

# The Peculiarities Of Democratization In Post-Soviet Countries Current Situation And Trends

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**Abstract:** The article explores the issues of democratization, integration, and political regime type in post-Soviet 15 countries during social and political order transformation. This research is especially based on comparative analysis of Freedom House's Nations in Transit: Confronting Illiberalism empirical data. As a result of this research four groups of post-Soviet countries are defined taking into account their peculiarities of political regime types as well as their foreign integration policies. It is concluded that EU member and EU associated post-Soviet countries have better results and positive trends for democratizing of their political systems. As for EEU integrated or non-integrated post-Soviet countries, they already built semi-consolidated or consolidated authoritarian regimes. Being EEU member Armenia has the best democracy score in Eurasian bloc of post-Soviet countries. Armenia is unique EEU member state that has also signed the CEPA with EU. And if needed Armenia has a potential to contribute to democratic transition of other EEU member countries. It is also proposed that consociational democracy can be more proper model for democratic transition in post-Soviet plural societies if they develop participatory political culture. The need for a consociational model for plural societies in post-Soviet space is needed to avoid ethnocratic values, which in their turn can lead to the development of non democratic, especially ethnocratic regimes.

**Index Terms:** Democratization, integration, post-Soviet transformation, political culture, political regimes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Post-Soviet transformation as a social and political process implies a transition of regimes. Basically, this process is described as an aspiration to democratic values, with the goal of building democratic institutions. The political order in changing societies is characterized by instability and as S. Huntington points out: "... the order can exist without freedom, but freedom without order is impossible" (Huntington, S., 2007, p. 27). This means that freedom, as a democratic value, lies on the basis of a democratic transition. For this, it is necessary to form an appropriate political culture, which will become an instrument to achieve democratic goals.

## 2. Post-Soviet political culture

Conventional models for "democracy transitions" are incomplete and insufficient to analyze regime changes in post-Soviet societies. The distinction between the types of dominant political institutions (formal institutions versus informal ones, or the rule of law versus arbitrariness) marks a line between "transition to democracy" and post-Soviet transitions to several different regimes. The main sources of political competition in post-Soviet societies are intra-elite conflicts, not "pacts". In such societies, there is no solid basis to establish the dominance of formal institutions over informal ones. This situation can be explained by relying on the type and degree of political culture in post-Soviet societies, since the political behavior of elites and citizens is reflected in the very process of democratization. But most post-Soviet societies have a low level of political culture, which is a reflection of the Soviet era, where a totalitarian political culture was spread, which left its mark on the political consciousness of the post-Soviet man.

Eventually in some post-Soviet countries (which did not prefer the European integration) these realities led to the dominance of informal institutions over formal ones (Gel'man V., 2003, p. 87). Actually, scholars note that the state weakness, as a distinctive feature of post-Soviet politics, has two different measurements. First, weakness means significant limitations on the state's ability. In particular, the state monopoly on legitimate violence is undermined by the competition between state and non-state actors (some of whom claim to act on behalf of the state). Secondly, a weak state cannot ensure the rule of law, (even if such a state uses slogans as "dictatorship of the law"). The use of various terms to describe these phenomena, such as "oligarchy", "feudalism", "caciquismo - the power of local bosses" (Knight, A., & Pansters, W., 2006), etc., only emphasizes the importance of this feature of post-Soviet transformation. For clarification, let us note that such formulations can be characteristic for those post-Soviet countries where the model of dependent political culture is dominant. In this type of political culture citizens have their own perception of political power, but they are submissive to it, even when the political power has a negative nature. With this type of political culture, citizens do not expect a personal involvement to change anything in the activities of the authorities, they are only "observers". Such a political culture is also called "clientelism" (Rukavishnikov, V., Halman, L., & Ester, P., 1998) which characterizes a social or political system based on patron-client relationships. Clientelism has a long tradition and is often based on kinship, being mutually binding (Trantidis, A., 2015, p. 113). After decades of regime changes in post-Soviet area, the model of liberal democracy emerged and took root only in some post-communist countries. In most former communist states, the political transformations either lost their momentum. As a result, partially democratic or (hybrid) systems were created, but in some states political changes led to the consolidation of new authoritarian regimes (Ekiert, G., Kubik, J., & Vachudova, M., 2007, p. 7). This situation was largely influenced by the integration policy of post-communist countries. The independent statehood (current or in the past) and the previous experience of democracy and market economy had a positive impact on political and economic reforms. Those countries that had less repressive regimes, more liberalized cultures, and strong dissident movements (ie Eastern European countries) under

- **Nations in Transit 2018 Confronting Illiberalism.** Retrieved on 05.09.2019 from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/nations-transit-2018>
- **IMF 2019 GDP rates for Post-Soviet countries.** Retrieved on 10.09.2019 from <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPDPC@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD/RUS/GBR/KGZ/ARM>

the USSR, were more successful to develop democratic system and market economy, while countries where the Communist Party had experienced the most repressive rule, faced huge obstacles to democratization. This phenomenon is explained by the different potential of democratization and by the desire of these countries for their preferred types of political culture aiming to realize the political power as a political institution. Inherited social and economic inequalities, cleavages and conflicts also played a significant role in creating opportunities for a successful transition. Ethnic and religious cleavages, especially strengthened by territorial and economic factors, create significant problems for democratizing countries and they can be used by anti-democratic elites (Ekiert, G., Kubik, J., & Vachudova, M., 2007, p. 14). This is affected by the Soviet paternalistic consciousness and the autocratic type of political culture, when the re-socialization is hampered. State building is one of the fundamental aspects for successful democratization. The key question for a successful democratic reform is the following: how to build state institutions that will not be too strong to interfere excessively in the lives of citizens and in their political and economic freedoms, but will be strong enough to effectively enforce the rule of law and avoid seizure of power by various groups? To solve this problem, it is necessary to promote (the) political competition and accountability, as well as to encourage the leaders to adhere to democratic values. The whole process should be mediated by the work of civil institutions, which are the key to democratic culture.

**3. Post-Soviet regime transition** If a regime change does take place, there is no guarantee that a democratic regime will be created in result of the transition. The electoral revolutions swept through the former communist states of Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space in the late 1990s and early 2000s initially aroused optimism about the democratic potential of the region. The supporters of democracy promotion viewed these so-called "color revolutions" as a source of political inspiration, as well as an opportunity to get skills for the further advancement of democracy (Bunce, V., Wolchik, Sh., 2006, p. 5). Nevertheless, the regimes emerged in result of electoral revolutions cover the spectrum between democracy and authoritarianism (<sup>1</sup> Hintz, L., 2011). In this regard it is necessary to make a comparative analysis among post-Soviet countries to reveal their regime characteristics which will give us an empirical data to distinguish the similarities and differences between them. To better understand the current situation and upcoming trends of democratization it is important to take a look at Freedom House's Nations in Transit 2018<sup>1</sup> data on democracy scores of 15 post-Soviet countries by separating them to appropriate groups.

**Table 1.** EU member Post-Soviet Countries.

Score 1-7*	Electoral Process	Civil Society	Independent Media	National Democratic Governance	Local Democratic Governance	Judicial Framework and Independence	Corruption	Democracy Score
<b>Regime type – Consolidated Democracy</b>								
Latvia	1.75	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.25	1.50	3.00	2.07
Lithuania	2.00	2.00	2.25	2.75	2.25	1.75	3.50	2.36
Estonia	1.5	1.75	1.50	2.00	2.25	1.50	2.25	1.82

Table 1 let us understand that more democratized are post-Soviet countries that have chosen EU integration and are already EU members such as Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. These countries have consolidated democracy regime type.

**Table 2.** Eurasian Economic Union member Post-Soviet Countries.

Score 1-7*	Electoral Process	Civil Society	Independent Media	National Democratic Governance	Local Democratic Governance	Judicial Framework and Independence	Corruption	Democracy Score
<b>Regime type – Consolidated Authoritarian Regime</b>								
Armenia	6.00	3.75	5.50	6.00	5.75	5.50	5.50	5.43 Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
Belarus	6.75	6.25	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	6.00	6.61
Kazakhstan	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.71
Kyrgyzstan	5.75	5.00	6.25	6.50	6.25	6.50	6.25	6.07
Russia	6.75	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.61

Table 2 shows that post-Soviet countries that have chosen EEU integration such as Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia have developed consolidated authoritarian regime besides Armenia which has a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime type. Armenia is closer to semi-democratic than to semi-authoritarian regime. Armenia is also the unique EEU member country that has signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with EU which is a positive trend.

**Table 3.** European Union associated Post-Soviet Countries

Score 1-7*	Electoral Process	Civil Society	Independent Media	National Democratic Governance	Local Democratic Governance	Judicial Framework and Independence	Corruption	Democracy Score
<b>Regime type – Transitional Government or Hybrid Regime</b>								
Georgia	4.50	3.75	4.25	5.50	5.25	5.00	4.50	4.68
Moldova	4.00	3.25	5.00	5.75	5.50	5.00	6.00	4.93
Ukraine	3.50	2.75	4.25	5.75	4.75	5.75	5.75	4.64

Table 3 shows that post-Soviet countries which have chosen EU integration and are now associated with it, have stronger democracy scores than EEU member countries. These countries have succeeded in developing transitional governments or hybrid regimes. It is important to note that countries continuing their EU integration policy improve their democracy indicators like Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

**Table 4.** Non-integrated Post-Soviet Countries

Score 1-7	Electoral Process	Civil Society	Independent Media	National Democratic Governance	Local Democratic Governance	External Pluralism and Inclusiveness	Corruption	Democracy Score
Tajikistan No Integration	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	6.25	7.00	7.00	6.75 Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
Turkmenistan No Integration	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.75	7.00	7.00	6.90 Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
Uzbekistan No Integration Top of Form	7.00	6.75	6.75	7.00	6.75	7.00	7.00	6.88 Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
Azerbaijan No Integration	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.50	7.00	7.00	6.50 Consolidated Authoritarian Regime

As for non-integrated post-Soviet countries such as Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan, they only developed consolidated authoritarian regimes and had the worst democracy scores. The comparative analysis of democracy indicators in post-Soviet countries shows that the better results were recorded by countries that preferred European integration (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine). Countries that preferred Eurasian integration (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) have correspondingly lower scores, as well as those countries that are still on the side (Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). Therefore, based on above-mentioned comparative data analysis we can distinguish 4 groups of post-Soviet countries according to their democracy scores, regime types, and integration policy.

**Table 5.** Current Four Groups of Post-Soviet Countries

- I – EU members (**Consolidated Democracies**)  
Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia
- II – EAEU members (**Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes**) Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia (**Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regime**)
- III – EU associated (**Transitional Governments or Hybrid Regimes**) Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova
- IV – No integration (**Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes**) Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan

democratization it is important to consider the historical factor too: not only because some countries already had a democratic experience, but also because countries with different historical and cultural legacies began to diverge during the post-communist transition period. From this point of view, the type of political culture played a significant role for the integration of the post-Soviet countries. The latest indicators of democracy in the post-Soviet countries confirm this statement. We can state that the vector of integration policy also influenced the indicators of democracy in post-Soviet countries. Democratization is more transparent in European integration countries. As for the Eurasian

integration, many difficulties are still standing. Without taking into account the democratic indicators and political culture features of the Eurasian integration post-Soviet countries, these issues cannot be resolved effectively. The development of participatory culture in the Eurasian bloc countries will be the most important factor to strengthen harmonious interrelations between EU and Eurasian Union. We need to state that Armenia has the highest score of democracy in the Eurasian bloc. This fact is interesting because Armenia as Eurasian Union member, has one of lowest GDP (per capita - \$ 4.53 thousand)<sup>2</sup>. It is very difficult to have a high indicator of democracy when the country is in a deep economic crisis. This shows that the Armenian society, on its cultural basis, is predisposed to democracy. The comparison of these two indicators (the index of democracy and GDP) proves the high democratic potential of Armenian society. From this point of view Armenia can become a mediator to deepen relations between EU and Eurasian Union, giving harmony to bilateral relations. If possible, Armenia can serve as an example for other countries of the Eurasian bloc, if their democratic aspirations are not false. Taking into account the plural social structure in some post-Soviet countries the democratization can be efficient according to the consociational model which is designed on the principle of a reasonable distribution of power in all spheres of social and political life. According to the classification of Arend Lijphart: if the structure of society is heterogeneous and the political culture of elites is coalitional, the model of democracy is consociational. Consociational democracy has 4 characteristics (two primary and two secondary). Grand coalition - Elites of each pillar come together to rule in the interests of society because they recognize the dangers of non-cooperation. Mutual veto - Consensus among the groups is required to confirm the majority rule. Mutuality means that the minority is unlikely to successfully block the majority. If one group blocks another on some matter, the latter are likely to block the former in return. Proportionality - Representation is based on population. If one pillar accounts for 30% of the overall society, then they occupy 30% of the positions on the police force, in civil service, and in other national and civic segments of society. Segmental autonomy - Creates a sense of individuality and allows for different culturally-based community laws (Lijphart, A., 1969, pp. 207-225). In this regard, it has to be noted that the main goal of consociational model is to strengthen the sense of security for each group, giving it the maximum opportunity to decide its destiny, while not creating a threat to the security of other groups. Consociational democracy is a generalization of the experience of several states, such as Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, and Israel. Such a model can find application in several developing (plural) post-soviet countries, where the problem of interethnic contradictions and reconciliation are especially urgent. A necessary prerequisite for the stability of consociational model is the ability of the elite to come to a common opinion to resolve problems. History knows many examples when attempts to mechanically implement such a model (Lebanon, Cyprus, Malaysia) failed precisely because of the unreadiness of society and the elite to compromise.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Four groups of post-Soviet countries that have been defined,

consider their peculiarities of political regime types as well as their foreign integration policies. EU member and EU associated post-Soviet countries have better results and positive trends for democratizing their social and political systems. As for EEU integrated or non-integrated post-Soviet countries, they have already built semi-consolidated or consolidated authoritarian regimes. Being EEU member Armenia has the best democracy score in Eurasian bloc of post-Soviet countries. Armenia is unique EEU member state that has signed CEPA with EU. And if needed Armenia can contribute to democratic transition for other EEU member countries. As for the choice of democracy model, the consociational democracy can be more proper for democratic transition in post-Soviet plural societies. A consociational future for post-soviet plural states is realistic if the participatory and civic cultures in those societies develop. The development of participatory political culture can become an auxiliary factor to achieve the main goal, in this case to establish Rule of law, which has already been proven by the example of those post-Soviet countries that preferred the European integration. This means that the choice of an integration vector or the consideration of the experience of other new democracies can also become an instrument for successful democratization, with the goal to establish a Rule of law. Without considering the cultural potential and the degree of civic culture in plural societies, the consociational model may face difficulties. To implement the consociational democracy in post Soviet plural societies, first, it is necessary to create and ensure at least a minimum level for participatory and civic culture. This model is the most harmonious for countries with plural societies. The need for a consociational model for plural societies in post-Soviet space is needed to avoid ethnocratic values, which in their turn can lead to the development of non democratic, especially ethnocratic regimes.

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