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## The origins and elements of imitation democracies

*Political developments in the post-Soviet space*

Throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union, diverse regimes have established themselves behind a democratic façade while concentrating power in the hands of a president. A comparison of the Eastern Slavic states with those of Central Asia and the Caucasus shows not only that these imitation democracies have the same source, but that these one-man regimes also draw on the same elements and practices of political rule. Contrary to their purported power and stability, they are dysfunctional in their claims of control, their means of creating legitimacy, and their socio-economic productivity. They all contain the seeds of their own downfall.

After the collapse of the "socialist camp", the formerly communist countries and the Soviet Union uniformly proclaimed similar goals: democracy and a market-based economy. In practice, however, the way those countries evolved afterward hardly had anything uniform about it. The fundamental differences between Russia and the countries of eastern central Europe, including those of the Baltic region, are obvious.<sup>1</sup> In the countries of eastern central Europe, democratic constitutional states of the western European and North American type were formed. In those countries, different political forces submit to a common set of rules, handing the reins of power over to one another at regular intervals. In Russia, by contrast, "no-alternative" presidents have ruled, men who use legal and democratic institutions only as camouflage, and turn their power over to a designated successor. If one were to compare Russia only with the constitutional states of eastern central European countries, one could easily be lured into over-rating the uniqueness of its post-Soviet development and political system.

In fact, Russia's system is by no means unique. Systems of the same type can be found in many Asian and African countries. Nor does the post-communist world lack parallels for the political developments in Russia: Indeed, its case is not even a particularly unusual one. One can find similar systems in all of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with the exception of Moldova and of three countries (Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan) where such systems have already completed their life-cycle.<sup>2</sup>

Comparing the pathways of political development of different CIS states and the political systems they led to is a task of colossal complexity. This article is merely an initial attempt to sketch out the outlines of such a comparison. In it, I hope to identify the following:

— the preconditions in Russia and the other CIS states favourable to the emergence of such systems;

- the underlying logic providing the basis for their development;
- the roots of their decline and collapse;
- future prospects opened by the collapse of such regimes;
- and the inter-relationships between the various processes within the CIS and the potential for outside influence.

### **Prerequisites for "imitation democracies"**

Despite the enormous diversity of political systems in the modern world, two dominant types clearly emerge as the most prevalent. The first of these is genuine democracy, which has been firmly established in the most highly developed countries as well as in many less-developed states that used to be considered "Third World" countries. The second type consists of those systems that, for lack of a universally accepted term, one could call "managed" or "imitation" democracies, i.e. systems in which power is concentrated in the hands of a president who rules behind a façade of democracy and rule of law. Systems of this type are in place in Russia and most of the other CIS states, as well as in many other countries.

Imitation democracies differ from the other types of non-democratic systems: non-constitutional monarchies, which are buttressed by tradition; blatant dictatorships, where power is based on the military and a democratic façade is unnecessary, and totalitarian systems, where pretensions of democracy can be kept to a minimum because ideology has provided an alternative. Admittedly, even the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century — the communist systems of that era and, to a lesser extent, the fascist ones as well — could not completely dispense with a democratic façade. Elections did take place, though no choices were available; there were constitutions, though they contained extra-legal clauses (such as that referring to the CPSU as the "leading and guiding force"); parliaments did exist, though they approved all decisions unanimously. Communist regimes called themselves "socialist" or "people's democracies". This systematic hypocrisy on the part of totalitarian regimes testifies to the fact that even in their bloom, totalitarian ideologies were unable to provide a fully satisfactory alternative to democratic legitimization. Most of the non-democratic political regimes that currently exist are imitation democracies. This suggests that certain conditions encouraging the establishment of this type of system are met in today's world.

With the doubtful exception of Islamic fundamentalism, there are no longer any ideological alternatives to a social order based on democracy that are worthy of serious consideration. Democracy is the sole remaining way of legitimizing political power. Traditionalist non-democratic regimes, such as Saudi Arabia's, are relicts of the past. Their survival can be put down to fortuitous circumstances, and they do not provide an appealing model for other countries to emulate. The totalitarian communist systems in North Korea and Cuba are also hangovers from the 20th century, the age of totalitarian ideologies. Military dictatorships are, by nature, temporary phenomena associated with exceptional circumstances. Over time, they transform themselves into real democracies, or — when dictators organize manipulated elections or plebiscites — sham democracies.

This absence of ideologies that could legitimize an undemocratic regime, even taken together with the general spread of certain democratic ideas and

principles, does not mean that all societies are ready for democracy. A functioning democracy requires either that specific cultural preconditions exist, or that social and cultural development is at a relatively advanced level.

One who accepts a standard but cannot comply with it begins to counterfeit compliance, deceiving both himself and others. If there is no ideological alternative to democracy available, and the cultural and psychological conditions for a genuine, functioning democracy have not been established, it is possible for political systems of the type that are widespread in the territory of the former Soviet Union to emerge: undemocratic regimes that counterfeit democracy. Those prerequisites were met in the CIS countries at the beginning of their post-Soviet development.

### **Universal democratic discourse**

When the republics of the former Soviet Union were undergoing the transition from communism to post-communism, essentially no alternatives to democratic concepts were available there.

Certain democratic ideas and principles had already taken root, thanks to communist ideology. Just as they accepted the necessity of elections and a constitution, people in the USSR took it for granted that power had to come from the people, be subject to elections, and "serve the people". One natural form of the protest against Soviet power had been to denounce the lack of democracy and point out the difference between reality and declared principles. So there was an attempt to transition to a genuine democracy after the fall of the Soviet regime, by giving real substance to the formal institutions of Soviet democracy.

No ideological alternatives to democracy emerged later on, either: In all of the CIS countries, the debates between presidents and their oppositions took place within the framework of democratic discourse. Essentially, only one ideological justification for the authoritarian regimes in the CIS has been put forth: Heidar Aliev, Askar Akaev, Nursultan Nazarbaev, and — in a milder form — Vladimir Putin refer constantly to the idea that "our countries" are not ready for full-fledged democracy. Instead, they claim, these countries are still in the preparatory stage. Therefore, their reasoning goes, one should not measure them by Western standards or pressure them unduly, for that would be to risk causing the overall process to fail. It would not occur to any ruler in a CIS country to dispense completely with democratic legitimization. Elections can be reduced to a ritual, yes — but it is a ritual no regime could do without. Constitutions may serve as fig-leaves, true — but fig-leaves without which one wouldn't appear in public.

Despite this universal democratic discourse, however, there have only been five examples of the peaceful, constitutional transfer of power to an opposition in the sixteen years since the Soviet Union dissolved. Three of those have occurred in Moldova, whose evolution has differed fundamentally from that of the other countries. In both other cases, the new presidents immediately set to work constructing "no-alternative" regimes of their own: Aliaksandr Lukashenka as successor to Viacheslav Kebich in Belarus and Leonid Kuchma succeeding Leonid Kravchuk in the Ukraine. The consistent invocation of democratic values goes hand in hand with consistently undemocratic developments. Democratic principles, though acknowledged, are not followed. Why is this?

## Absence of precedence

The situation cannot be explained simply by invoking the "heavy burden of the Soviet legacy". Democratic societies have emerged in the eastern central European and the Baltic countries despite the communist past.<sup>3</sup> Societies in the communist countries developed along the same general lines that the rest of the world did, though more slowly and idiosyncratically. Thus the formerly communist countries were, for the most part, better prepared for democracy by the time the system collapsed than they had been when it was first established.<sup>4</sup>

The lack of readiness for democracy within the post-communist CIS countries has less to do with the legacy of the old system than with more deeply-rooted cultural and historical factors. I would like to list a few of the more obvious here, without going into the most basic cultural factors impeding the democratization in the area.<sup>5</sup>

First of all, unlike the countries of eastern central Europe, none of the CIS countries could refer back to a historical experience of democracy while constructing a post-Soviet democratic system. Democratization efforts after 1917 were so shortlived and so unsuccessful that the post-Soviet experience can be viewed as essentially the first attempt. On the contrary, some of the countries, Russia and Uzbekistan above all, have a strong authoritarian tradition that is firmly established in the consciousness of their populations. In historical perspective, Russia's greatness cannot be separated from figures like Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great or Stalin, while the national pride of Uzbekistan centres on the figure of Tamerlane.

If none of the CIS countries can identify a clear model for democracy in their own history, there are also no role models to be found among countries with which they share strong cultural ties. Of course, the model of the European and American democracies has exerted enormous influence and continues to do so. However, as those states are very remote culturally from the CIS countries they cannot play the same role there that Finland and Sweden have played for Estonia and Latvia. Turkey can act as a kind of role model for the Turkic-speaking, Islamic countries of the CIS, but Turkey is not really a model of stable and highly developed democracy. Moreover, the Turkish model must compete for influence with those of other Islamic countries. Culturally, the CIS states continue to be dependent to a great extent on Russia, a country that really cannot serve as an example of successful democratization.

It is completely natural that democratization is made more difficult by absence of a democratic precedent, the lack of experience with democracy and the absence of clear models to follow. In this region, though, the process is exacerbated all the more by the fact that it coincides with two other transitions that are just as complicated.

They are, first, the transition from a socialist economy to a market economy. Under socialism, which lasted for more than two generations, people grew unaccustomed to market institutions and private property. This meant that introducing the market to the CIS states was a task almost as unprecedented as introducing democracy.

The second transition is the one from Soviet empire to modern nation-state: This was also a first for the populations of the CIS states, unlike for those of eastern central Europe (here, once again, with the exception of a few unsuccessful attempts during the Russian Civil War).<sup>6</sup> If one then factors in the

sudden and unexpected collapse of the USSR,<sup>7</sup> it is clear that in 1991 the peoples of the CIS were in the situation of a person who is suddenly and unexpectedly thrown into a pool of water. Add to that that the person in question never learned to swim and, in fact, never had the opportunity to do more than observe the activity from afar. Though he may well understand that he has to swim and, indeed, try his utmost to do so, it would be quite easy for such a person to fall into panic and despair.

### **The political regimes in the CIS countries**

After the collapse of the USSR, all of the CIS countries were quick to announce their desire to create constitutional democracies. The chaos that broke out throughout the region of the CIS resembled, in milder form, the turmoil of the Russian empire after the end of the tsars' rule. There is probably no need to mention the terrible economic situation that came about in the CIS countries at the start of the 1990s any more than I need to remind the reader of the wars, uprisings and coups that wracked the territory of the former Soviet Union in that same period. The structures of the state disintegrated so completely in some countries that criminals were able to rise to power: Sangak Safarov in Tajikistan, Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani in Georgia, and Suret Huseinov in Azerbaijan.

In view of this situation, the population's desire for "order" was a totally natural one. A survey taken in Kazakhstan in 1998 reflects the attitude of the entire CIS population at the time. Asked which system would be capable of solving Kazakhstan's social problems, 4.4 percent of those polled cited communism, 7.3 percent socialism, 5.9 percent capitalism, 2.8 percent "Western-style democracy", and 2.3 percent Islam. But 56.9 percent said, "Doesn't matter, the main thing is to establish order."<sup>8</sup>

People feel a sense of nostalgia for the calmer years before the revolutions, though it is not one that results in a conscious effort to reinstate the Soviet system — since communist ideology is dead — or encourages the spread of other antidemocratic ideologies — since the latter no longer exist in modern culture.

A certain degree of chaos is natural with any change of political and/or social system. A sense of nostalgia for the system now gone is just as natural. This kind of overly positive assessment of the past occurs in all countries that have experienced anti-communist revolutions. Yet there are fundamental differences in its consequences — depending on the intensity of the nostalgia (and the difficulties that evoke it).

In countries that were better prepared for the transition to democracy than the CIS states, it brought about the electoral defeat of the radical forces in power during the years of the revolution. This caused power to shift to more moderate figures who still had ties to the old elites, though they had adjured the communist ideology. The most striking examples of this are the electoral victory of Algirdas Brazauskas over the Sajudis movement in Lithuania and the election in Poland that unseated Lech Walesa in favour of Aleksander Kwasniewski. This first democratic transfer of power definitively transformed what had been the rule of victorious democrats into the rule of democracy and law, leading to the development of a system where regular changes of government are the norm.

When these same factors are present in somewhat different proportions — slightly more anarchy due to the revolution, a somewhat more vociferous call for an end to that anarchy and a society somewhat less ready for democracy — then the outcomes are quite different. Instead of the institution of regularly changing governments and the strengthening of democracy through the electoral victory of the heirs of the "pre-revolutionary" past, the existing regime consolidates its position, rendering the transfer of power impossible. The regime itself begins to take on "pre-revolutionary" authoritarian features, and imitation democracies are formed. Such systems are based on the manipulation of public opinion and the falsification of expressions of the public will. Yet it would not be possible to establish them were there not a corresponding demand on the part of society, did it not consent to the manipulation and falsification.

Unquestionably, the uncertain crises in various CIS states in the early 1990s could have ended differently: The imitation democracies that ultimately emerged were not the only possible outcome. But at that time the CIS countries' chances of becoming real democracies were probably minimal. Ukraine and Belarus may have had the best chance: There, at least, a peaceful transfer of power did occur. The fact that democracies based on the rule of law did not develop there is substantially bound up with the personalities of Kuchma and Lukashenka. Imitation democracies were the most probable and most natural result of this constellation. The personalities of the people in power, their past (Boris Yeltsin's anti-communism and Lukashenka's nostalgia for the communist era, the intellectuality of Levon Ter-Petrosian, and the "plainness" [*prostota*] of Emomali Rakhmon formerly [Rakhmonov]), and the individual nuances of their ideologies lent a specific colouring to their regimes, but had little influence on their basic core or the logics of how they evolved.

### **From the logics of development to the logics of behaviour**

The population's need to put the turmoil of revolution behind them was a factor encouraging the creation of imitation democracies. The logics of the behaviour adopted by the presidents are another such factor. A one-man regime that merely counterfeits democracy cannot be introduced through legal channels. It can only be imposed using illegal means. Yet the further a president moves to solidify his regime in this way, the more certain looms the threat of legal consequences should his grasp on power slip.

By signing the Belovezha Accord, Yeltsin set the seal on the collapse of the USSR in spite of the fact that he had no public mandate in Russia to do so (or, even in spite of a mandate to do completely the opposite). Through that action alone, he made it immensely more difficult for himself to hand over power. The opposition were hardly likely to resist the temptation to hold him responsible for the "destruction of a great state": should it come to power, he would almost certainly face legal proceedings, with charges ranging from exceeding his competence to high treason. But if it might perhaps have been possible to ensure Yeltsin's personal safety had he stepped down in 1992 or early 1993, such a move was entirely out of the question in the wake of the bloody dissolution of the Russian Parliament in October of 1993.<sup>9</sup>

The same logics are reflected in the behaviour and motivations of other heads of state. The catalogue of actions available to a president who has opted to create a "no-alternative" regime includes the revocation of the valid constitution and the introduction of unconstitutional legislation, the manipulation of election and referendum results, pressure on the judiciary, and

trumped up criminal charges against political opponents and others, and extends to the "mysterious" disappearance and murder of opposition figures.

There were many criminal acts committed in the course of privatization in addition to the crimes designed to strengthen the regime directly. Since public officials were able to act with no oversight whatsoever, these processes inevitably led to the plundering of the state's assets, an act in which both the presidents themselves and their close associates were involved. Hence, the further a one-man regime is strengthened and expanded, the more difficult it becomes for the president to deviate from the path once he has taken it, and the more likely it is that he and his supporters will face trials, imprisonment and financial ruin when he steps down — unless he transfers power to a carefully selected successor and secures his own immunity from prosecution. It is indeed very easy to start down this path, but next to impossible to leave it later on.

In the various CIS countries, the one-man regimes underwent similar phases, taking on similar forms. We will now turn to take a closer look at some of these phases.

### **The dissolution of uncontrollable parliaments**

Yeltsin's bloody conflict with parliament was the most important milestone in the development of an authoritarian regime in Russia. However, it was not the only clash of this kind to occur in the CIS. In the first half of the 1990s, conflicts between presidents and parliaments played out in all of the CIS countries — with the exception of Turkmenistan, where the parliament was completely subordinate to the president right from the start.

These conflicts were due to the fact that the first parliaments were elected in the era of Mikhail Gorbachev, when the authorities were not yet able to exert more than minimal influence on elections, and society was entirely caught up in a wave of democracy. The parliaments were not yet "manageable"; their members perceived their own mission as a noble one, and their presidents were still convinced of the weighty significance of their office.

The parliaments were the greatest obstacle to the consolidation of presidential power and the creation of an authoritarian system.<sup>10</sup> Disputes between the presidents and the legislatures were aggravated by the fact that the old Soviet constitutions — with numerous amendments — were still valid in the CIS states, and there was no clear division of competencies among the different branches of government. Under these circumstances, the conflict between the presidents and the parliaments escalated into anarchy. Since parliamentary representatives were closer to the voters than the president and his entourage were, public dissatisfaction with market economy reforms throughout the region centred on the parliaments. Even stronger than the protest against the reforms, though, was the demand for public order, so populations tended to side with their president in his conflicts with parliaments: Presidents stood for order, while parliaments symbolized the chaos of democracy.

Only in Russia did a conflict of this type result in bloodshed. In Kazakhstan, the president dissolved the parliament without resorting to violence, but he did so twice in a row (1993 and 1994). Parliaments were also dissolved in Kyrgyzstan (1995) and Belarus (1996). Moldova, whose political development has generally been very idiosyncratic, is the only country in which the conflict between the presidents (first Mircea Snegur, then Petru Lucinschi) and parliament ended in the defeat of presidential power and the establishment of a



parliamentary republic.

### **Elimination of former comrades**

One aspect of Boris Yeltsin's dispute with the parliament was his personal conflict with Speaker of Parliament Ruslan Khasbulatov and Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi, who had taken parliament's side. There are parallels in other countries for this as well: in Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev clashed with the speaker of parliament Serikbolsyn Abdildin and removed the country's vice president, Erik Asanbaev from office. In Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the presidents, Askar Akaev and Islam Karimov clashed with their respective vice presidents, Feliks Kulov and Shukhrullo Mirsaidov. In Azerbaijan, there was a conflict between Heidar Aliiev and Rasim Kuliev, the speaker of parliament. Finally, in Belarus, Aliaksandr Lukashenka fell out with many of his former supporters as well.

All of these conflicts follow the same psychological pattern, one typical for the development phase of authoritarian regimes. Initially, the president is surrounded by the people who fought at his side in the struggle for power and who see him as the first among equals rather than as their boss. Inevitably, the emerging authoritarian system acts to suppress such figures, since they resist being demoted from comrades in arms into mere followers. (All of the obvious differences aside, such conflicts play out according to a pattern similar to what occurred between Hitler and Röhm as well as Stalin [and later Khrushchev] and other members of the Politburo.)

### **Adoption of new constitutions**

Once he has defeated parliament, the president can push through a new constitution, one that grants him far-reaching powers and restricts the competences of the other branches of government. Such constitutions allow one-man regimes to function without being in constant violation of constitutional law. Through them, the regimes acquire quasi-legal form. Presidents even attempt to use them to protect themselves from imaginary risks. For example, the constitutions of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan do not even include a procedure for removing a president from office, while in Russia and Kazakhstan, the procedure has been made so complicated that it would be virtually impossible to implement.

Revealingly, none of the constitutions in CIS states establishes the office of a vice-president: The presidents are no longer willing to tolerate another official who has been elected by the people, and they want to ensure that they have a free hand in the choice of their successor.

Since the provisions of the new constitutions are well-suited to the one-man regimes, those regimes have a tendency to enshrine them as "sacred" texts. This stands out in stark contrast to the casual attitude of those same presidents towards the constitutional standards in force before the new laws were passed. One-man regimes are not, by their very nature, constitutional states. According to the rules of the game, even those rules introduced by the president himself, sooner or later, it would be possible for someone else to win. Thus, a constitution, even one drawn up according to the president's own instructions, remains a mere matter of form that can be changed or simply brushed aside at any time.



For example, all of the constitutions initially included language limiting the president's term in office, but the relevant articles were later amended. In Tajikistan, for instance, a constitutional amendment extended the presidential term from five years to seven in 1999, and in 2003, a further change allowed the president to rule for two seven-year terms. Uzbekistan and Belarus also saw the passage of constitutional amendments allowing the president's term in office to be extended and making him eligible for unlimited re-election.

Kazakhstan provides a striking example of how presidents deal with constitutions. In 1993, parliament adopted a constitution that ran counter to the interests of Nazarbaev. Nazarbaev thereupon unconstitutionally dissolved parliament. But the president was not happy with the newly elected parliament either and dissolved it again in 1994. In 1995, he held a referendum on extending the president's term in office to 2000, in open disregard of the constitution. Somewhat later, another referendum was held to adopt a new constitution that had been designed by the presidential administration and ought thus to have been ideal from his perspective. However, taking his cue from a propitious (for him) political situation in 1998, Nazarbaev decided not to wait for the end of the term that had been granted to him by the referendum, but instead to call for new elections, thereby violating not only the new constitution, but the results of the referendum as well. In addition, several constitutional amendments were passed, including one that eliminated the age restriction on the presidency and one that extended his term in office. Hence Nazarbaev has held office under three different constitutions — and has violated all three of them.<sup>11</sup>

### Methods for securing power

Constitutions lend a relatively stable outer form to the one-man regimes. However, maintaining such a regime requires the systematic prevention of any attempts by opposition forces to destabilize it. It is essential to detect potential risks early and act to avert them. An exhaustive presentation of the diverse range of methods and measures used in the CIS states to establish and maintain political stability is beyond the scope of this article, so I will limit myself to naming only the most important of them.

— *Controls on the media:* Television is the most important in this respect, as the most effective mass medium with the widest reach.

— *The passage of expedient laws on elections and political parties:* The government enacts laws making it difficult or even impossible to register political parties. High percent thresholds are set, making it harder for certain parties to enter parliament. Furthermore, new regulations are issued, making it possible to keep unwanted candidates off the ballot. For instance, in 1998, a presidential decree in Kazakhstan empowered the courts to bar from elections any candidate who had committed a violation of administrative law within one year of the election date. With that, Nazarbaev's most important rival, Akezhan Kazhegeldin, was knocked out of the race.

— *Controlling electoral commissions and the systematic manipulation of elections:* All one-man regimes in the CIS manipulate election results. True, in countries like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan "manipulation" is no longer quite the right term, since the elections there are so non-free and so ritualized that there is no longer any need for it. In other countries, the regime employs its "administrative resources" actively throughout the campaign and elections, including the vote-counting process. Results are manipulated even when it is

clear that the genuine results reflect the desires of the president, because the people responsible locally tend to compete with one another for the honour of being the district that posts the best results. So while there can be no doubt that a majority of Belarusians voted for Lukashenka in the 1996 referendum as well as in the 2006 election, there can be no less doubt that their results had been manipulated.

— *Establishment of pro-president parties:* At the start of the 1990s, all of the parties that existed in the CIS had been formed independently of the people then in power. However, being the member of a party that was not established by the president which has an ideology and platform that are independent of him inevitably ties the president's hands. So heads of state tend to distance themselves from all parties, usually in an early stage of their regime, portraying themselves instead as the president of the entire nation. The exceptions are Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, whose presidents immediately founded their own parties, which they controlled directly, drawing on their CPSU party organization to do so.

Over time, however, presidents feel a growing need for parties to serve as a mechanism for testing loyalties, selecting staff, and additional managing activities. As a result, pro-president parties are set up, with ideologies and platforms that are limited essentially to support for the regime. In Russia, this is United Russia (*Edinaia Rossiia*), in Kazakhstan the Fatherland's Ray of Light party (*Nur-Otan, formerly Fatherland, or Otan*), in Azerbaijan the New Azerbaijan party (*Yeni Azerbaijan*), and in Tajikistan the People's Democratic Party (*Hizbi Demokrati-Chalkii*). It is quite possible for such regimes to experiment with pseudo multi-party systems. For example in Kazakhstan, in addition to the Fatherland party, there were until December 2006 two "supplementary" pro-Nazarbaev parties (the Civic Party and the Agrarian Party), but in December 2006 both of them merged into Fatherland, which was then renamed Fatherland's Ray of Light. New parties can also be established (All Together, or *Asar*). In this way, the illusion of party diversity is created. There is also a multiparty system in Uzbekistan, in which the parties struggle to outdo one another in declaring their loyalty to the president.

## Privatization and power

Establishing and maintaining a one-man regime is not merely a political process, but one with social and economic dimensions as well. The privatization of state property in almost all CIS states in the 1990s had social, economic and political significance. It also served to strengthen the one-man regimes. Since there were practically no social control mechanisms governing privatization, the process became one of the "distribution" of the state's assets by the executive, accompanied by numerous legal violations. Therefore it was in the new owners' interests to propitiate those in power, for their chances of being "appointed" a millionaire depended upon it. It was also in their interests to uphold the regime: Should the opposition come to power, privatizations might be reversed (this did take place to some extent in Georgia and Ukraine following the "colour revolutions". This puts a means of controlling these new owners into the hands of the president: At the slightest hint of disloyalty, the president could order investigations into their economic activities or irregularities in the course of privatizations (which they themselves had encouraged at the time) and prosecute their opponents solely for violations of commercial law. Proceedings of this type involving real or imaginary violations of criminal or commercial law are underway in Russia (against Boris Berezovskii, Vladimir Gusinskii and Mikhail Khodorkovskii), in

Kyrgyzstan (against Feliks Kulov), Azerbaijan (against Rasul Kuliev), Kazakhstan (against Akezhan Kazhegeldin, Galymzhan Zhakiyanov and Mukhtar Abliazov), and Belarus (against Andrei Klimov and others).

One-man regimes are incapable of establishing a normal legal environment for a market economy. They are not at all interested in doing so, however, because that would entail the loss of their control over the economy, which could lead to the loss of control — including political control — over society as a whole.

### **The dynamics of control and the system's momentum**

One-man regimes are established and strengthened using the methods described above and by other means. Presidents are driven by the logics of their own actions to attain greater and greater control over their societies.

It is essential that the president emphasizes that there is no alternative to his power. This inevitably leads to an extension of his control to cover a greater and greater area and the elimination of all alternative players in more and more arenas. The president moves forward from suppressing genuine opponents to creating conditions that make it impossible for any opponent to emerge: Combating real dangers soon gives way to a battle against potential or even imaginary threats. Next to the no-alternative president emerges a no-alternative parliament, then no-alternative media, etc. The logics at work here can be observed very distinctly in Russia, where the presidential regime has been extending its control over society with the utmost success since 1991. The other regimes are proceeding in a similar fashion though.

By now, this process has developed a momentum of its own, a self-reinforcing dynamic that presses onward almost without assistance on the part of the presidents. The bureaucracy is driving it forward, since its interests lie in reinforcing the president's power. Every official appointed by the president endeavours to display his loyalty as prominently as possible and avert dangers to the regime with the utmost vigilance.

However, it is apparent that these regimes can also evolve in another direction. Given internal pressure from the opposition and external pressure from the West in some countries the control over the society appears to flag once a certain level has been attained; under such conditions the desire to maintain power may take the form of limited concessions to the opposition and democracy. This is what happened in Ukraine, where Kuchma, who was uncertain of the victory of his designated successor (and perhaps did not entirely trust him anyway), decided to try to curtail the powers of the next president by means of constitutional amendments rather than continue expanding the powers of his office. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan also experienced similar periods of "liberalization".

"Liberalization" and "democratization" of this type are never more than a façade: At issue is always an attempt to disguise the nature of a one-man regime and extend its life-span. However, such measures can contribute to an environment favourable to regime change and a transition to democracy.

### **Power transfer as a time of crisis**

All presidents must come to terms with the fact of their own aging and secure their own safety as well as that of their families and loyal followers by turning power over to a person they trust. Each time this occurs there is an

accompanying risk of political crisis. The transfer of power cannot help but embolden the opposition. It also inevitably brings to a boil conflicts between "court factions" backing different candidates for succession. Naturally, presidents have a tendency to transfer power to those they trust the most, their children. One-man regimes therefore have a very natural tendency to turn into quasi monarchies.

So far there have only been two cases where power has been transferred by a president to his designated successor: one in Russia and one in Azerbaijan. In the Russian case, Yeltsin did not have a "suitable" family member available, and in Turkmenistan, Saparmyrat Niyazov, who had not named a successor upon his death in December 2006, was succeeded by Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov, but in Azerbaijan, power was transferred from father to son. Inner-familial power transfers are very probable in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan; in Kyrgyzstan, such a transfer was thwarted by the "Tulip Revolution".

There is always a crisis associated with the transfer of power. Various outcomes are possible. It may simply fail, allowing regime change. Not every relative who may be designated as successor has the qualities necessary to continue the regime. Moreover, transferring power to one's children reveals all too clearly that the regime has dispensed with any basis in law, depriving the successor of the necessary legitimacy. However, if power is transferred to a relatively "new" man, as was the case in Russia, one who cannot be tied to the "sins" of his predecessor, the regime can take hold and be "rejuvenated". The effects of such a "rejuvenation" treatment do not last for very long, however.

The lifespan of authoritarian regimes is the subject of rhythms similar to those of a living creature. At first, the regime is weak and unstructured. Then it grows stronger and stronger and takes on a clear outline. But after its prime, it enters a period of aging and decline.

### **The decline of "imitation" democracies**

One can divide the factors contributing to the decline and fall of imitation democracies into two major categories: those linked mainly to internal developments within the regime and those that have more to do with the evolution of the society at large. We will examine first those factors that result from the regime's natural aging process and take effect independently of any societal developments.

One important factor is the loss of feedback. An authoritarian regime is a system in which those in power gradually lose touch with the processes actually at work within society. The further elections are transformed into rituals and falsehoods and the more completely the media is subjected to government control, the more dilute the flow of information concerning public sentiment becomes. The president surrounds himself with people who share his perspective and his expectations concerning himself and their country. Personality cults grow up quite naturally. This process has taken on particularly grotesque dimensions in Turkmenistan under "Turkmenbashi" Niyazov. But Aliev, Nazarbaev, Karimov, Lukashenka and other presidents also have their own cults. Having established their position as no-alternative rulers, the presidents themselves begin to believe in the exceptional characteristics that are ascribed to them in order to justify that position.

Just as the president's surroundings and the media he controls reinforce his belief in his own colossal intellect and extraordinary merits, so too do they strengthen his conviction that the country is progressing splendidly under his rule, populated by a prosperous people who love their president. The extra information supplied to him by his intelligence services, which is not made accessible to the public, treats only highly specific aspects of reality. In essence, the president relies on the same distorted information that is served up to the rest of society by the system he created: He watches the same television stations and reads the same newspapers.

The bizarre mixture of reactions during the colour revolutions made it apparent that the leaders of the CIS states live in a world of illusion: The presidents explained those revolutions by alluding to the sinister machinations of foreign powers, proclaimed their certainty that a similar revolution would be impossible in their countries due to their own exceptional qualities and popularity (this from Akaev just a few days before he fled the country). At the same time, though, they feared that the same thing might indeed happen to them, as a result of secret powers at work in their own countries.

### **Criminalization and the loss of control**

Corruption plays a larger role in imitation democracies than it does in other types of non-democratic regimes. Dishonesty is inherent to this type of system, because the systematic violation of all declared principles and laws previously enacted is integral to its nature. This distinguishes their presidents from traditional monarchs, military dictators and even totalitarian rulers, who have no need to cloak themselves in a disguise of democracy.

The president is dependent on the local authorities who ensure his victory in elections and referenda; on the judges who issue the rulings he needs against his adversaries; on the "oligarchs", who could, theoretically, finance the opposition; on the generals, who could potentially refuse to put down the opposition at a critical moment and on the intelligence services, which could form secret alliances with the opposition. However, he cannot rely on the ties to his subordinates that are provided for military dictators by army discipline, for totalitarian rulers by their ideological bonds to the machinery of power and for monarchs by traditional loyalty. The president is therefore forced to offer his followers material advantages, in other words, to bribe them. In this way, corruption and criminalization become integral to the system.

Yet with that comes an increasing loss of control over the state and society. Corruption corrodes the communications system within the state apparatus. Paradoxically, the pre-sident's actual ability to control lessens as his consolidation of power proceeds. If presidential decrees run counter to the interests of the machinery of government, that machinery may simply ignore them.

A system held together by material interests alone will collapse like a house of cards in a crisis. As the colour revolutions have shown, the presidents have no genuine staunch supporters. Unlike democratically elected presidents, Shevardnadze, Kuchma and Akaev were left to stand alone at the hour of need. Even Yeltsin, who did manage to transfer power to a designated successor, was very soon forgotten by all.

### **Survival of the weakest**

Corruption leads to the deterioration of the governing elite. But corruption alone is not responsible for this decline: The system of social mobility typical of these regimes also plays a role. When it comes to appointing a deputy or immediate subordinate, no one is going to name an uncontrollable, incisive personality liable to outshine his superior. So the systematic dominance of "bureaucratic" social mobility leads to an equally systematic deterioration of the quality of the elite.

In imitation democracies, the principle of bureaucratic mobility gains the upper hand, supplanting other mechanisms. At the start of the 1990s, when the system had not yet fully taken shape, there were plenty of opportunities to advance into the elite without the sanction of the leadership. A great many "self-appointed" people took advantage of those opportunities. It was not long though, before such channels were blocked. Since then, all distinctive personalities, even those who support the president, have been removed from his entourage. Formally, members of parliament are elected, but in reality they are appointed like other officials. The positions in the upper echelon of the industrial hierarchy have already been filled; uncontrollable "oligarchs" are being eliminated. Thus the only people remaining in leading circles are those who have been placed there by people at the upper levels of power. This has led to a systematic decline of the elite as a whole.

### **Loss of legitimacy**

The natural impulse on the part of the presidents to extend the sphere of their control transforms democratic and constitutional institutions into little more than fiction, which grows increasingly obvious. The elections, now completely predictable, are transformed into a ritual: Their outcome is no longer in question.

However, these imitation democracies have no source of legitimacy other than that of elections. Were it not for the self-deceit on the part of society and the deception practised by those in power, such systems could provide no justification for their own existence. Yet once a certain degree of control has been attained, the deception is no longer tenable.

The greater the regime's control over society, and the more predictable its election results, court rulings and media reports, the more its rulers forfeit their legitimacy. The phenomena associated with this decline would appear even if the societies themselves did not change, but evolve and change they do.

Towards the end of the Gorbachev era and during the early post-Soviet period, societies in CIS states were overwhelmed with a flood of unexpected and incomprehensible changes. This intensified the desire for a "strong hand", creating fertile psychological soil for the growth of imitation democracies. Yet much of that which seemed new and threatening at the time has since become a normal part of everyday life. People have grown accustomed to private property and market prices and become used to the absence of a rigid official ideology and to political and civic freedoms, if limited in scope. They have learned to live under new circumstances; they have, in short, adapted. This is one of the key reasons why gross domestic product is on the rise throughout the CIS and why the standard of living has ceased to fall. On the one hand, to a certain extent this counts in favour of the one-man regimes, since it serves as evidence of their effectiveness and lowers the risk of spontaneous protest. On the other hand, though, those same processes have reduced desire in the population for a "strong hand".



The natural generational shift only strengthens this "habituation" factor. In the perception of people whose views were formed under the USSR, and who retain at least some memory of the Stalinist terror, the late Soviet period was mild and liberal, while those same people equated the liberalization under Gorbachev with unstructured and dangerous freedom. For younger people, though, the liberal conditions under today's regimes are something natural and normal. There is no doubt that the generation that grew up in the post-Soviet era is better prepared psychologically for democracy than the Soviet generations were.

The growth of opposition to the one-man regimes is also crucially bound up with changes in the structure of society. Over the past years, a new civic elite has taken form, one that, though dependent on the state, is far less so than was the old nomenklatura. Part of that elite would like to see a system of rule of law that could protect them against arbitrariness on the part of the authorities.

Another new phenomenon is the opposition's success in overcoming internal divisions. Initially the presidential regimes confronted two separate opposition groups. Each hated the other enough to consider the regime as the lesser of two evils. On the one side were the Communists, along with their ideological and structural heirs and spin-offs and, on the other side, were the anti-communist democracy movements.

Gradually, the situation is changing. A transformation is underway throughout the opposition movements of the "left", though to different degrees in different countries. They are distancing themselves from communist dogmas, and starting down the same path — in other forms and under other circumstances — that the former communist parties in eastern central Europe took before them. Then, too, a distinct disillusionment can be detected in the anti-communist movements. Combined with the general pressure exerted by the regime, this has made it possible for opposition groups marching under different banners to find common ground in democratic demands of a general nature. The partisan feuding between equally powerless opposition parties is giving way to the common struggle against the regime to force the introduction of new "rules of the game". More or less organized and stable alliances between socialists and communists on the one side and democratic forces on the other have emerged in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus. A corresponding tendency can be detected in Russia as well.

There are several other factors that contribute to weakening the one-man regimes and inciting opposition. The public has been growing increasingly weary of the men who have held the reins of power now for decades. Additionally, there is the example of eastern central Europe and the high level of development of the democratic states in general.

In some CIS states, these factors can contribute to a certain degree of liberalization. The transition of the CIS states to democracy is certain to be accompanied by profound political crises, however, for it entails the loss of power of the presidents (or of their designated successors), who have every reason to try to retain power by any possible means, and who have created systems that render the peaceful and legal accession to power on the part of the opposition essentially impossible. It is easier to imagine a traditional monarch introducing a constitution, or a dictator sending his army back to the barracks (there are historical examples for both of those cases) than it is to imagine a president who, having constructed a one-man regime, elects to destroy it with his own hands, contrary to his own interests and instincts and to the detriment



of his friends and followers, thus bringing about the victory of his adversaries. As yet there have been no examples of "revolutions from above" in the CIS. However three imitation democracies have already been brought down as a result of a "revolution from below".

### **The fall of the imitation democracies**

To date, three regimes that took the form of imitation democracies have been overthrown by revolutions in the CIS region. This enables us to draw certain general conclusions about the fall of such regimes.<sup>12</sup> All CIS countries have the same type of regimes, with one and the same mode of operation and developmental logic. As a result, their similarity extends to their collapse: The revolutions follow a very uniform scenario.

The first point is that all three successful revolutions, along with several failed attempts (in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Armenia), were associated with elections. Naturally, this is not a coincidence. These systems always feature elections and other elements of democracy, and those features are never more than façades. The contradiction between reality and declared principles is inherent to the system. Accordingly, system crises are the result of the extreme amplification of this contradiction and ultimately lead to its elimination.

The regime consistently stage manages elections and falsifies their results with the tacit acceptance of society. At some point, however, the population withdraws that acceptance and balks at yet another attempt at falsification. The people take to the streets in protest, demanding an investigation into official election results. The presence of crowds in the streets amounts to a threat of force. A war of nerves begins. A thousand unpredictable factors influence the conflict's outcome, but ultimately there are only three scenarios possible.

In the first scenario, those in power do not dare use force. They yield, as we saw in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. In the second case, the attempt to use force fails because the military refuses to obey orders. No such case has occurred yet, but we will probably see one eventually. In the third scenario, those in power refuse to back down, and the crowds are dispersed, thus ending the protest since demonstrators are neither numerous enough nor sufficiently well organized to resist.

The first two scenarios lead to the fall of the regime. The third version only postpones that fall. There is no doubt that every election in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Belarus will be accompanied by new attempts by the opposition to foil the electoral fraud. This means that the ultimate outcome is predetermined: Sooner or later, one of those attempts will succeed.

Revolutions in the wake of elections, or rather of electoral fraud, are a natural scenario in imitation democracies. It is clear, though, they are not possible in every country. A legal opposition, a certain degree of latitude for self-organization within the society and relatively free elections are prerequisites for such a revolution.

Once a certain degree of severity has been reached, a scenario of this kind can no longer occur. In Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan, for instance, such a development would be practically unthinkable. In those countries, the elections have been so ritualized that they are not the subject of any expectations whatsoever. It is now impossible for society to organize legally. This provides the regimes in question with a certain extra margin of stability, but it also

means that their end will come unexpectedly, and that it will almost certainly involve bloodshed.

The colour revolutions provide a model that can apply in the case of more liberal regimes: The events that unfolded in Uzbekistan's Andizhan provide a view of the opposite extreme.

### **Developmental variations**

The fall of the imitation democracies is only a matter of time. It can lead to different results, however. As I pointed out above, the regime's fall is the result of two processes. These two processes are interwoven, but should be defined separately for analytical purposes. They are, first, the deterioration of the regime due to system-inherent factors, and second, the evolution of the society, for which the framework provided by the political system becomes too restrictive. What happens after the regime's collapse depends on the relative weight of each of those two factors.

If the system breaks down primarily due to the fact that society has outgrown its regime, then a democracy will take shape. This was the case in Ukraine and — though less definitively — in Georgia.

If the collapse is the result of the internal deterioration of the regime, and the society has not yet reached a developmental stage that would allow it to maintain a stable democracy, then the cycle will begin anew, with alternating and equally unstable anarchic democracies and dictatorships. This is a phenomenon that can be observed in the recent history of many "Third World" countries.

This outcome, though not inevitable, is certainly the most probable result of the developments in Kyrgyzstan. With the overthrow of the Akaev regime, the situation in the country has returned in a certain sense to where it started in 1990–91. It is entirely possible that a new imitation democracy, similar to Akaev's, will emerge there after the current period of chaotic democracy, just as a new authoritarian imitation democracy emerged in Indonesia under General Suharto after the fall of President Sukarno.

### **Possibilities of outside influence**

The CIS is more than a region composed of countries having the same type of regime coexist and develop parallel to one another. It is also the territory of the former Russian Empire and the USSR. CIS states have close historical and cultural ties with one another, above all, through Russia and the Russian language. Moreover, the CIS is an international organization that lends structure to the region and has the "latent" function of covertly contributing to sustaining imitation democracies.

The close ties among CIS countries mean that processes and events that occur in one of them have an immeasurably greater impact on the others than do processes and events that play out in non-CIS countries. Colour revolutions excite the opposition and trouble the leadership in all CIS countries. Conversely, the successful suppression of a crisis and smooth transfer of power to a successor, such as those in Russia and Azerbaijan, inspire presidents and serve as a warning to opposition movements. For this reason, the presidents of all CIS countries, regardless of their relations otherwise, have a common interest in keeping their colleagues and neighbours in power and can rely on

each others' support in the hour of need. In a way, one might compare the CIS to the anti-revolutionary "Holy Alliance" of the crowned heads of Europe in the post-Napoleonic era. It is an alliance of presidents against the opposition movements, one in which a central role, naturally, falls to Russia's president. In critical situations, when their hold on power grows unsteady, the presidents of the CIS states have turned to Russia as their natural ally, and they will continue to do so.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, the democratic countries do try — sometimes a little harder, sometimes a little less so — to help democracy take root in the CIS region by keeping authoritarian regimes in check and supporting the democratic opposition. That is why every democratic opposition automatically positions itself as anti-Russia and pro-West. The same tug-of-war that once went on inside the "socialist camp" continues within the CIS, though at a different level, with less intensity and gentler methods. Yet although the CIS is a "field for the battle" between Russia and the West, neither, in my opinion, can influence events in the CIS states to more than a very limited extent.

Russia has only relatively modest assistance to offer to the presidents of the other CIS countries. Post-Soviet Russia is far weaker than the USSR was; it is far more dependent on the outside world and lacks the ideological motivation that came into play in Soviet times. So it cannot extend to the post-Soviet regimes the kind of "fraternal assistance" that the USSR provided to Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. The colour revolutions have shown that Russia is not in a position to come to the rescue of neighbouring regimes in a crisis situation.

The opportunities for the West to influence events are also limited, however. Of course, the leading democratic countries, which are considered model democracies, can prevent the post-Soviet presidents from resorting to too-harsh authoritarian measures, since their good opinion has a certain legitimizing function for these rulers. But when confronted with a genuine threat to the regime, this is a very minor consideration. Hence, although the late Azerbaijani president Aliiev had a quite pro-Western orientation, there was never a possibility that he would refrain from transferring power to his son for the sake of his reputation in the West.

Furthermore, the pressure for democratization from outside has never been exerted consistently and probably never will be. The authorities in CIS countries can keep it to a minimum by invoking the bogeyman of destabilization and extremism. In Russia, the regime was highly successful in this quarter by pointing out the risk of a takeover by ("red-brown") communists and Russian nationalists. In Central Asia, it is Islamic radicalism that plays this role.

These risks are not mere invention. However, it was largely the one-man regimes themselves that created them. In a country where no regular transfer of power takes place, and where the population is not allowed to express its dissatisfaction peacefully and legally, it is only natural that some of the protest will flow into extremist channels.

It is true that the retention of radical elements in the ideology of the Communist Party and the radicalism of the new youth movements in Russia have created and are perpetuating the risk that a new regime established in the event of an opposition victory will be even more authoritarian than the current one. However, it is also clear that the radical tendencies within politics in

Russia are directly bound up with the nature of the present regime, which has made it impossible for either the "left" or the "right" opposition movement to come to power by legal and non-bloody means. By contrast, the electoral victory of the Communists in Moldova — the only CIS state where a one-man regime has not been created and where it might be possible for the opposition to come to power by legal and peaceful means — by no means led to the creation of an authoritarian regime. On the contrary, it served to fortify a system based on the regular alternation of governments and accelerated the transformation of the Communist Party there.

If Russia and Moldova represent two opposite approaches to responding to the risk of communist radicalism, then Tajikistan and Uzbekistan embody two different methods of combating Islamic extremism. Despite a long and brutal civil war, the Islamic movement in Tajikistan did not turn toward extremism and was able to integrate into the society following the peace agreement. By all appearances, no "Islamist" threat exists in Tajikistan today. Should one emerge, it could only be as a result of a transformation of Rakhmon's regime. The situation in Uzbekistan is quite different. The danger posed by Islamic radicalism is indisputably considerably greater there now than it was in the beginning of the 1990s, before the suppression of the democratic opposition. It is equally apparent that strict monitoring of any expression of Islamic piety on part of Islam Karimov's regime has encouraged the spread of Islamic extremism. If someone can be subjected to police interrogation or lose his job simply for complying with the requirements of Islam, the radicalisation of Muslims is, quite simply, inevitable.

One-man regimes create a vicious circle: They themselves generate the risks of destabilization and extremism so that the democratic states view them as the "lesser evil" and turn a blind eye to their behaviour and fierce suppression of the opposition. This can cause the risks of destabilization and extremism to increase.

Even the targeted use of influence on the part of the democratic countries on the political development of CIS countries can yield only limited results, and it can play a decisive roll only in specific moments of crisis. The democratization of the CIS states cannot be brought on by external influence: It must be the result of internal processes. The most important influence that the democratic states can exert has nothing to do with conscious political decision-making. It lies instead in their function as a role model. Just as the example of the free countries eroded the foundations of the communist regimes, so are the achievements of the democratic states, European integration and the EU accession of the new post-Communist democracies of eastern Europe and eastern central Europe undermining the one-man regimes in the CIS countries by virtue of their example.

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<sup>1</sup> A very good comparison of the political systems of Russia with those of the Baltic states is provided by S. Nisten-Khaarala, "Sravnenie politicheskikh organov i konstitucii Rossii i baltiiskich stran — kul'turnaia obuslovlennost' i stechenie obstoiatel'stv", in E. Zadorozhniuk, D. Furman (eds.), *Strany Baltii i Rossiia: Obshchestva i gosudarstva* (Moscow 2002).

<sup>2</sup> There is an extensive and uncharted body of literature on developments in post-communist Russia. I will only mention one book here, with whose authors I agree in many respects: Peter Reddaway, Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russian Reforms* (Washington, D.C. 2001). See also: Dmitrii Furman, "Nasha politicheskaia sistema i ee tsikly", in *Svobodnaia mysl'*—XXI, 11, 2003. The literature on developments in other post-Soviet states is similarly diffuse. However, there are very few comparative resources that examine multiple countries, such as the annual Freedom House report, *Nations in Transit: Civil Society, Democracy and*

*Markets in East Central Europe and Newly Independent States* (New York, since 1995).

- 3 The communist system survived longer in what are now the CIS countries (again with the exception of Moldova) than it did in eastern central Europe. There is one country, though, that was communist for just as long as the USSR, but that transformed into a real democracy after its collapse: This is the remarkable and seldom considered case of Mongolia.
- 4 This is made clear by a comparison of the pre- and post-communist situation of all former communist countries, with no exception, regardless of whether they turned into stable democracies or had to accept a setback and are now imitation democracies. For instance, it is clear that the Baltic states were about as ready for democracy in the interwar years as Belarus is today: Following a brief period of democracy, an authoritarian regime similar to the Belarusian system today emerged in the Baltic states. It is also clear that Russia and Kazakhstan were both considerably better prepared for democracy in 1991 than they were in 1917.
- 5 Naturally, it is no coincidence that the most successful post-communist democracies in eastern central Europe and in the Baltic region are those that were influenced by the Western forms of Christianity, i.e. Catholicism and Protestantism. No less accidental is the fact that no democratic system has yet developed in an Islamic CIS country. There are also very few Islamic democracies outside of the CIS. For more detail, see Dmitrii Furman, "Divergentsiia politicheskikh sistem na postsovetском prostranstve", in *Svobodnaia mysl'*–XXI, 10, 2004.
- 6 The historic experience of the Russian people, who created an empire and dominated it, is the precise opposite of the experience of the peoples conquered by the Russians and absorbed into their empire. Still, the Russians and these other peoples do share a common lack of experience with a nation-state of their own. Getting used to life without empire is difficult for both Russians and non-Russians.
- 7 In March of 1991, a referendum on the future of the USSR was held in all of the republics of the USSR except the Baltic states, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova. In it, 76.4 percent of those who voted declared themselves in favour of maintaining the union, while 21.7 percent voted against doing so, *Pravda*, 27 March 1991. Yet the USSR ceased to exist that same year. Of the three heads of republics who declared the end of the USSR in the Belovezha Accord, only one, Ukraine's Leonid Kravchuk, had a mandate to do so from his people, a majority of whom had voted for independence in a referendum.
- 8 V. Dunaev, "Konfliktuiushchie struktury kazakhstanskoi modeli mezhetnicheskoi integratsii", in *Tsentr'al'naia Aziia i Kavkaz*, 6, 1999, 14–15.
- 9 On the development of the regime under Yeltsin, see Liliia Shevtsova, *Rezhim Borisa El'tsina* (Moscow 1999), available in English as Lilia Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality* (Washington D.C. 1999).
- 10 For a systematic discussion of authoritarianism and authoritarian systems, see Margarete Wiest, "Beschränkter Pluralismus: Postkommunistische autoritäre Systeme", in *Osteuropa*, 7, 2006, 65–77.
- 11 For a detailed discussion, Dmitrii Furman, *Postsovetiskii politicheskii rezhim Kazakhstana* (Moscow 2004).
- 12 On this topic see Gerhard Simon, "Der Wandel autoritärer Systeme. Postkommunistische Volksbewegungen für Demokratie", in *Osteuropa*, 7, 2006, 79–93.
- 13 The foreign-policy direction of the CIS governments depends on whether or not their political power at home is being put to the test. As long as autarchy is stable and the danger emanating from the opposition minimal, the presidents may take a "pro-Western" stance. In periods of crisis, though, every regime turns to Russia and the CIS. The most striking example of this tendency was the political turnaround of Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov following events in Andizhan in May 2005.

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