://www.ft.com/content/83ece7e4-cc71-45b5-8db7-766066215612].

destabilizing crises. Putin is willing to take ever-greater risks to force the West to listen to Russian demands[6].

Soft Annexation of Belarus

To prevent the development of the Ukrainian scenario, when Putin decided that the only way to hold Ukraine in Russia's orbit was the illegal annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, the takeover of Belarus has not been carried out in the form of its annexation by "little green men" or a hybrid operation. In relations with Belarus, Putin does not want to repeat the "Ukrainian mistake"[7]. Vladimir Putin made a mistake by invading Crimea, escalating a crisis for Russia that had been brewing for many months. Putin's move into Crimea appeared to spring from a deeper misjudgement about the reversibility of the process that led to the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. The further Russia wades into this revanchist strategy, the worse its troubles will become[8].

To prevent Ukraine from moving geopolitically westward, the Kremlin invaded and occupied Ukrainian territory. But in doing so, neoimperialists planted deep roots of resistance to the Russian occupation of Ukraine, and intensified popular support for Euro-Atlantic integration[9]. After the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, Ukraine rejected Vladimir Putin's "Russian World". At the same time, Russian influence over Ukraine has plummeted to new lows. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the events of the past seven years have led to Ukraine's decisive departure from Russia's sphere of influence. Evidence of this historic shift can be seen throughout Ukrainian society[10].

> **By and large, it does not matter for Russia whether it is Lukashenko who will be in power in the future. The main goal is a compliant leader, who does not allow the western vector of Belarus' development**

With this in mind, in Belarus the Russian takeover is being done in a form of soft annexation. It is coined as a slow, stealthy, and methodical operation[11]. The main thing is not to let the protest in Belarus become national. As with most Kremlin operations, there are a lot of moving parts to the Russian takeover of Belarus, including economic, military, and political elements, but the direction of the motion is unmistakable.

6   A. Troianovski, *On Putin's Strategic Chessboard, a Series of Destabilizing Moves*, "The New York Times", 19 November 2021, [https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/19/world/europe/russia-putin-belarus-ukraine.html].

7   K. Marten, *Putin's Biggest Mistake the Real Stakes of Intervening in Ukraine*, "Foreign Affairs", 1 March 2014, [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2014-03-01/putins-biggest-mistake].

8   D. Ignatius, *Putin's error in Ukraine is the kind that leads to catastrophe*, "The Washington Post", 2 March 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/david-ignatius-putins-error-in-ukraine-is-the-kind-that-leads-to-catastrophe/2014/03/02/d376603e-a249-11e3-a5fa-55f0c77bf39c_story.html].

9   M. Carpenter, V. Kobets, *What Russia Really Has in Mind for Belarus And Why Western Leaders Must Act*, "Foreign Affairs", 8 September 2020, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2020-09-08/what-russia-really-has-mind-belarus].

10   T. Kuzio, *Five reasons why Ukraine rejected Vladimir Putin's "Russian World"*, Atlantic Council, 26 March 2021, [https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/five-reasons-why-ukraine-rejected-vladimir-putins-russian-world].

11   B. Whitmore, *Soft annexation: Inside the Russian takeover of Belarus*, Atlantic Council, 31 March 2021, [https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/belarusalert/soft-annexation-inside-the-russian-takeover-of-belarus/].

It should be noted that Lukashenko has never truly defended the national interests of Belarus, since for him the independence of the state is a bargaining chip and an instrument for preserving his security and power. Russia benefits from Lukashenko as he is now: weak, isolated from the international community. Although Lukashenko is well aware that in exchange for the Kremlin's support he will have to give up both Belarus' sovereignty and his power (at least part of it), he has less and less room for maneuver.

Kremlin Footprint in Media Coverage

Starting from August 2020, Russia has been able to gain almost full control over the media in Belarus. In September 2020, Moscow deployed its top-tier media supervisors to Minsk to oversee the process of "synchronizing" the way news reports were presented, setting the 2014-2020 coverage of Ukraine as an example[12]. Now the Kremlin has unlimited possibilities to advance its agenda in Belarus.

Among the peculiar features of Russia's information operations in Belarus is sowing chaos in the media, compromising the truth, and employing a large number of different channels through which either half-truths or outright lies are fed to the target audiences[13]. In Belarus, Russia often uses the same media, channels, and personalities that operated in disinformation activities

targeting Ukraine.[14] Most often, the targets of information attacks are not only Belarus' western neighbours but also Ukraine. And here there is a clear connection, and often a direct repetition of the narratives put forth by the Kremlin propaganda.

> **" *Lukashenko has never truly defended the national interests of Belarus, since for him the independence of the state is a bargaining chip and an instrument for preserving his security and power***

The survey of Belarussian media space conducted in September-October 2021[15] showed that the main topics Moscow circulated, targeting the country's audience, covered expanding Russia's military presence in the country, deepening integration within the Union State of Russia and Belarus, and Lukashenko's aggressive acts against Poland and the EU using the illegal migrants. They supported the main propaganda vector, too: "Russia and its allies, including Belarus, are surrounded by enemies who must be repelled. And the main war domain arena is the information field". Through Kremlin-controlled platforms, a similar perspective is being imposed on Belarussians. Russian information operations in Belarus are accompanied by military sabre-rattling and

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12 *Это очень дорогого стоит. Что делают в Беларуси сотрудники российских государственных СМИ — и как благодаря им риторика местного ТВ стала более агрессивной (It's worth a lot. What are the employees of the Russian state-owned media doing in Belarus – and how, thanks to them, the rhetoric of local TV has become more aggressive)*, "Meduza", 11 September 2020, [https://meduza.io/feature/2020/09/11/eto-ochen-dorogogo-stoit].

13 M. Avdeeva, *Kremlin's Influence Operations: Working Out Countering Mechanisms for Eastern Partnership Member States*, iSANS, 14 June 2020, [https://isans.org/articles-en/kremlins-influence-operations-working-out-countering-mechanisms-for-eastern-partnership-member-states.html].

14 C. Paul, M. Matthews, *The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model. Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It?*, RAND corporation, 2016, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html].

15 M. Avdeeva, *Justifying the militarization of Belarus and integration with Russia. Monitoring of pro-Russian media in Ukraine for September-October 2021*, iSANS, 02 November 2021, [https://isans.org/analysis-en/monitoring-en/justifying-the-militarization-of-belarus-and-integration-with-russia-part-1.html].

the pursuit of an escalating domination strategy – massive army drills, provocations at the border, cyberattacks, sabotage, and intelligence operations.

Lost Neutrality of Belarus in Relations with Ukraine

A year into masterminding a fraudulent election in Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko has renounced what he previously claimed was the neutral status of relations with Ukraine. He lost "information sovereignty" and is shifting toward Russian propaganda[16], starting to threaten Kyiv. This is part of the price the Belarussian dictator is paying for the Kremlin's help in retaining power in Belarus. It is expected that the further information confrontation between Lukashenko and Kyiv will unfold on Moscow's instructions, risking turning shortly into actual provocations at the border. Belarus is also poised to take Russia's side in the ongoing information war with Ukraine regarding energy issues.

Lukashenko's information parries are not always noticed. But their analysis allows us to recognize the direction they take, which is what one should expect of provocations or actions aimed at the Belarussian regime's aggravation of the situation. Lukashenko's rhetoric over the months since the election fraud has become increasingly intertwined with the Kremlin's information campaigns. Lukashenko began talking about the supposed danger coming from Ukraine almost immediately after the pseudo-elections in August 2020 and the large-scale protests that followed. The impetus for this was given by the Kremlin, which actively

disseminated the topic of the "Ukrainian trace" in the Belarussian events of July-August 2020 through controlled media channels.

To help build the image of Ukraine as an enemy of Belarus, the Kremlin media conducted several disinformation campaigns in which they actively quoted Russian foreign minister Lavrov and the head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Naryshkin.

In his rhetoric, Lukashenko portrays Ukraine as an enemy, and regularly tries to accuse Kyiv of radicalizing the Belarussian protest movement and of external interference, blames his own mistakes on his neighbours, or simply threatens Ukraine. He articulates attacks both directly – threatening, for example, to cut off fuel supplies to Ukraine[17] – and by merely discussing the possibility or impossibility of some action, as, for example, with his constant exaggeration of the subject of recognizing Crimea as Russian[18].

In information campaigns in Belarus designed in such a way as to turn the image of Ukraine into that of an enemy, the theme of the strengthening of NATO's presence in Ukraine is a constant. It is used to substantiate the need for organizing military countermeasures to threats stemming from Ukraine, and for increased military cooperation with Russia.

Militarization of Belarus

Instead of relying on roadmaps signed in November 2021, which Lukashenko will almost certainly attempt to suspend,

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16 M. Avdeeva, *In the wake of Russian propaganda: How and with what Lukashenko threatened Ukraine*, iSANS, 23 August 2021, [https://isans.org/articles-en/in-the-wake-of-russian-propaganda-how-and-with-what-lukashenko-threatened-ukraine.html].

17 *Лукашенко заявил, что мог бы вместе с Путиным поставить Украину "на колени" (Lukashenko said he could, together with Putin, bring Ukraine "to its knees")*, "Ukrayinska Pravda", 09 August 2021, [https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2021/08/9/7303259/].

18 A. Shraibman, *Why Lukashenko Has Recognized Crimea as Russian Territory*, Carnegie Moscow Center, 8 December 2021, [https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/85944].

the Kremlin is using more tangible and dependable mechanisms of binding Belarus to Russia. The military presence in Belarus is one of the most important aspects here. From a defence point of view, Belarus is now part of the defence sphere of Russia. The Kremlin is increasing its military presence in Belarus, specifically combat-ready aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

> **In the period that has passed since the fraudulent elections in Belarus, Lukashenko has renounced his neutral status in relations with Ukraine. He also lost his "information sovereignty" and was forced to follow in the wake of Russian propaganda, voicing threats against Kyiv**

Russia has opened a joint "military training centre" for the air force and aerial defence near the Belarussian-Polish border[19]. "Iskander" units were put on the border with Ukraine, and Lukashenko declared his readiness to jointly defend the Union State against the "hostile West"[20]. He is going as far in his rhetoric as toying with the idea of the possible deployment of Russian nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus.

All this means that the risk of Belarus turning into a new springboard for Russia's military aggression remains acute. The fact that such a threat is real is evidenced by Lukashenko himself, who on 5 August 2021, meeting with Belarussian security officials on the border situation said, «... *but the Ukrainian leadership, pursuing an anti-popular course, took a confrontational stance... And for us this is an additional threat, which we did not have before... These actions of our neighbour, if this happens, will threaten us with conflict...*»[21],

Lukashenko instructs Belarussians to think about the need for a Russian military presence and regularly repeats statements similar to the following: *«If it is necessary for the security of the Union State that we are building, for the security of Belarus and Russia, to deploy all armed forces here with all types of weapons, they will be deployed here immediately[22]»*.

The rhetoric of Minsk forces Ukraine to assess the veracity of threats of expanding Belarussian-Russian military cooperation and possible provocations on the Belarussian border. The Kremlin is also imposing on both Ukraine and Europe the need to view Belarus as an adversary and expect a military invasion from there. The same purpose was served by the holding of the Zapad-2021 joint military exercises in September.

In the period that has passed since the fraudulent elections in Belarus, Lukashenko has renounced his neutral status in relations with Ukraine. He also lost his "information sovereignty" and was forced to follow in the wake of Russian propaganda, voicing threats

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19 A. Shraibman, *Is Russia the future of Belarus?*, "Foreign and Security Policy", 19 November 2021, [https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/foreign-and-security-policy/is-russia-the-future-of-belarus-5555/].

20 M. Avdeeva, *Migrants at the border: how long will the blackmail last? The hybrid attacks prove to be effective*, iSANS, 15 December 2021, [https://isans.org/columns-en/migrants-at-the-border-how-long-will-the-blackmail-last.html].

21 *Совещание по вопросам ситуации на границе* [Meeting on the Situation at the Border], President of the Republic of Belarus, 5 August 2021, [https://president.gov.by/ru/events/soveshchanie-po-voprosam-situacii-na-granice].

22 *Встреча с активом местной вертикали по актуальным вопросам общественно-политической обстановки* [Meeting with the Activists of the Local Vertical on Topical Issues of the Socio-Political Situation], President of the Republic of Belarus, 30 July 2021, [https://president.gov.by/ru/events/vstrecha-s-aktivom-mestnoy-vertikali-po-aktualnym-voprosam-obshchestvenno-politicheskoy-obstanovki].

against Kyiv. All this was the price that Lukashenko paid the Kremlin for helping to maintain his power in Belarus.

The further confrontation between Minsk and Kyiv will take place at Moscow's behest, which in the short-term risks turning into real provocations with the military build-up upon Ukrainian borders, and the information war on the side of Russia in its confrontation with Ukraine and the West.

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IS LOSS OF TERRITORY BY EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES WHEN CHOOSING INTEGRATION WITH THE WEST INEVITABLE?

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Thirty years after the post-Soviet republics' independence was proclaimed and internationally recognized, the nations of the Eastern European region continue to struggle to protect their sovereignty, against the backdrop of permanent political and economic instability, military conflicts, and security challenges. In this paper it is argued that pro-Western orientation and desire to participate in Western integration projects have deepened the sovereignty crisis and exacerbated long-standing conflicts in the region. This article attempts to analyse whether this damage has occurred as a result of the European and Euro-Atlantic choice of the East European countries or whether it can be attributed to a number of domestic and external factors, which existed before these countries became independent.

Introduction

Eastern Europe is often described in the West as the "arc of instability" – a term that comprises a chain of neighbouring countries that are geopolitically vulnerable and politically unstable internally. Historically, the region has been divided between different empires. After the collapse of the Communist Bloc, new states were established. Along with independence, they inherited a number of internal economic and social problems, unresolved ethnic contradictions, and territorial claims. The region of Eastern Europe and New Eastern Europe, which includes Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, has always been in the sphere of interests of external actors. Today, the sovereignty of these countries is in crisis. However, the question is whether it is caused by increased cooperation and integration with the West, or other domestic and external factors that existed before the nations defined the vector of their foreign policy.

To answer this question, we should start by defining the concept of "sovereignty", and whether we, the countries of the New Eastern Europe can be called "sovereign".

Nowadays, the concept of sovereignty still spurs scientific debate. Each of the suggested definitions bears the mark of the political situation of a particular era and prevailing ideologies. Often, they contradict each other. The most generalized point of view is based on identifying sovereignty

with the highest (supreme) power. This definition was provided by I. Trainin[1], who associated sovereignty with the supreme power, unlimited within the state and independent in external relations. Some scholars, such as E. Usenko[2], proposed a more specific interpretation, considering sovereignty as an independent state power, insubordinate to the power of the second state, which, in our opinion, generally reflects the essence of state sovereignty. Another important criterion of a sovereign state, according to C. Tilly[3], is its ability to eliminate external threats from outside its own territory. Some theories[4] identify sovereignty with international legal personality – the ability of a state to be a subject of international law.

Are the Countries of New Eastern Europe Sovereign?

None of the countries examined in this study meet the above criteria. Back in the early 1990s, Moscow provoked, on the internationally recognized territory of Moldova, an artificial conflict that culminated in creating a separate territorial entity – Transnistria – within the country. Following a similar pattern in the post-Soviet space, Ukraine lost control of the Crimean Peninsula in February-March 2014. Shortly afterwards, certain parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions were seized as a result of Russia-led armed aggression.

Belarus remains a geographically integral country without manifesting a chronic lack of sovereignty. However, due to the establishment of an authoritarian, unipyramidal regime, the lack of economic interest from European states, and the blatant disregard of democratic values, Belarus has isolated itself from the West, and limited its international sovereignty. The bifurcation point for Belarus in relations with the West was the result of last August presidential election. The EU countries and Ukraine declared those elections to have been rigged, and the Government of Lukashenko– as illegitimate.

> **From a practical perspective, the societies of the Eastern European region, since the collapse of the Socialist Bloc in 1989-1991, have been exercising sovereignty under their political actors' interpretation of this concept**

From a practical perspective, the societies of the Eastern European region, since the collapse of the Socialist Bloc in 1989-1991, have been exercising sovereignty under their political actors' interpretation of this concept. Naturally, the state and sovereignty perception has evolved over the past decades. T. Zick in his work «Are the States Sovereign?»[5] attributes this evolution to external pressure from multinational corporations, international organizations and supranational entities, as well as to the growth of separatist sentiments among the population, and the growing trend toward greater autonomy of national and religious minorities within the country. The spread

1 I. Trainin, *К вопросу о суверенитете* [On the issue of sovereignty], "Soviet state and law", 1983, p. 75.

2 E. Usenko, *Теоретические проблемы соотношения международного и внутригосударственного права* [Theoretical problems of the correlation between international and domestic law], "Nauka", Moscow 1997, pp. 57 – 91.

3 C. Tilly, *European States, AD 990-1992*, Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell 1990, p. 23.

4 I. Levin, *Суверенитет* [Sovereignty], Legal Center Press: 2003, p. 74.

5 T. Zick, *Are the States Sovereign?*, "Washington University Law Quarterly", Vol. 83, 2005, p. 230.

of nationalist ideology led to the collapse of multinational alliances and the development of sovereign independent states.

The Regional Context

For this part of Europe, the concept of "sovereignty" is linked to its historical past. The region has been dissolved two times in the past five hundred years. According to M. Minakov[6], the foundation of the post-Soviet nations was based on the main concepts of sovereignty:

- people or ethnonational sovereignty – the right of the people to self-determination;

- individual sovereignty – rights and freedoms of an individual;

- regional values – acquired as a result of the adoption of fundamental international treaties and the implementation of European norms.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 21st century, the political systems of the post-Soviet countries showed their inefficiency and were experiencing a deep crisis. In Ukraine, this crisis was manifested in the Orange Revolution (2004); in Moldova, without significant changes in the regime in power, democratization processes took place. The authoritarian regime in Belarus suppressed any revolutionary sentiments among the population. Therefore, the contradictions increasingly grew, which induced further military intervention, and the outbreak of armed conflicts in the region.

The security of the Eastern European countries, which were dealing with their own political difficulties, was also influenced by the launch of integration projects and initiatives under the auspices of both the West and Russia: the establishment of the Eastern Partnership (2009), the enlargement of the EU and NATO, the Eurasian Union. The region was caught between two fires: two integration projects and two systems with contrasting values and different visions of security. The geopolitical and geoeconomic significance of Eastern Europe has increased, and Eastern (New Eastern) Europe has found itself in the middle of competition between European and non-European centres of power (like the United States) since it has a powerful concentrated geopolitical and strategic potential[7]. As a result of European Union and NATO enlargement toward the East and the implementation of Russia's foreign policy initiatives, the region became a space of external common strategic interests. The latter includes Ukraine and Moldova – countries without clear membership prospects either in the EU or in NATO – and Belarus, which joined the Eurasian integration project. Despite different foreign policy priorities, all three countries are forced to walk a tightrope between the two systems and fight for their national interests. Consequently, the sovereignty of these countries will continue to be under threat, as long as they are regarded as bargaining chips during negotiations between key partners aiming to reach political and economic compromises.

The Quest for Hegemony

The activation of integration processes and the signing of a number of cooperation agreements incited confrontation in the region. They led to the consolidation of the elites in authoritarian power regimes,

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6   M. Minakov, *Post-Soviet sovereignty and Ukraine's political development*, "UA: Ukraine Analytica", №2 (24), 2021, p. 29.

7   O. Khylko, *Параметри безпекового середовища України* [The parameters of the security environment of Ukraine], "Міжнародні відносини. Серія "Політичні Науки", №3 (2014)", 2014 [http://journals.iir.kiev.ua/index.php/pol_n/article/view/2235/1994].

which were struggling to maintain their influence in the region. However, other crucial political, economic and cultural factors have contributed to the vulnerability of democracies and jeopardized state sovereignty since the formation of the new states. The newly formed republics have entered a new democratic era with weak economies, unresolved ethnonational issues, instability, and uncertainty about the future. The central driver of destabilization in the region has been the policy of Russia, which is satisfied with the situation and has fulfilled its geopolitical ambitions of maintaining hegemony in the region and bringing the former republics back into the Kremlin's geopolitical orbit.

According to this policy[8], the Russian Federation identifies its own security with the limited sovereignty of its neighbours, especially those which are part of the so-called Russian civilizational space, within such projects as «Russian World» ("Русский мир") and the Eurasian Union. Russia has created all the necessary legal grounds for this. The Constitution of the Russian Federation[9] proclaims that the state's duty is their citizens' protection and their patronage abroad. The recently updated National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, approved by decree of Russian President Vladimir Putin, declares Russia's support for its allies and partners in resolving defence and security issues, and neutralizing attempts to exert external interference in their internal affairs. It stipulates the strengthening of «fraternal ties» between Russians, Belarussians and Ukrainians. The intention to support compatriots living abroad in preserving their rights, including their all-Russian cultural identity, was also laid out[10].

Thus, ignoring international law and acting in accordance only with its own legislation, Russia consolidated its presence in the territory of the Republic of Moldova by deploying a Russian contingent of peacekeeping forces in order to resolve the armed conflict in Transnistria in 1992. Russian-backed separatist movements in the regions of Moldova with an overall majority Russian population led to the establishment of a separate state-territorial entity within the territory of Moldova.

> **The activation of integration processes and the signing of a number of cooperation agreements incited confrontation in the region. They led to the consolidation of the elites in authoritarian power regimes, which were struggling to maintain their influence in the region**

To this day, the Transnistrian standoff remains a "frozen conflict", and the Russian Federation has maintained its presence in Transnistria, having stationed its peacekeepers there and created one of the largest Russian diasporas abroad. Moreover, a virtual majority of the population of

8   M. Kapitonenko, *Політика Росії щодо сусідніх держав (Доктрина "обмеженого суверенітету")* [Russia's Neighborhood Policy (The Doctrine of the "limited sovereignty")], "Foreign Policy Portal", 2019, [http://fpp.com.ua/polityka-rosiyi-shhodo-susidnih-derzhav-doktryna-obmezhenogo-suverenitetu]

9   *Конституция Российской Федерации (принята всенародным голосованием 12 декабря 1993 года)* [The Constitution of the Russian Federation (adopted by National Voting on December 12, 1993)], "Constitution of Russian Federation", December, 1993 [http://www.constitution.ru]

10   *Указ Президента РФ от 2 июля 2021 г. № 400 "О Стратегии национальной безопасности РФ"* [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation №400 dated July 2, 2021 "On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation"], "Official website with the official text of legal acts of the Russian Federation" [www.pravo.gov.ru].

Transnistria have Russian passports and fall under the protection of the Russian Federation. Before the pro-European government led by Maia Sandu came to power in 2020, for more than three decades, all power was concentrated in the hands of socialists, which allowed pro-Russian forces to take control of all representative and government structures. Russia has secured its dominance in Moldova's information field, and strengthened the position of the Moscow Patriarchate. Another critical factor that limits Moldova's sovereignty and threatens its political independence is Moldova's complete dependence on Russian gas supplies. Only this year, after the termination of the contract with the Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom, Moldova, for the first time in 30 years, began to look for alternative gas supply routes (from Ukraine and Romania).

> **the concept of balancing between East and West no longer makes sense for Ukraine, following Russia's aggression in 2014 and the loss of control over the territories of the Crimean Peninsula and parts of Donbas. This conflict caused damage to the territorial integrity of Ukraine, completely changing the course of its foreign policy**

Ukraine holds a prominent place in the implementation of the doctrine of "limited sovereignty" of the Russian Federation. Without Ukraine, according to the firm belief of Z. Brzezinski[11], Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. Besides sharing a common border, Ukraine and Russia have been united by a closely intertwined historical past, economic ties, and political culture. After the declaration of independence, Ukraine began to perceive its own sovereignty in a new way, separate from its socialist past, which was also driven by some subsequent democratic processes, ideological pluralism, an open economy, the development of national identity, and a multi-vector foreign policy. Ukraine chose to establish and maintain ties with the West, and Russia but did not outline strategic vectors of its foreign policy up until 2014. It has forced the Ukrainian authorities to seek compromises favouring Russia's interests, and also allowed the Russian Federation to consistently and repeatedly interfere in the internal and external affairs of Ukraine through political, diplomatic, economic, energy (gas wars), information, and propaganda pressure for decades.

Interestingly, the concept of balancing between East and West no longer makes sense for Ukraine, following Russia's aggression in 2014 and the loss of control over the territories of the Crimean Peninsula and parts of Donbas. This conflict caused damage to the territorial integrity of Ukraine, completely changing the course of its foreign policy. The choice of Ukraine to look to Europe, officially embedded in the Constitution of Ukraine in July 2019, was a result, and not a cause, of the violation of its state sovereignty.

Equally important, after the military intervention of the Russian Federation in Georgia in 2008, and the establishment of the self-proclaimed republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the possibility of war between the countries in the region became a reality. This signal was not overlooked, and even at that time, analysts predicted a repeat of the Georgian scenario in Ukraine.

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11 Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books: New York, 1997, pp. 61, 114.

The issue of Crimea has always been a ticking time bomb in Russian-Ukrainian relations. During the time of the presence of the Russian Federation Black Sea fleet in Ukraine, under the "Agreement between Ukraine and the Russian Federation concerning stay of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation in the territory of Ukraine" (1997), Russia consolidated the presence of its military formations in the territory of Ukraine, contrary to the provisions of Article 17 of the Constitution of Ukraine[12]. Russia also systematically violated its obligations, used leased facilities to gather intelligence, conducted propaganda activities, and supported separatist movements[13].

The constant destabilizing policy of the Russian Federation toward Ukraine limited the sovereignty of an already weak and vulnerable state. Regardless of their tendencies and developments in favour of particular global or regional players, Russia has sought and will continue to strive to return Ukraine to its sphere of influence through sabotaging the peaceful settlement in Donbas and resolution of the Crimean issue, undermining the internal political situation, implementing targeted disinformation campaigns, and supporting separatist tendencies at the national and regional levels.

Belarus has become another stomping ground for Russia's revisionist ambitions. Like Ukraine, Belarus tried to stick to the model of a "bridge" between East and West and to build relations with NATO and the EU. However, the signing of "The Treaty on the Creation of a Union State" with Russia guaranteed that Belarus would continue to remain in the sphere of Russian influence, finally defining its geopolitical configuration.

By opting for the integration project with Russia, Belarus was able to protect its own sovereignty and get certain economic benefits. Nevertheless, Russian support, going together with dictating its own rules, contributed to Belarus remaining at the same stage of development, developing an economic, military, and energy dependence on Russia. In the grip of concentric circles of integration with Russia, Belarus is practically unable to pursue an independent foreign policy.

> *The new Eastern Europe continues to be a region that unites countries with compromised sovereignty, multi-level contradictions, and security threats*

Against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the Belarussian authorities acted as a mediator, and focused on distancing themselves from Russia's aggressive policy and restoring contacts with the EU and the United States. In particular, a great deal of effort was put into involving Belarus in the Eastern Partnership and the Visegrad Four. On top of that, a long-standing ban on the number of American diplomats in the country was also lifted. However, the results of last year's presidential election, suppressing the opposition and dispersing mass protests, cast a long shadow on the integrity of the Lukashenko government. Amid Belarus' isolation on the global stage, Lukashenko resorted to deeper integration with Russia, gaining President Putin's political and military support.

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12 *Конституція України від 28 червня 1996 р.* [Constitution of Ukraine dated June 28, 1996], Parliament of Ukraine, 1996, Chapter 1, Article 17
   [http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/cgi-bin/laws/main.cgi?nreg=254%EA%2F96%2D%E2%F01]

13 V. Gorbulin, *Крим. Війна: передумови російської агресії* [Crimea. War: preconditions of the Russian aggression], National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, 2016 [https://www.rnbo.gov.ua/ua/Diialnist/2399.html1]

Constant pressure and interference from the Kremlin forced Belarus to develop relations with the West. Similarly, the crisis in relations with the West returned Belarus to the path of a closer union with Russia. Further deepening of this integration will encroach on the sovereignty of Belarus.

Conclusions

The new Eastern Europe continues to be a region that unites countries with compromised sovereignty, multi-level contradictions, and security threats. Integration projects within the Eurasian, European and Euro-Atlantic spaces have equally deepened the crisis of sovereignty and led to an even more significant aggravation of long-lasting contradictions in the region, culminating in armed conflicts and the seizure of territories. All things considered, it would be wrong to conclude that the direct reason for the loss or damage of the sovereignty of Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus was their choice to join a specific integration project. In Eastern European states, events develop according to unique scenarios. However, they are predetermined by common historical, socio-political and economic factors already in place before these countries became independent. The societies of the newly formed states understood and exercised their sovereignty differently, which reinforced nationalist tendencies and played a role in further secession in the region. The former republics concentrated within themselves almost all the potential for the regional dimension of Moscow's foreign policy. Russia's programmed, consistent and conscious revisionist policy, aimed at maintaining and strengthening control over its «near abroad», has led to the conservation of ineffective socio-political systems in these countries, made them weak in the face of external threats, caused a lack of democracy and stoked tensions. Under these conditions, the countries cannot fully exercise their own sovereignty and are forced to deal with risks of greater limitations or even loss of their sovereignty.

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US PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES: REALLY DEMOCRATIC OR A DE FACTO CLIFFHANGER?

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Internews Ukraine

The most recent presidential elections in the United States were very close ones, and raising many questions regarding the process, proved that the system needs to be revised. Given the fact that US citizens do not directly elect their presidential candidates from both major parties, this article considers the primaries' schedule as an influential factor that shapes the final choice. The system as a whole receives much criticism every four years due to being archaic and not having direct representation of the US population overall. At the same time, the existing scholars' analysis mainly focuses on various aspects of the US presidential system and usually does not consider the primaries' calendar. Thus, the article examines whether the entire presidential nomination system can be called a cliff-hanger.

Introduction

The existing presidential nomination system has been criticised for at least the past 30 years, particularly after the 2000 and 2020 elections when the Supreme Court was involved, and the US Capitol attack occurred following last year's election, respectively. In this paper, the presidential system will be called 'primaries' or 'presidential primaries' for the sake of the simplification of terms. In fact, the current system offers two ways for the parties to decide which candidate suits their constituents most: primaries and caucuses.

Primary elections are conducted in order for the party to choose which candidate has the best chance to beat his/her opponents from the other party. At the same time, as the BBC mentioned, there were only four states in 2020 in which the Democrats held this type of the selection process: Nevada, North Dakota, Wyoming and Iowa. On the contrary, the Republican party held caucuses only in Guam, the Northern Marianas, American Samoa, and the Virgin Islands[1]. Thus, the tendency is clear to exclude caucuses, and it is possible that primaries may dominate in all states in the 2024 or 2028 presidential elections. It is essential to mention that this paper considers neither state nor local elections, nor will it examine elections to the Senate or the House of Representatives, and will focus on the ways the Republican and Democratic parties select their candidates to run for the White House.

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1   *US election 2020: What are primaries and caucuses and how do they work?* "BBC". 5 March 2020
    [https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51273719].

Which States Are the First to Determine the Final Presidential Rivals?

The US presidential primaries look like the presidential elections in modern democracies, where voters directly cast their ballots for candidates of their choice. It should be said that the first US primary in today's understanding of the word occurred in 1912. However, the current schedule of primary contests has been formed in the next 55 years.[2] At the same time, as Donovan and Hunsaker summarized, the presidential contests may be affected by the preferences for candidates. They argue that the voter's choice is driven by expectations of how well a candidate may perform in the campaign, which means if he/she can at least win the nomination within the party.[3] They claim that the recent polling numbers, media attention, and history of electoral campaigns may determine the candidates' support. This implies that the voters would be less likely to cast their votes for candidates who lost several primary elections in a row and have only potential chances to be nominated.

Speaking of the primaries calendar, it is necessary to mention that both major political parties are free to set up their own schedule of primaries and caucuses[4], which is why the Republican presidential primaries differ from the Democratic ones. However, the first two states have dominated the early exchanges since the mid-1970s, namely Iowa with its caucuses and New Hampshire with a primary. Both states have a long history of going first. Roughly speaking, holding the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primaries have become a habit both for Republicans and Democrats since 1976.[5],[6] The discussion of this "random" choice has been on the agenda for a long time, and it has become deeper and more damaging recently due to the fact that Iowa state is "not diverse" enough to be the first state to vote for the potential president. According to the 2020 census, Iowa is one of the US' least diverse states. More than 84% population identify themselves as white, and data from only five states exceed this number, while the national average is just above 60%.[7] However, the counterargument to this claim would be data that proved that the voter turnout at the Iowa caucuses reaches almost only 20% of eligible voters, hinting at the fact that having the vast majority population of any group within the particular state cannot be said to have a notable effect.[8] If Iowa caucuses become a bipartisan tradition, New Hampshire accompanied it by being the first national primary election for parties from both sides of the aisle.

Does the Primaries' Order Really Make A Difference?

In order to elaborate on a hypothesis made earlier, I choose to analyse the results of the first four states where primaries occurred,

2   *Is Our Primary System Broken?* "FiveThirtyEight", 3 June 2021 [https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/is-our-primary-system-broken/].

3   T Donovan, & R. Hunsaker, *Beyond Expectations: Effects of Early Elections in U.S. Presidential Nomination Contests.* "Political Science and Politics", 2009, 42(1), 45–52. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/20452372].

4   Haskell, J. *Reforming Presidential Primaries: Three Steps for Improving the Campaign Environment.* "Presidential Studies Quarterly", 1996, 26(2), 380–390. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/27551585].

5   S. Sanders, *Why Does Iowa Vote First, Anyway?*, "National Public Radio", 29 January 2016, [https://www.npr.org/2016/01/29/464804185/why-does-iowa-vote-first-anyway].

6   Stahl, J. *Why Iowa and New Hampshire go first.* "The National Constitution Center". 29 January 2016. [https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/why-iowa-and-new-hampshire-go-first.].

7   Kauffman, C. *Iowa remains a less diverse state, as two-thirds of its counties lose population.* "Times-Republican", 13 August 2021. [https://www.timesrepublican.com/news/todays-news/2021/08/iowa-remains-a-less-diverse-state-as-two-thirds-of-its-counties-lose-population/].

8   Sanders. S., n.4.

as well as the so-called "Super Tuesday" in every primary election since 1976, when the longest-living President in US history Jimmy Carter won the Democratic nomination, which then paved the way to the White House.

> **Carter's nomination proved that he would have been less likely to succeed in the primaries without demonstrating good spirits at the beginning of the campaign. Thus, the 1976 Democratic primary served the party as a cliff-hanger and helped them win the presidency as well**

I identify the scope of the 44 years prior to the 2020 campaign, considering every "game-changing election", which means that the elections that brought second terms for the president-in-office then will not be analysed, as the incumbent President has never lost a party nomination in the history of US presidential bids. First of all, the available data is sufficient to make the major argument and as stated earlier, the current system of primaries was formed in the 1970s, making the 1976 Democratic and Republican primaries the first ones when Iowans went to the polls first. Moreover, during those 44 years, as mentioned earlier, the Republican and Democratic administrations entered the White House the same number of times: Carter and Biden as one-term Presidents (at least for now regarding Biden), as well as both the Obama and Clinton administrations

having been re-elected. On the Republican side: Trump and George H. W. Bush won the electoral college one time, and Reagan and George W. Bush managed to do it twice. Thus, six presidential terms each from both sides of the aisle, making 12 in total, 8 of which would matter the most.

Echoes of the Past Still Helpful to Gain Momentum

Jimmy Carter entered the 1976 Democratic primary election with low polling numbers, and he was not considered a potential frontrunner. Despite having been in the Democratic establishment for decades, his national recognition left much to be desired. Besides, 17 of his Democratic colleagues entered the race as well, a number that was overtaken by Democrats only in the 2020 campaign. On the contrary, the Republicans' image was badly damaged due to the Watergate scandal, which occurred in 1972, and the Vietnam War[9]. What is more, political scientists then emphasized that when Carter had left the governorship of Georgia in 1975, he had no political base, was not visible in the polls, and had little money to finance his bid. [10] Besides, in early 1975, Carter came last with only 1% of support in a Gallup poll among democrats[11].

At the same time, according to the newly established rules and a record number of primaries then, Carter realized that his wisest strategy would be to campaign in each state. He was an unpopular candidate; thus, his decision to attempt to win states where he might not finish first served his plan.[12] He had won the Iowa caucuses

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9   *Carter Credibility Issue: Galley and Vietnam War.* "New York Times", 21 May 1976
    [https://www.nytimes.com/1976/05/21/archives/carter-credibility-issue-galley-and-vietnam-war.html.].

10 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, *United States presidential election of 1976.* "Encyclopedia Britannica", 26 October 2021. [https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-1976].

11 S. L. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*, University of Chicago Press, 2020 [https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.7208/9780226772875-009/html].

12 Britannica, T, n.10

and the New Hampshire primary[13], thus receiving more and more delegates' votes. Such an adjustment and early electoral success paved the way to the nomination. Winning in 9 states out of the first 15, he gained momentum and led in 19 states overall by receiving more than 52.29% of the pledged delegates' votes at the National Convention and winning the nomination.[14] Hence, Carter's nomination proved that he would have been less likely to succeed in the primaries without demonstrating good spirits at the beginning of the campaign. Thus, the 1976 Democratic primary served the party as a cliff-hanger and helped them win the presidency as well. Carter's biographers have pointed out that his success was mostly determined in Iowa's caucuses. No one took Iowa seriously. Most candidates did not even go there. At the same time, Carter said, "If I win there, I could use that as a way to build momentum". He went door-to-door, went to every dinner, slept in the homes of Iowan supporters. That was his understanding that the process had changed.[15]

It is important to note that both parties did not take part in the so-called Super Tuesday back then, as it was introduced later. Generally, this is a day when the vast majority of delegates' votes can be assigned. As noted by the New York Times, it is the closest thing to a national primary. For example, 1,357 delegates were at stake in the 2020 Democratic primary, accumulating a third of the overall votes.[16]

National Polling Matters, But Is Not an Inclusive Reason for Candidates' Performance

Ronald Reagan won the general election twice: in 1980 and 1984. What is more, he was also very close to being nominated in 1968 and 1976, losing by only a slight margin to Nixon and Ford, respectively[17]. Former CIA Director Herbert Walker Bush and former California governor Ronald Reagan entered the 1980 Republican primary contest as the most experienced and well-recognized candidates among the other five opponents[18]. Bush won the Iowa caucuses, while Reagan was more favourable for conservatives in New Hampshire.[19]

It is interesting that Reagan and Bush polled equally, accumulating 32% each according to Gallup polls, conducted following the Iowa caucuses on January 25-28. However, after his New Hampshire victory, Reagan maintained the lead with 55%, while Bush trailed at only 35% in a poll conducted on 29 February – 3 March, 1980[20]. Following Reagan's win in New Hampshire by almost 17% compared to Bush, no Republican

13 *Carter and Udall Lead as Delegates Are Picked in Iowa*, "New York Times", 11 April 1976 [https://www.nytimes.com/1976/04/11/archives/carter-and-udall-lead-as-delegates-are-picked-in-iowa.html]

14 R.A. Strong (n.d.). *Jimmy Carter: campaigns and elections*. "Miller Center". [https://millercenter.org/president/carter/campaigns-and-elections.].

15 O. B. Waxman, *What the 2020 Democrats can learn from one of the most crowded primary fields in history*, "Time", 27 June 2019 [https://time.com/5607309/democratic-primaries-with-most-candidates/].

16 M. Stevens, *When Is Super Tuesday and What Is It Exactly?*, "New York Times", 27 February 2020, [https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/27/us/politics/super-tuesday.html].

17 L. Cannon, *Ronald Reagan: campaigns and elections*, "Miller Center", [https://millercenter.org/president/reagan/campaigns-and-elections].

18 ibid

19 J. Perlez, *Reporters' notebook; Bush's Humphrey' factor*, "New York Times", 8 March 1987, [https://www.nytimes.com/1987/03/08/us/reporter-s-notebook-bush-s-humphrey-factor.html]

20 J. M. Jones, *Iowa, New Hampshire Results Often Shift National Preferences*, "Gallup", 3 January 2008 [https://news.gallup.com/poll/103537/iowa-new-hampshire-results-often-shift-national-preferences.aspx]

managed to challenge him. What is more, according to the CBS news/ New York Times poll, Reagan's popularity started to grow and then led to his then record-breaking general election results.[21] That said, the New Hampshire primary served as a trigger to Republicans coalescing around Reagan by May 1980[22]. Thus, the first primary determined the further campaign one more time, hinting at another cliff-hanger presidential nomination.

After losing the 1980 Republican nomination, H. W. Bush was chosen as vice-president and served two terms in the Reagan administration. Bush was the one who invented "the "Big Mo" to describe the momentum that victory in the Iowa caucuses gave his campaign in 1980[23]. George Bush's second primaries in 1988 were more successful than the 1980 contest. He overcame a fourth-place finish in the Iowa caucus, but gained the lead in the New Hampshire primary[24]. However, Bush's polling rate was far from being optimistic for him.

A Gallup poll of New Hampshire residents before the primary elections suggested that 36% were favouring Senator Dole, with Bush supported by only 28%. The third rival was trailing at 12%; thus, the race was close between two GOP candidates. [25] At the

same time, according to various CBS News/ New York Times National Polls, Bush's numbers had not been so low. However, the majority of polls suggested that Dole was the frontrunner before the New Hampshire primaries.[26] Their results indicate, of course, that it is not necessary to win both the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary, as Bush did. He was able to secure a credible finish, supported his viability, and his national polling numbers went up as well.[27]

Super Tuesday was high time for Bush to prove his ability to prolong the momentum and get a substantial lead. Bush won 16 out of 17 Republican contests by receiving the 501 delegates' votes out of the 891 that were at stake on March 8, 1988, which means he secured more than 56% of all Super Tuesday's conservative delegates. However, before Super Tuesday, Bush and Dole were level pegging when it came to their share of national delegates. The 1988 Republican Super Tuesday brought Bush 74%, while Dole was left with only 17%.[28]

Bill Clinton had been polling first since 1991, far before the primary season started. However, the 1992 campaign was unique. The Democrats decided not to hold the Iowa caucuses first due to the fact that Iowa Senator T. Harkin was running; hence, it was not wise spending time there for his

21 S. L. Popkin, n.11

22 A. Nagourney, *George Bush, Who Steered Nation in Tumultuous Times, Is Dead at 94*, "New York Times", 30 November, 2018 [https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/30/us/politics/george-hw-bush-dies.html]

23 J. Perlez, n.19

24 K. E. John, *A Report: 1980-1988 New Hampshire Presidential Primary Polls*. "The Public Opinion Quarterly", 53(4), 590–605. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/2749360].

25 *Politics 88: Dole Tops Bush in Gallup Poll; Dukakis Leads*, "LA Times", 15 February 1988 [https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-02-15-mn-28994-story.html].

26 L.M. Bartels & C.A. Broh. *A Review: The 1988 Presidential Primaries*. "The Public Opinion Quarterly", 1989, 53(4), 563–589. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/2749359].

27 R. E. Adkins & A. J. Dowdle. *How Important Are Iowa and New Hampshire to Winning Post-Reform Presidential Nominations?* "Political Research Quarterly," 2001, 54(2), 431–444. [https://doi.org/10.2307/449165].

28 C. D. Hadley & H. W. Stanley, Super Tuesday 1988: Regional Results and National Implications. "Publius", 1989, 19(3), 19–37. [https://doi.org/10.2307/3330481].

contenders. Clinton entered the race in New Hampshire and came second, [29]although there is a substantial difference in obtaining 25%, which was a "comfortable second or perceive the total loss". Clinton's 25% was 8% behind Paul Tsongas that year.[30] Clinton's momentum grew at Super Tuesday 1992, when he won eight out of 11 states polling on one day[31]. Thus, the 1992 elections were the first when the New Hampshire primary did not point out the future nominee due to not being the first contest.

As the 2000 Republican primary polls suggested, that George W. Bush maintained his lead since the pollsters considered him to be running for office, the 2000 Republican nomination was not a cliff-hanger.[32] However, the 2000 general presidential election was a real one due to events in Florida, and then the federal Supreme courts' involvement and vote recount.[33]

Barack Obama's 2008 Democratic primaries were a cliff-hanger from the very beginning. He had demonstrated better polling figures than Hilary Clinton in less than 10% of national polls before January 2008[34], which hinted at his outsider's position. However, he had won the Iowa caucuses, which tied him up with Clinton. In mid-December, 2007, Obama had only 27%, while Clinton got 45%

of national support according to the Gallup poll, as the most credible polling agency. Having said this, Gallup can be called into question by mistakenly predicting only the Trump-Clinton 2016 election and Truman-Dewey 1948 contest.

> **Barack Obama's 2008 Democratic primaries were a cliff-hanger from the very beginning. He had demonstrated better polling figures than Hilary Clinton in less than 10% of national polls before January 2008 , which hinted at his outsider's position**

However, the Iowa contest was a real cliff-hanger for Obama's campaign. By early January of 2008, he had already obtained 33%, which was equal to Clinton's loss of 12%.[35] Later on, Obama did lose only 2% at the New Hampshire primary out of the first six states[36]. What is more, regardless of the upcoming Super Tuesday, Obama secured the lead before the Nevada caucuses and the South Carolina primary[37], which made him already the front-runner prior to Super Tuesday, where he won 12 out

29 J. M. Jones, n.20

30 T. Donovan, & R. Hunsaker, n.3

31 M. Levy, *United States presidential election of 1992*. "Encyclopedia Britannica". 27 October 2021 [https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-1992].

32 F. Newport. *Bush Continues to Dominate Republican Field in 2000 Election*, "Gallup", 30 June 1999 [https://news.gallup.com/poll/3751/bush-continues-dominate-republican-field-2000-election.aspx].

33 L. Kennedy, *How the 2000 Election Came Down to a Supreme Court Decision*. "History", 24 September 2020 [https://www.history.com/news/2000-election-bush-gore-votes-supreme-court].

34 *Democratic Primary Preview: Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina*, Pew Research Center, 3 December 2007 [https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2007/12/03/democratic-primary-preview-iowa-new-hampshire-south-carolina/].

35 F. Newport. *Huckabee, Obama Gain at National Level*, "Gallup", 7 January 2008 [https://news.gallup.com/poll/103615/Huckabee-Obama-Gain-National-Level.aspx].

36 *United States presidential election of 2008, primary results*, "Encyclopedia Britannica". [https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-2008/Primary-Results].

37 CNN 2008 election center, 2008 [http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/states/nevada.html].

of 23 states. All in all, Obama managed to clinch the nomination and received the 2,118 delegates needed to triumph at the party's convention[38].

The 2016 election was a cliff-hanger, when it comes to both the general elections and the Republican primaries. The Clinton-Trump 2016 head-to-head presidential polls (September-October 2016) showed that the former first lady would easily win the White House. However, this never happened. When it came to the Republican primaries, Donald Trump entered the race trailing up to 10 points behind Clinton. Furthermore, Trump was polling much behind the major contenders within the party, namely Lindsey Graham[39]. The Iowa caucuses brought a narrow lead for Trump's major opponent, Senator Ted Cruz[40]. Trump achieved less than 3%, but managed to win three out of the other four primary contests. It should be stressed that Trump had won New Hampshire by 24%, South Carolina by 10% and Nevada by a much larger lead, 24%. Then Trump triumphed on Super Tuesday by winning 7 out of 11 states and receiving almost half of the needed number of pledged delegates[41]. Later on, Trump's rate in the primaries had risen up to 50% nationally, and he paved the way to becoming the nominee[42].

History and the Primary Calendar Matter

The incumbent US President Joe Biden entered the Democratic primary not as a clear frontrunner, just as had many of the nominees mentioned earlier. He was the most experienced and recognisable candidate, for certain. Speaking of Iowa's campaign, Biden could have performed better, as he finished only fourth in that tight race[43]. What is more, he did not receive any pledged delegate's votes in New Hampshire[44]. His performance in Nevada left much to be desired. However, he gained momentum in South Carolina by obtaining almost half of the state's available delegates' votes[45]. It could be argued that this happened due to the endorsement he received from Jim Clyburn, the highest-ranking African American Democrat in Congress[46]. For Biden, it was a real firewall, which continued his momentum till Super Tuesday. A total of 14 states were at stake on

38 J. Zeleny. *Obama Clinches Nomination; First Black Candidate to Lead a Major Party Ticket*, "New York Times", 4 June 2008, [https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/04/us/politics/04elect.html]

39 C. Bialik, *How The Republican Field Dwindled from 17 To Donald Trump*, "FiveThirtyEight," 5 May 2016, [https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-the-republican-field-dwindled-from-17-to-donald-trump/].

40 *2016 Republican primaries, Iowa*, "CNN", 15 May 2016, [https://edition.cnn.com/election/2016/primaries/states/ia/Rep].

41 Super Tuesday Results 2016, "New York Times", September 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/2016-03-01/].

42 H. Hartig, J. Lapinski and S. Psyllos, *Poll: Trump Reaches 50 Percent Support Nationally for the First Time*, "NBC News" 26 April 2016 [https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/poll-trump-reaches-50-percent-support-nationally-first-time-n5620611].

43 *Iowa Caucus Results 2020*, "New York Times", 29 February 2020 [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/02/04/us/elections/results-iowa-caucus.html]

44 *Democratic Delegate Count and Primary Election Results 2020*, "New York Times", September 2020 [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/elections/delegate-count-primary-results.html]

45 S. Peoples, M. Kinnard, B. Barrow, *Biden wins South Carolina, aims for Super Tuesday momentum*, "AP", 29 February 2020 [https://apnews.com/article/elections-in-state-wire-election-2020-ma-state-wire-joe-biden-b9872b58b495fd17044f359338ab3f2a].

46 D. Strauss, *'A chain reaction': how one endorsement set Joe Biden's surge in motion*, "The Guardian", 4 March 2020 [https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/04/joe-biden-jim-clyburn-endorsement-super-tuesday].

the 2020 Super Tuesday, and Biden got 10 of them, while his major rival Bernie Sanders managed to win only four, which meant that Biden obtained 458 delegates out of the 1,344 which were at stake. All in all, Biden cleared the way to becoming the nominee.

> ❝ *the primaries' schedule was one of the key factors that determined each of the campaigns discussed. However, seven out of the selected nominations proved that candidates need to start well in the very first primaries, as voters will instead support those who still have a chance to win the contest. In other words, voters want their voice to be heard and not wasted*

As voting choice and campaign performance are beyond the scope of the article, it could be summarized that the primaries' schedule was one of the key factors that determined each of the campaigns discussed. However, seven out of the selected nominations proved that candidates need to start well in the very first primaries, as voters will instead support those who still have a chance to win the contest. In other words, voters want their voice to be heard and not wasted. At the same time, as history shows, some dramatic victories or losses could make candidates exit the race. For example, Harry S. Truman sought re-election in 1952 after serving his first full term as President following the 1948 elections. However, after losing the New Hampshire primary, which was the first at that time, he decided to exit the race[47].

How should The Cliff-Hanger Primary System Be Revised?

The article proves that the Iowa and New Hampshire caucuses and primaries, respectively, remain major milestones in the race to secure the parties' nominations.[48] The examples chosen from both Republican and Democratic primaries prove that they defined candidates' performance in early voting states, such as has been the norm in voting arrangements since the 1970s. Besides, in the aftermath, no candidate who won the nomination, lost three out of the four first states in the primaries, with the exception of Joe Biden.

There is no doubt that the existing system of primaries should be changed at some point. While the first states, including the Super Tuesday contests, received much media and campaign attention from both parties, states that conduct primaries later are largely unnoticed. Another aspect that may need changing is the primary counting method. There is an ongoing discourse that instant-runoff voting, known as ranked-choice voting, could be implemented[49]. This system may solve the problem when candidates campaign on similar issues equally, or a voter does not have a solid and clear preference; thus, he/she may rank his/her choice by assigning respective numbers in front of candidates' names. It should be said that in the 2020 Democratic primaries, Wyoming, Alaska, Hawaii and Kansas used

47 Waxman, O. B. *Could Trump Lose the Republican Nomination? Here's the History of Primary Challenges to Incumbent Presidents.* "Time". 10 October 2019. [https://time.com/5682760/incumbent-presidents-primary-challenges/]

48 R. E. Adkins & A. J. Dowdle, n. 27

49 *The Primaries Are Just Dumb.* "New York Times". 15 November 2021, [https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/26/opinion/democrats-primary-south-carolina.html].

this system. The early voting in the Nevada caucuses took place according to such a model as well. At the same time, the fact that various states have different legislature on this issue also plays an important role when it comes to amending the current winner-take-all or the plurality system[50].

> **There is no doubt that the existing system of primaries should be changed at some point. While the first states, including the Super Tuesday contests, received much media and campaign attention from both parties, states that conduct primaries later are largely unnoticed**

The paradox of the current system is that Iowa and New Hampshire, as the first national primaries got much more attention while being less diverse than other states,

which hints at their unique role and power in determining the nomination[51]. Despite the apparent effect of the first primaries on the nomination process, it is less likely that the system will be changed in the short-term perspective. The problem is that both major parties have been campaigning for almost five decades within the system, and they have got used to it as it serves their purposes. In addition, there is no bipartisan discussion on the need to amend the system, which from time to time is beneficial to both major parties.

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50 S. Bokat-Lindell, *Can Ranked-Choice Voting Cure American Politics?*, "New York Times", 24 June 2021 [https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/24/opinion/ranked-choice-new-york.html]

51 *The Primaries Are Just Dumb*. "New York Times", n.49