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DEMOCRACY DEVELOPMENT IN POST-SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

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Annotation: Democracy development is moving on gradually in post-socialist countries. One of the former soviet republics that demonstrates a shift toward democracy is Georgia. One of the serious challenges of transition to democracy is the clan factor, which is also characteristic of the post-soviet and “post-socialist camp” space. Democracy development can be a challenging process, requiring a lot of careful planning, negotiations and change management approaches. Nonetheless, democratization process is moving on, with moderate progress, in post-socialist states of Eastern and Southern Europe.

Key words: democracy, post-socialist countries, Eastern Europe, conflict resolution, international organizations, democratization, foreign policy, international security, diplomacy, Southern Europe, civil society, Balkans

Democracy development is moving on gradually in post-socialist countries. One of the former soviet republics that demonstrates a shift toward democracy is Georgia. A Declaration supporting Georgia’s NATO aspirations was adopted at the Bucharest NATO summit in 2008. Washington provided not only military and political support, but also served as a powerful advocate for Georgia internationally, representing the former Soviet Caucasus republic as a “beacon of democracy” [1, p. 95]. However, according to Democracy Index 2019 Georgia is characterized by hybrid regime, ranking 5-6 out of 10, just as Ukraine [2, p. 1].

At the intersection of Europe and Eurasia, Georgia has recently been a site of geopolitical conflict. Georgia fought a five-day war with Russia in 2008 over the disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Despite a history of regional tensions, Georgia has boosted its Positive Peace rankings by substantially improving in Good Relations with Neighbours by 2020 [3, p. 3].

One of the serious challenges of transition to democracy is the clan factor, which is also characteristic of the post-Soviet and “post-socialist camp” space, e.g. Chechnya in the RF and Albania. When the state is reconstructed after a conflict or after a serious change in government, such as a transition from communism or a dictatorship to a democratic republic, the clan has to withdraw in order to allow the state structures to take over the responsibilities of a state [4, p. 1]. However, the clan will try to keep influence and may not have enough trust in the state structures yet and this may lead to conflicting aims [4, p. 1]. Thereby the notion of clan can be interpreted widely – from its ethnic and tribal meaning to the concept of “old political elites”.

The process of uneasy transition to democracy in such post-socialist Balkan country as Montenegro is evidenced by political parties’ struggle in 1989 and 1990. In particular, during intraparty debates of 1990 the conservative wing of the SKCG party (League of Communists of Montenegro) concluded that “more parties do not mean more democracy”; thus, essentially democracy could be exercised without a multiparty system, or that one party could remain dominant within such a system [5, p. 38]. Apparently, this statement contradicts the classical notion of democracy. Morrison holds that more than a decade after Montenegro’s gaining independence, the internal political crisis is being played out in a wider international context where the EU is in crisis and geopolitical dynamics are shifting and in a regional context in which democracy is increasingly under threat across the Balkans [5, p. 169].

Democracy development has been uneasy in the post-socialist countries of the Balkan region. Palmberger during her research and respective class observations in Bosnia and Herzegovina notes that the lecturer presented Tito to his students as a statesman who sought to erase national feelings; yet, so the lecturer argued,

nationalism (national liberation) is crucial for achieving democracy [6, p. 116]. In both the Bosniak- and Croat-dominant public discourses, the past is presented in such a way that it serves to legitimise the respective national aspirations [6, p. 116].

Democracy development can be a challenging process, requiring a lot of careful planning, negotiations and change management approaches. Western states, as advocates of democracy, following the perspectives of Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama, believe that it is necessary and justified to overthrow despots in the name of freedom [7, p. 13]. Matter-of-course, one needs to utilize a case-by-case approach under such circumstances and conduct thorough investigation of all pertinent details. Nevertheless, democratization process is moving on, with moderate progress, in post-socialist states of Eastern and Southern Europe.

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