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Forms of Rule in the Post-Soviet Space: Hybrid Regimes

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1. Introduction

Does it make sense to classify political regimes as “hybrid” and, if yes, what are properties and consequences of such a classification? This is the question this text is dealing with. In order to answer it, we try to map the field of conceptual and empiric research which concentrates on the phenomenon of political regimes that are neither clear democracies nor outright autocracies. Specifically, the potential need for a hybrid type arises when real world cases unify elements which belong to different established regime types, for example the simultaneous existence of pluralist elections (a feature of democracies) and media repression (a feature of autocracies). The term hybridity in that sense can simply be associated to a ‘mixture’ of components which – according to a given theory – belong to two or more different categories.

One of the major discussions around hybrid regimes has addressed the issue if the establishment of hybrid types should be seen as an element of scientific progress or as an indicator of insufficient classification. On the one hand, the creative development of a genuine regime may be able to describe regime characteristics more adequately and to catch specific properties of power relations or other political variables. On the other, an explicit dissociation from established categories like ‘democracy’ or ‘autocracy’ goes along with an abdication of understanding with regard to typical power constellations and their consequences. Any construction of new types therefore faces the fundamental challenge to make us better understand our phenomenon which can already partially – but not completely – be understood. Introducing the category of a hybrid regime to systematic regime studies is only justified if that category is better able to describe, understand or

explain features of political power that remain poorly grasped as elements of either democracies or autocracies.

The hybridity of regimes started to be identified as an object of research during the middle of the 1990s. As such, they are an issue of studies on the Third Wave of transition (after Huntington, 1991). In the early years of the Third Wave, the problem was not in the centre of scholarly attention. Rather, both political actors and scholars acted on the assumption of two dominant pathways – democratic stabilisation and consolidation (Diamond et al., 1997) on the one side or democratic breakdown (Linz, 1978) on the other. Only after some time certain countries obviously deviated from these antagonist expectations by remaining in the status of incomplete transition over a longer period of time. The debate on the character of hybrid regimes gained special momentum because important cases of transition studies – for example Argentina, Indonesia, and Russia – were or still are involved.

The text proceeds as follows. In section 2, we try to identify how hybrid types are constructed. The section will demonstrate that hybrid types are sometimes seen as genuinely distinct from other types. At the same time, however, hybridity is associated with the creation of subtypes, for example with different sub-forms of democracy or autocracy which deviate from the allegedly ‘complete’ types. Section 3 enquires into this finding by more closely discussing these different logics of construction. On the one hand, a phenomenon specific approach has brought forward types without clear associations to democracy and/or autocracy; we will call them “oscillation regimes”. On the other hand, the creation of subtypes leads to two sorts of sub-regimes: incomplete democracies and incomplete autocracies. In the literature, we find different suggestions of classification which will be briefly discussed. The fourth section will take a look at empiric developments, and the fifth section will summarize the results.

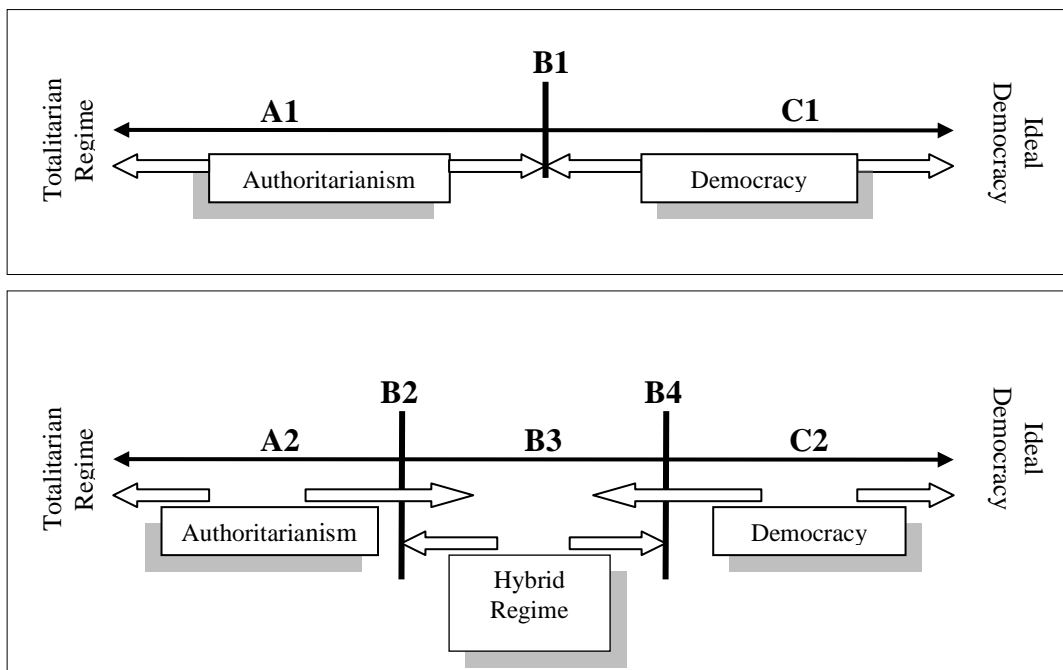
2. Hybrid regimes: core principles

From a bird’s perspective, two diverse strategies of coping with the difficulties of shabby typologies have been adopted in the transition literature (Krennerich, 2002: 59-61). The first strategy consists in the mixture of regime elements in order to define new regime types. This is where the term “hybridity” was used most prominently (Karl, 1995). Terry Karl used it for Central American cases in which democratic elements – here: pluralist political competition – and non-democratic features – here: clientelist decision-making procedures – existed along each other. The second strategy does not mix regime type elements but creates special occurrences of established regime types. One of the most prominent expression of transition studies are “democracies with adjectives” (Collier and Levitsky, 1997): democracies which lack one or the other element of what are theoretically consolidated democracies. More recently, also authoritarian regime types with additional attributes have been discussed (Levitsky and Way, 2002, Shevtsova, 2004).

In Diagram 1, the constitutive logics of these different strategies of type construction are visualized. The first variant may be called a “pure type” strategy. Autoc-

racy (A1) and Democracy (C1) are separated by a clear line; in that sense every political regime belongs either to one or the other type. In a strict sense, the term hybridity should therefore even be avoided; there is no room for deviating types. From a purely logic point of view, one would always have to speak of main types or main type alienation from that perspective. Still, many authors use the term ‘hybridity’ when cases, usually countries, are supposedly located on or close to the dividing line B1. The logic is tellingly sketched by Wolfgang Merkel’s term of a “defective democracy” – a democracy with certain shortcomings which (if we follow Merkel) still allow the usage of the dominant concept ‘democracy’ (Merkel, 2004).

Diagram 1: Pure types versus fuzzy types



The second variant, also visualized in the diagram, leaves a deliberate gap between democracy and authoritarianism.¹ Hybridity is not limited to a crossover region but comes along in three variants: B3 indicates the core of the genuine type, B2 and B4 present regimes which are on the edges of the regular types A2 and C2. By idea, the regimes on and around B2 and B4 could also be defined as ‘incomplete’ with regard to the established types. In practice, however, scholars rather tend to focus on B3 as the newly created type and try to include various features into them. Therefore, hybrid types always bear elements which are – in other conceptions – attributed to either democracies or autocracies. Examples are

¹ I use the terms autocracy and authoritarianism interchangeably in this text.

elections, the rule of law, the freedoms of speech and assembly on the one hand and electoral fraud, fragile judicial systems, and tutelary rulers.

The examples remind us of the fact that all political regimes are made up by various elements rather than being centered on one decisive structural feature. To be sure, some existing regime typologies are one-dimensional. The prime example coming into mind concerns elections which have been declared central to democracy in certain democratic theories (Schumpeter, 1976 (1942), Downs, 1957). These minimalist conceptions, however, are inadequate for an advanced analysis of post-transition democracy – if cases are not clear, the whole problem consists in hard-to-catch interactions beyond elections. Therefore, the white arrows in the lower diagram indicate that hybrid regimes always bear characteristics from both democracy and authoritarianism.

If this finding is accepted, a next question arises: are there certain patterns of mixture between ‘democratic’ and ‘autocratic’ elements to be discerned? A first answer has again to allude to the main types. In fact, there are no conceptions of democracy that are ready to disclaim elections as *the* core element of democracy. Many theories insist that there must be more to a democracy than just free and fair elections (Held, 1996). Democracies without non-manipulated elections, however, are not possible. Therefore, no compromises concerning hybridity can be made concerning elections. With regard to that variable, all regimes are indeed either democratic or non-democratic (Merkel, 2004).

Logically, hybrid regimes therefore consist of free elections as well as *other* regime elements which bring in a partially autocratic character.² Usually, it has been argued that these have to do with the specific understanding of incumbents of allowing possibilities of democratic control. The clientilism as discussed by Terry Karl questions the autonomous formation of elite structures, leading to decision networks beyond public control (Karl, 1995). Friedbert Rüb locates hybridity in the lacking willingness of democratically elected incumbents to limit their own reach of power (Rüb, 2002). More specifically, Rüb associates hybridity with a typical combination a) of democratic power legitimation and power exercise and b) autocratic power structures and an unlimited reach of incumbent power.

If we follow his concept, hybrid regimes are characterized by pluralism, free and fair elections, and at least some rule of law elements. Furthermore, the structure of power is ill-defined by weak horizontal control, leading to a barely controlled executive which is itself able to decide where to limit its own power (Rüb, 2002: 106). This highlights the long discussed affinity between regimes with strong presidents and autocratic characteristics (Linz, 1990). Yet, Rüb addresses this relationship in more abstract terms by speaking of control powers within a regime of checks and balances rather than focusing on strong presidents alone (Rüb, 2001).

In sum then, hybridity can be associated to two sorts of political regimes. Pure types refer to the ‘main types’ of democracy and authoritarianism and add addi-

² Unfortunately, the literature does not offer a threshold beyond which an election can objectively be labeled as ‘free’ or even as ‘free and fair’. OSCE missions usually try to get to a classification, but these judgements are under political control and can hardly be used on a comparative basis.

tional attributes. Prominent examples, just to name a few, are Kubiček's "delegative democracy" (Kubicek, 1994) and "competitive authoritarianism" as designed by Levitsky/Way (2002). The other variant is characterized by fuzziness. Democratic and non-democratic elements go along, stand in complex relations one to another, and form regimes with distinct characteristics.

3. Alternative concepts: diminished subtypes, oscillation regimes

What are the properties of hybrid regimes following the two principles of typification discussed in the previous section? My argument is that pertinent types of hybridity are based on basically different strategies of type construction, namely the development of diminished subtypes in the pure type dimension and of oscillation regimes in the fuzzy type dimension.

The pure type strategy results in the creation of subtypes of either democracy or authoritarianism. It follows the approach of Collier and Levitsky who define (in their case: democratic) regimes as categories with a set of distinctive features (Collier and Levitsky, 1997). Subtypes to these main types are "diminished" in the sense that they are incomplete, or "defective", with regard to the main type. For example, "delegative" democracies are inferior to consolidated democracies because of their weakness of the horizontal control of powers (Kubicek, 1994, Merkel et al., 2003: 87-91). An alternative to the creation of diminished subtypes would be the establishment of differentiated subtypes as is, for example, the case with presidential or parliamentary democracy. These do not alter the character of the respective main type. Diminished subtypes do so by adding attributes which do not belong to the defining elements of the main type (Krennerich, 2002: 60-61).

The most systematic approach to catch diminished subtypes of democracy has been developed by Wolfgang Merkel and several collaborators (Merkel, 2004, Merkel et al., 2003). His group analyzed political regimes by looking at different partial regimes. In each of them, potential "defects" were associated with specific attributes to characterize the respective subtypes:

- A damaged electoral regime allows for characterization of a regime as "exclusive democracy";³
- Limited civic rights, for example arbitrary access to courts or inequality before the law, and limited political freedoms such as the harassment of civil society lead to an "illiberal democracy";

³ It should be noted that this classification refers solely to the systematic exclusion of certain parts of the population from electoral voice, for example with regard to the Russian population in Estonia and Latvia in the first years after 1991. The argument is not extended to other potential defects of the electoral regime, for example electoral fraud. In this case, a regime would not qualify as democratic anymore.

- Weak control powers and feeble horizontal responsibilities result in a “delegative democracy” as described by Kubiček (see above);
- Damage of effective government power – no real power for those elected – entails the classification as “enclave democracy”.

In the context of our article, Merkel’s types can be seen as proxies for all types of diminished democracy which can be found in the literature. First, they focus on a particular element of democratic rule rather than on the democratic regime as a whole. Second, they attribute a malfunctioning in comparison to certain standards of (real or ideal) democracy. The attribute – this is the third point – describes this particular ‘defect’ but then semantically adapts it to a particular democratic case as a whole.

Like in a mirror image, things are similar with regard to subtypes of authoritarian regimes. Obviously, the notion of ‘diminished subtypes’ needs to be used in purely analytic terms. We do not object the notion of a ‘defective democracy’ because of the implicit understanding that a non-defective democracy is usually preferable in normative terms. Intuitively, calling a diminished subtype a ‘defective autocracy’ would give a signal that a normatively problematic regime exists in variations which are even worse. Subtype diminishment in the case of hybrid authoritarianism can indeed usually be acquainted with the opposite: elements of autocracy open up and lead to more freedom or societal autonomy.

Since it is not possible to discuss all subtypes of autocracy here (see, for example, Shevtsova, 2004, Hanson et al., 2006), I concentrate on one of the most prominent ones – the concept of “competitive authoritarianism” as developed by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. In their view, competitive authoritarianism “must be distinguished from unstable, ineffective, or otherwise flawed types of regimes that nevertheless meet basic standards of democracy” (Levitsky and Way, 2002: 53). Translated into the diagram of the previous section, the authors locate competitive authoritarianism within the field A1, but close to the line B1 which marks the crossover to a democratic regime. In competitive authoritarianism, some democratic elements, like a certain pluralism connected to elections, are present. In the end, however, competitive authoritarian regimes are defined by not offering democratic institutions as “an important channel through which the opposition may seek power” (ibid., 54). Instead, “incumbents violate [democratic] rules so often and to such an extent that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy” (ibid., 52). These violations concern not only elections, but also the arenas of legislation, the judiciary, and the media.

This understanding of a specific type of autocracy offers many parallels to the construction of democracy subtypes according to Merkel. Competitive authoritarianism is a ‘diminished’ subtype in the sense that one core element – elite selection – differs in character from the main type (where we would expect a top-down elite selection, completely controlled by incumbents). At the same time, the new subtype highlights this specific element while neglecting other features of this diminished authoritarianism. For example, the notion is less easily applicable to the judiciary sphere where ‘competition’ is hardly observable. To my knowledge, autocracy studies have so far not developed an integrated model of subtypes

which would allow for more systematic categories.⁴ Instead, we can observe a turn towards metaphors like the “uneven playing field” (see Way in this volume) which include the multi-dimensionality of diminished authoritarianism without being able to conceptualize in a differentiated way.

While there are many parallels between diminished democracy and diminished autocracy, there also exists one major difference. Diminished democracies are implicitly seen as relatively long-lived regimes, with built-in defects of a structural nature. The electoral regime plays a crucial role because non-democratic developments in this sphere may swing the whole regime into the authoritarian direction. In such a case, the structural nature of democratic defects makes it not very likely that such a trend may be reversed within a short time.

With regard to diminished autocracy, however, things are somewhat different. Since we are by definition dealing with regimes which allow for competition, it is not unlikely that the organization of acceptably free elections may lift a case above the electoral democracy threshold. If regimes are not completely closed, there is always a next election on the horizon. Of course, there exist different suggestions on *how many* free (and fair) elections need to be observed until a country may plausibly be classified as a stable democracy. However, we have seen that there exist many diminished forms of democracy, and stability is not a precondition to all of them. Therefore, diminished authoritarian regimes are by definition close to becoming democracies. Indeed, one of the major aims of autocracy studies is to identify conditions under which this is the case.

Consequently, we find the scholarly opinion that competitive authoritarian regimes often oscillate between democracy and non-democracy (Howard and Roessler, 2006: 368). Stating an oscillation as such does not change the character of competitive authoritarianism as a diminished subtype. Yet, if the status between democracy and autocracy changes regularly, some authors have come to the conclusion to focus on the phenomenon of regime change itself. By doing so, they undertake a conceptual switch from the pure type to the fuzzy type strategy. Or, returning to diagram 1, they focus on the character of B3 instead of B1.

In conceptualizing hybridity as a genuine type marker, one has to focus on the source of fuzziness within a given regime. Traditionally, this element has been linked to the interaction of political and economic elites in young democracies (Karl, 1995, Schmitter, 1992, Comisso, 1997). In recent years, and especially in the post-socialist space, the focus of attention has however turned to elections as the most important regime element where to identify hybridity. Notably the so called colour revolutions give reason to shed light on a variant of hybridity that is linked to an ambivalent character of elections.

Bunce and Wolchik have identified 14 cases of such elections where the subsumption as either democracy or autocracy has not been clear (Bunce and Wolchik, 2009). In principle, they all took place in non-democratic settings but offered a

⁴ The seminal conceptualization by Juan Linz presents a series of authoritarian sub-types which, however, can hardly be reduced to one core element. See Linz, Juan (1975) *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. IN Greenstein, Fred & Polsby, Nelson (Eds.) *Handbook of Political Science*. Reading.

semi-open political battle field in which ‘democratic’ oppositions were allowed to compete for public office. Bunce and Wolchik identified further elements (ibid. 99 and 103): the defection of internal key regime allies, changes in electoral regime (for example with regard to the introduction of professionalized election monitoring), and the collaboration of opposition elites. None of them belong to a non-diminished authoritarian regime where repressive measures of safeguarding incumbent power would be expected.

To be sure, the aim of Bunce and Wolchik did not consist in creating a genuine type of hybrid regimes; they were looking for circumstances under which ‘electoral revolutions’ take place. Of the 14 elections under scrutiny, many did not result in deepening hybridity but in fact underlined an authoritarian regime character, for example in Azerbaijan (2003 and 2005) and Belarus (2001 and 2006). Other cases resulted in once-for-good democratic turnovers, for instance in Romania (1996), Bulgaria (1997), and Slovakia (1998).⁵ The remaining cases – various elections in Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Serbia – form enough substance to establish a type of its own – the stretch B3 in diagram 1.

Here, we find a constellation in which elections form a window of opportunity by allowing societal pluralism to become, under certain circumstances, a threat to an authoritarian regime (Bunce and Wolchik, 2009: 106). Or, as Lindberg writes:

“Elections make democratization more likely if they serve to make repression ‘expensive’ and counterproductive, and spur the opposition to unify and mobilize, and if they make a policy of tolerating the opposition seem to the rulers as if it will make their rule more legitimate, but in fact trigger defections of state actors to the opposition and create self-fulfilling expectations about the continuation of competitive politics” (Lindberg, 2009: 87).

Where is the fuzziness ascribed to this model? It is hidden in the fact that free elections – successful electoral revolutions – are only one element among others to make a regime democratic. Going back to Merkel’s partial regimes, we can see easily that certain defects like a weak horizontal control of powers or a limited respect for political rights are structural dangers for democratic regimes. Easily a situation can arise where the succeeding elections have to be held under authoritarian pressure, for example by a hostile bureaucracy or a reluctant security apparatus. In that sense, open elections do not form a necessary condition for a regime to turn into a democracy, whatever minimal or defective its character. Rather, an oscillation between free and non-free elections forms a pattern which is both theoretically feasible and empirically observable.

4. Hybrid regimes in Eastern Europe: findings

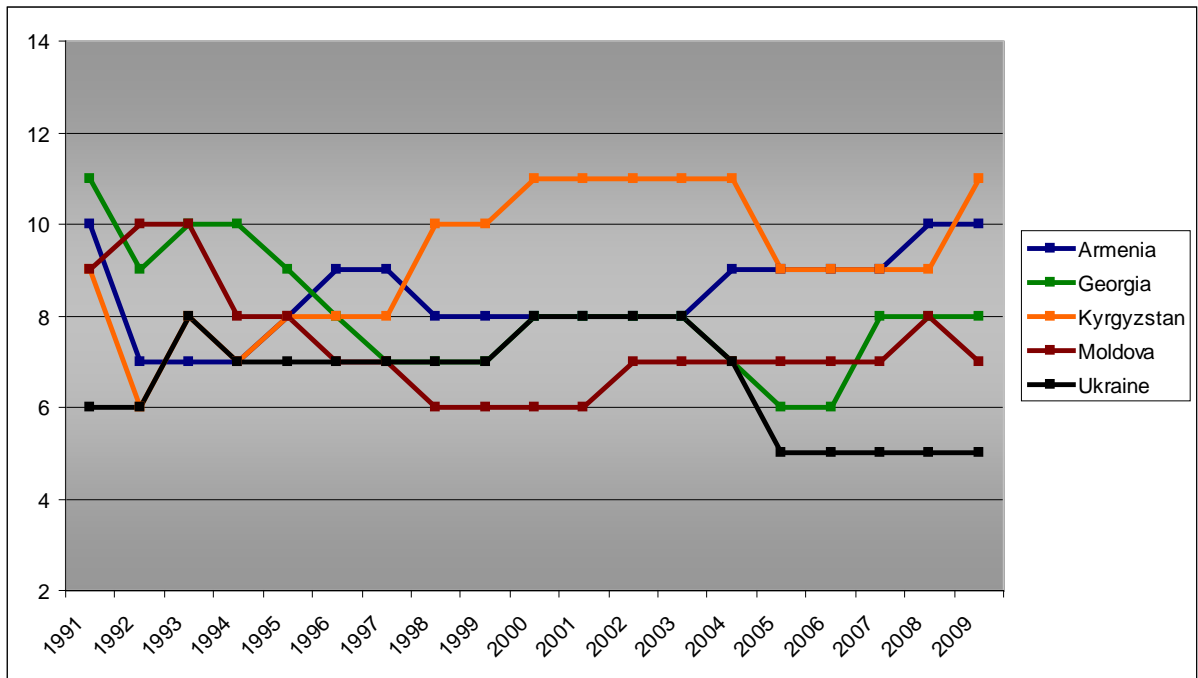
Which of the country cases in the post-soviet space can be identified as hybrid on the empirical level? Following our argument so far, there are two logics of classification. According to the pure type strategy, hybrid regimes are those which are

⁵ In the case of successful electoral revolutions, the regime character changed to A2. In non-successful cases, the resulting regime character was located in C2 (again, see diagram 1).

close to the threshold between democracy and autocracy. According to the fuzzy type strategy, hybrid regimes occur in an area where neither democratic nor autocratic elements prevail.

Being aware of different regime measurement concepts (Lauth et al., 2000), we turn to the Freedomhouse ratings for an assessment of democratic regime content in the Post-soviet space. As we know, Freedomhouse in its “Freedom in the World” surveys rates country cases with numbers from 1 to 7 each in the dimensions of political rights and civil liberties.⁶ Diagram 2 lists a set of cases for which the hybrid regime finding holds in the sense that they are, or have been, close to the democracy threshold within the last 20 years.⁷ In that sense, classification takes place according to the pure type logic. Cases far from the democracy threshold should not be included. For example, the Baltic States have been rated as clear democracies for many years. Or, to the other end, cases like Belarus or Russia bear a clearly authoritarian essence and therefore lack hybridity (Freedomhouse, 2010).

Diagram 2: Regime development of hybrid post-soviet cases according to Freedom House ratings, 1991-2009



⁶ See www.freedomhouse.org (accessed July 2, 2010).

⁷ The formulation “close to the threshold”, of course, implies the pure type logic as described in section 2. Freedomhouse itself has created a fuzzy hybrid type itself by establishing a category which is called “partly free”. As we can deduce from the Freedomhouse website, it becomes relevant when regimes are neither “free” (collecting 1 or 2 credits on each of the dimensions ‘political rights’ and ‘civil liberties’) nor “not free” (6 or 7 credits on each of the dimensions).

However, diagram 2 also goes along with a different logic. It includes those five cases of the post-soviet space – Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Ukraine – which belong to the Freedomhouse category of “partly free” regimes. That, of course, constitutes a fuzzy type logic that establishes a ‘something else’ apart from a purely democratic (“free”) or purely autocratic (“not free”) regime.

What do the data tell us? First, there are indeed cases in which oscillation takes place to a considerable extent. Therefore, it seems utterly plausible not to rely on *one* threshold between democracy and authoritarianism but to allow for a more differentiated look at non-pure, or fuzzy, types. Second, only one of the cases presented in the diagram (Ukraine) shows some signs of steady development into the direction of democracy (see, however, Lange, 2010). Beyond Ukraine, we can see tendencies of more or less stable hybridity (Georgia, Moldova) as well as cases of moderate re-autocratization (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan). Of course, the diagram does not take into account the authoritarian regimes in Central Asia or in Azerbaijan. Some of them also showed hybrid characteristics in the 1990s. Third, and maybe most importantly, hybrid types are not very stable with regard to the democratic content of their regimes. Rather – as we see with the cases of Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan – we can observe oscillation mainly *within* the area which Freedomhouse characterizes as “partly free”.

Accordingly, we have quite some evidence that hybrid regimes are characterized by inherent instability. Not only do they combine properties of different regime logics, usually in the sense that pluralist elections are combined with non-pluralist tendencies in other partial regimes like the administration or the judiciary. Also, they face difficulties of keeping this relationship in a stable nature. Obviously, we are faced with an enduring conflict of two regime logics. On the one hand, some political actors challenge the actors in the tutelary power structure. On the other, even newly elected incumbents have to root their power in democratically “defective” partial regimes. In consequence, ‘democratic turnovers’ in a hybrid setting rarely have the prospect of developing a country into the direction of a consolidated democracy. Only the absence of strong defects in all partial regimes serves as a denominator of democracy in the long run.

5. Conclusion

This text has shown that the discussion of hybrid regimes as a result of post-soviet transition is justified for both conceptual and empiric reasons. Conceptually, a restriction on the pure types ‘democracy’ and ‘autocracy’ leaves us with a bloodless understanding of cases which do not clearly fit into one of the categories. On the one hand, the creation of diminished subtypes has helped to highlight certain anomalies of the core models of ‘democracy’ and ‘autocracy’. On the other hand, fuzzy types display a specific mix of democratic elements (often competitive elections) and non-democratic regime domains (often in the administrative or judiciary dimension). To that respect, transition studies have been beneficial to our general knowledge of political regimes by adding the message that hybrid types are more than transitional exceptions. Rather, the study of post-soviet transition has

taught us that hybridity and instability are long-term characteristics of a number of important cases.

Because of the different ways of designing hybrid types, we have to pay special attention to the respective specificities of type construction. In the pure type strategy, attributes are added to a defining element of a core type. While the question 'democracy or not' is most often convincingly answered by a look at the character of elections, things are less clear with regard to authoritarian regimes. The concept of a 'competitive' or 'electoral' authoritarianism cannot persuasively refer to elections because their character is by definition sometimes free and sometimes not free. Are there other core elements? 'Bureaucracy' and the character of its actions have been targeted (Shevtsova, 2004). In the case of Russia, an overly strong centralization of power has allegedly been a central factor of re-authorization (Buhbe and Gorzka, 2007, Mommsen, 2007). Beyond post-soviet Europe it has often been problematic civil-military relations which have been seen as a major element promoting authoritarianism (Mares, 1998). Although all these suggestions seem plausible, it seems fair to state that the conceptual discussion on authoritarian regimes is less advanced if we go beyond characterizations of specific cases.

Moving to the empirical dimension, the study of hybrid regimes offers evidence which is more complex than the assumption of a general return of autocracy which has been stated by some authors (for example, see Hanson et al., 2006). In a longer perspective, we find various forms of oscillation and a number of regimes which, despite not permanently reaching the democracy threshold, cannot be classified as permanent autocracies. We find that democratic breakdowns have not taken place in consolidated democracies but rather in diminished ones. Typically, the main damage has occurred with regard to elections in these cases, but often as a function of other partial regime defects like weak horizontal control or other impediments to the guarantee of civil or political rights.

We have been able to observe that an area studies approach is of limited use when approaching hybrid regimes. Only in the west of the former Soviet Union, we find regimes with more than minimal democratic elements (Ukraine). In the east and the south, regimes have a tendency to authoritarianism. Hybridity itself, however, is more equally distributed: one regime in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan), two in the Southern Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia), one or two in Eastern Europe (Moldova and, depending on the democracy measurement tool, Ukraine). Therefore, it seems plausible to further approach hybridity in the post-soviet space on a case study basis rather than dealing with subregions within the area. All subregions display a strong variety of case profiles, for example Turkmenistan versus Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan versus Georgia, and Belarus versus Ukraine.

Since regional neighbourhood obviously only has a limited impact on the regime character, we are able to discover a generally contingent potential for regime development in all countries of the post-soviet space. The focus on hybridity has shown that comparatively rapid phases of regime development are well likely to occur. The challenge for 'democratic' actors consists in preserving dynamics towards democracy while avoiding autocratic backlashes. As we have seen, these are often rooted in partial regimes beyond the electoral sphere. Fixing democratic

defects here means to concentrate not on the core of democratic regimes but on the core's context.

In that sense, it is difficult to issue a general statement which strategy of typification should be preferred. Everything depends on the respective cognitive interest. If it consists in general knowledge on properties of political regimes, an awareness of *different* systematic approaches offers a valuable finding itself. If scholars want to know more about the defects of democracy, the focus needs to be directed to those regime elements which impede on a proper functioning of democracy in its various dimensions. Interest in the phenomenon of relatively open authoritarian regimes implies a reverse perspective, albeit scholars here enter a less developed field of established types and categories. Therefore, autocracy studies today bear the strongest potential for conceptual progress.

Finally, if the cognitive interest is to know more about the systematic functioning of individual cases, the diverse approaches towards hybrid regimes offer a somewhat advanced toolbox in order to understand post-soviet political dynamics. In the end, the acceptance of and trust in democratic elections depends on a large variety of actors both among the elites and within populations. They are located in politically relevant arenas like the administration, the judiciary, the media, and the public sphere in general. If certain pre-conditions of democracy are precarious, the hybrid character of political action may depend on contingent constellations in all of the named arenas. In some cases, we are able to rely on conceptual propositions in order to trace typical patterns – this is, for example, the case with the concept of neo-patrimonialism (see Erdmann and Timm in this volume). More often, however, patterns of hybridity display a case's individual nature. In that sense, the acceptance of hybridity as a category of its own offers a certain commitment – the basic choice to turn to qualitative considerations if the knowledge offered by established types and categories is not sufficient.

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