

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY AS A RESULT OF LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC REGRESSION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Nataliya Khoma

*Lviv Polytechnic National University
Institute of the Humanities and Social Sciences
5 Mytropolyta Andreia St., Lviv, 79000, Ukraine
nataliia.m.khoma@lpnu.ua*

Ihor Vdovychyn

*Ivan Franko National University of Lviv
Institute of Philosophy, Department of Theory and History of Political Science
1, Universytetska St., Lviv, 79000, Ukraine
vdovychyn.i@gmail.com*

Abstract

The purpose of the article is to provide insight into illiberal democracy as a result of liberal democratic regression in the EU-integrated Central and Eastern European countries. Changes in the political pathways of Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic have been analysed, indicating the distinctive qualities of their political regression. Factors increasing democratic regression of the analysed CEE countries after their joining the EU have been established. Conclusions regarding the reasons for the illiberal transition and specific aspects of democratic deconsolidation of the region's nations have been made. Specific characteristics of illiberal dynamics in the analysed group of countries have been defined. Deformation of liberal democracy has been studied in accordance with the methodology which combines the cognitive potential of neo-constitutionalism, political comparativistics and transitology paradigm.

Key words: *Illiberal Democracy, Liberal Democracy, Central and Eastern European Countries, Democratic Regression, Democratic Performance.*

INTRODUCTION

A decline in the quality of democracy has been a global trend of the past decade. Conservative nationalists, as well as other political actors opposing liberal democratic values, became more active in many countries. The initial support of populists and various ideologically oriented radicals who promoted narratives in discordance with the foundations of liberal democracy became more pronounced across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Therefore, one question becomes relevant: how much is the preservation of liberal democratic values threatened by the illiberal challenge faced by the young democracies of the CEE. Studying the reasons, history and possible outcomes of the decline in the quality of liberal democracy in those CEE countries which have been deemed compliant with the Copenhagen criteria in the course of the European integration process, under the situation when they go through an illiberal transition or stagnation in the strengthening of liberal and democratic values more or less pronounced, seems an important mission.

After 2010, when the Fidesz party in Hungary gained electoral advantage for the first time (parliamentary majority), illiberal democracy, deconsolidation of democracy, illiberal consolidation etc. started clearly manifesting itself in the analysed region. Following the 2015, when illiberal overthrow started in Poland, argumentation for the democracy deficit, decline in democracy, democracy deconsolidation, illiberal consolidation etc. gained ground in the political discourse. Therefore, scientific interest the cases of departure from liberal democracy in the CEE region increased as well.

DEMOCRATIC DECONSOLIDATION: DEFINING THE CONTENTS AND THE REASONS

Illiberal democracy analysis is not possible without looking into the essence of the processes bringing about the modification of the political regime towards illiberal democracy. Therefore, we need to investigate the contents and reasons for democratic deconsolidation and manifestations of liberal democracy effects etc. in the first place. The quick transformation of democracy is a characteristic feature of the XXI century. A Freedom House report for 2018 identified “democracy in crisis” [Freedom in the world 2018]. An antidemocratic pivot is a current global tendency [Císař O. 2017: 7]. It is in the past decade when the most significant negative change in the exercise of human and citizen rights and freedoms took place. There were considerably more loser countries in liberal democratic transformation than winners. Political processes in various regions of the planet mean that the problems of strengthening and preserving liberal democracies become more pronounced. Recently, the regimes which are authoritative in form, with capitalist economies and commitment to conservative nationalist ideologies became powerful political competitors of liberal democracy [Ignatieff M. 2014]. We are witnessing the construction of defective democracies which formally reproduce institutional design of western democracies, while giving a different substance to it. Formal democratic procedures turn into a façade concealing

authoritarian mechanisms. The following question becomes even more pressing: is democracy now doomed to lose its liberal core?

These disturbing trends did not emerge instantaneously. F. Zakaria stated in his 1997 study that authoritarian elements were present in at least half of the democratising countries [Zakaria F. 1997]. T. Carothers voiced an opinion in 2002 that of the nearly 100 countries considered as transitioning to liberal democracy, only fewer than 20 were on the way to becoming successful, and the rest would remain in the 'grey zone' [Carothers T. 2002: 9–10]. These countries were marked by democratic deficits: poor representation of citizens' interests, low levels of political participation, frequent abuse of the law by government officials, elections of uncertain legitimacy and other liberal democracy defects. Such grey zone regimes were characterised by a partial incorporation or imitation of liberal democratic procedures and formal institutions, while simultaneously being undermined by limited pluralism. They combined features of liberal democracies (competitive elections, pluralism, parliamentarism, constitutionalism etc.) and authoritarian mechanisms and methods, including open or latent repression. New political processes provided empirical evidence of these regimes being highly adaptive, strategically changeable and flexible; they were adjusted to the global capitalism rules they were fully integrated into.

In order to maintain a democratic façade while remaining in the 'grey zone' between democracy and authoritarianism, deficient illiberal regimes seek to earn the widest possible support of the people. They usually succeed owing to populism or pinpointing a certain ethnic, national, security, gender or other issue. It is worthwhile noting that while authoritarianism in its classical form is always directed against human and citizen rights and freedoms and ready to repress, the new 'grey zone' regimes act like a chameleon, adjusting to new circumstances, if only to prevent the possible application of international sanctions against the country. They hold institutional representation of various democratic institutions and, in a way, implement the majority of democratic procedures [Dzihic V. 2016: 31].

'Grey zones' between democracy and authoritarianism are clearly visible across different parts of the world these days. Moreover, the beginning of the 2008 global economic crisis revealed the fragility of liberal democratic systems even more, jeopardising the democratic consensus [Dzihic V. 2016: 31]. We can see that some consolidated democracies have been moving in a new authoritarian direction during the past decade. Presumably, it does not mean that their future is clearly authoritarian; however, their democratic institutions have been diminished and continue losing their stability.

S. Levitsky and D. Ziblatt [Levitsky S., Ziblatt D. 2018] who have been studying democratic crises for over twenty years, claim that present-day democracies 'die' not so much of revolutions or military coups, but due to the slow, steady weakening of critical institutions and the gradual erosion of long-standing political norms. Overall, there are numerous reasons for democracy deconsolidation. First of all, it is the rise

in inequality that results in a squeeze of the middle-class. This causes the surge of antiliberal populism. For instance, E. Luce pointed this out in his study 'The retreat of western liberalism' [Luce E. 2017].

The idea of 'democratic backsliding' is used in political science to denote the alteration of formal and informal institutions, which further changes a political regime towards a hybrid and new authoritarian one [Dresden J. R., Howard M. M. 2016; Erdmann G. 2011]. Most often, democratic backsliding will be treated in political discourse as certain 'corrosion' and weakening of the 'building blocks' of democracy, when compared to the more aggressive regime transformation from democracy to authoritarianism. Retreat from democracy is most frequently defined as 'democratic regression', 'democratic de-consolidation' and 'democratic breakdown'. For instance, N. Bermeo understands democratic backsliding as a regress in the evolution of liberal democracy principles; the researcher believes that it is the deceleration of democratic progress, but not its regression [Bermeo N. 2016: 6]. At the same time, democratic backsliding can assume various forms, from moderate to radical.

As fairly stated by S. L. Hanley and M. A. Vachudova, democratic backsliding means that political actors take conscious and progressive steps to cause democratic regress, i.e. it is not about sudden rejection; i.e. the sudden negation of democracy, like happens, say, in the case of a military coup [Hanley S. L., Vachudova M. A. 2018: 298]. Usually it is the executive authorities that become the main instrument of economic regress [Crowther W. 2017]. At the same time, governments act within the limits of relevant institutions and regulatory mechanisms, rarely participating in open antidemocratic activities.

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY: CHARACTERISTICS, CAUSES AND LIKELY OUTCOMES

Illiberal democracy is the most common subtype in the system of deficient democracies [Romanjuk O. 2017: 119; Merkel W. 2004: 49; Puhle H. J. 2005: 12]. It serves to strengthen the powers of authoritarian rule and interferes with the progress of freedom. Above all, illiberal democracy is characterised by a distortion of civil rights and freedoms: limitations of freedom of speech, information, priority of association and pressure on the judiciary etc. [Puhle H. J. 2005: 12]. Rights and freedoms that emphasise an individual's independence from state power and define the limits of state interference with personal life, become prejudiced. As a result of "*violation of civil rights and freedoms by legislative and/or executive authorities as well as its inefficient protection by the judiciary, these deficiencies limit constitutional and legal nature of the state*" [Romanjuk O. 2017: 119].

Illiberal democracy is characterised by attempts by certain politicians to concentrate their power [Bermeo N. 2016]. Populism, limiting pluralism in political discussion, infringement upon the mechanism of restraint and counterbalance, assumption of power by radical parties, assault on the democratic 'third sector' and free media char-

acterise the non-liberal transition. Pseudo-democratic authorities aspire to emphasise their seemingly democratic character; however, in reality democratic principles and values mostly start being used as a façade. It is done with a strong declarative rhetorical commitment to democracy which is not matched by decisions and actions. Illiberal democracy reduces the essence of democracy first of all to a multiparty system and alternative elections. Instead, all the other fundamental components required for the proper functioning of a pluralist democratic society are suppressed or institutionally marginalised. Croatian political scientist D. Jović actually calls these deformed democracies totalitarian [Jović D. 2017], though we believe such critical evaluation has been slightly blown out of proportion.

The formation of a rather radical illiberal segment in the structure of civic society, a so-called pseudo civil society, is an important characteristic of illiberal democracy. Using its civil and political activism, this type of society creates an atmosphere where various radical actors formulate the narratives aimed at vulnerable groups (ethnic and sexual minorities, refugees etc.), organises citizens for supposed border protection (from migrants), supports extreme religious conservatism (directed against abortions, LGBTI community rights etc.) and attacks multicultural values [Bustikova L., Guasti P. 2017: 169]. These civic and political actors become valuable allies to the state leaders who set off on the road to build an illiberal democracy. On the contrary, the official discourse describes liberal democratic actors as destructive ‘foreign agents’ who intend to undermine national sovereignty [Guasti P. 2016].

Therefore, our authors’ approach envisages positioning illiberal democracy as a sub-type of deficient democracy which preserves democratic appearances (elections, formally democratic constitution, multiparty system, separation of powers etc.) with the concurrent infringement on the rule of law; insufficient protection of civil and political rights and freedoms; pressure on civil society and formation of an illiberal (pseudo civil) segment within its structure; manifestation of the informal destructive institutionalisation of politics; increase of populism and popularity of radical political forces; pressure on the courts, media and other independent institutions; spreading conspiracy theories; authorities’ attempt to ‘conceal’ illiberal reforms in order to avoid sanctions from international, European institutions etc.

There are numerous reasons for illiberal democracy becoming a reality in certain countries. For instance, P. Deneen [Deneen P. 2018] points at an increased disappointment on the part of citizens with liberal democracy. In the researcher’s opinion, only egoism remained from the promise of individualism; equal opportunities are replaced by a new plutocracy; freedom is pushed out by a mixture of the state and commercial monitoring; cultural diversity becomes similar with the homogenous substance of globalised commerce. From P. Deneen’s viewpoint, excessive market liberalism gives birth to an even larger number of authoritative politicians-populist supporters.

Therefore, decrease in the level of trust in democratic institutions, emergence of a

quasi-civil segment in the structure of the civil society, strengthening of the informal destructive influences on the politics of the interested actors, attempts to establish political control over the media (both state and private) and pressure on the judiciary etc. destroy a liberal democratic project in many countries across the world, and CEE countries in particular.

FRAGILITY OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION OF CEE COUNTRIES AFTER JOINING THE EU

During the first two decades after communism collapsed, the trend towards democratic progress was clear cut in the majority of CEE countries, first being those countries that took the course towards European integration. The countries in the region were characterised by a stable process of democracy consolidation. However, they quite quickly came across the processes of de-democratisation and democracy regress. The countries from the analysed group quite quickly started to differ in terms of their democratisation level; and today, following the major global trends, the democratic progress in the region has slowed down. S. L. Hanley and M. A. Vachudova identified the democratic retreat here and even withdrawal towards a new authoritarianism [Hanley S. L., Vachudova M. A. 2018: 276]. We fully uphold the authors' position.

It should be noted that scientists arrived at the present scientific consensus on the deteriorating democracy quality in the CEE territory [Kochenov D. 2008; Sedelmeier U. 2014]. What M. Plattner called a 'declinist' sentiment [Plattner M. F. 2015: 7]) regarding democracy, is gaining more popularity. J. Dawson and S. L. Hanley argue that democratic malaise in the CEE is better understood as a long-term pattern of 'illiberal consolidation' [Dawson J., Hanley S. L. 2016: 20].

The last decade of election results in a number of CEE countries which became EU member states, demonstrate an increase in illiberal trends. There is no scientific consensus at present on which CEE countries can be definitely classified as illiberal democracies and those which have a major democracy defect which endangers the future prospect of liberal democracy. The most frequent opinion that we support is that Hungary and Poland are fully illiberal democracies, and the characteristics of most 'young democracies' accumulate the elements of illiberal transition, which justifies their analysis in the context of studying the threat of extending the illiberal democratisation realm in the CEE. We believe that the illiberal democratisation risk has long ago crossed the borders of Hungary (V. Orban's politics) and Poland (J. *Kaczyński's* politics). We also trace its manifestations and ascending dynamics in the newest politics of Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Croatia and other CEE countries. Overall, the CEE region is an important area for studying liberal democracy deficiencies, as all the countries of the region have been undergoing post totalitarian transformation, but this process deformed in the past decade in the majority of them.

The integration of some CEE countries into the EU was regarded for some time as the most successful instrument of expanding the liberal democracy realm. In 1990s-early 2000s the prospect of EU membership was a stimulus for democratisation in a candidate state. CEE 'young democracies' went along a complicated path of adaptation to the Copenhagen criteria for the sake of becoming an EU member. The very fact of them becoming a member state was regarded by the researchers as providing unconditional evidence of democracy consolidation [Merkel W. 2008; Schimmelfennig F. 2007]. Therefore, the political discourse of that time sharpened the expectations that EU membership would support the introduction of the 'democratisation through integration' concept. [Dimitrova A., Pridham G. 2004]. There was an expectation that the European prospect will '*keep back the extremist and populist trends*' [Bayer J. 2002]. It should be noted that just after the large expansion of the EU in 2004, the discussion was of two possible alternatives for political regime transformation of the EU's 'young democracies': a 'backsliding' theory and a 'Euro-straitjacket' theory. According to the backsliding theory, following the intense reforms to acquire the desired membership, the CEE young democracies would come back to more useful things with elements of authoritarianism, populism, violation of the rule of law principle, etc. One of the reasons of such a likely retreat is that the EU, whilst being active in its control of the EU joining member states, does not have any effective mechanisms to prevent the reverse of liberal democratic achievements after the finalisation of the process of adhering to the procedures by the candidate countries. The 'Euro-straitjacket' theory reads that there will be a long-term and stable positive consequence of the CEE countries joining the EU in due to consolidation of their national democracies. The political processes of the next 15 years after the CEE countries entered the EU demonstrated absence of support of the unified scenario theory for all of the mentioned countries. Back in 2007 a Bulgarian political scientist I. Krastev warned that the liberal consensus in the CEE countries gave way to a non-liberal populism. [Krastev I. 2007]. However, on the eve of the 2008 global economic crisis, the World Bank jumped to a rather hasty, in our opinion, conclusion: the era of democratic transition for the countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 had ended and they already functioned as liberal democracies. The creation of stable institutions that guarantee democracy, rule of law, human rights, respect and protection of minorities was optimistically acknowledged. [Alam A. et al. 2008]. However, as of today, this World Bank's opinion is regarded with criticism, for it is obvious that in many CEE countries the illiberal democracy is pushing out a still weak liberal democracy, and a democratic retreat of EU member states is taking place. For most CEE countries, the risk of undermining the existing achievements of post-Communist democratisation grew and continues growing, the fact of EU membership is not an absolute deterrent.

Our analysis of the political processes in the CEE countries which are EU members, proves that the influence of radical and populist political subjects increased immensely, and the countries demonstrated the symptoms of democratic 'tiredness'

and the exhaustion of liberal democratic elites. All of this became a fruitful ground to implement the principles of illiberal democracy. Some of the CEE countries had already moved away from the development of liberal democracy. We presume that it even might endanger their membership in the EU in some way, future EU prospects and undermine the authority of this integration union which has some member states with new authoritarianism elements in their political regime. For instance, R. D. Kelemen rightfully stated that “*the largest threats to democracy in Europe manifest themselves not on the EU level, but on the national level, in the emerging autocracies of the EU countries*” [Kelemen R. D. 2017: 212]. Evidently, at present it compels the EU to analyse the candidate countries more thoroughly, as these, hypothetically, can follow the steps of already deformed young democracies.

Antidemocratic processes of the past decade in EEC countries lead to an interest to study the fragility of democratic consolidation in post-totalitarian countries and finding the efficiency level of the EU tools to have these countries inexorably adhere to the Copenhagen criteria. Democracy deficiency cases in a number of EEC countries draw attention to the so-called ‘Copenhagen dilemma’: the stringency of the Copenhagen criteria regarding promotion of the rule of law and the absence of effective EU tools to secure the promotion of the rule of law after the candidate countries have joined the EU. Therefore, certain doubts arise regarding the sustainability of democratic reforms which were conducted at the EU request [Dimitrova A., Pridham G. 2004]. Predictably, the most ‘sensitive’ reforms may be reversed after the candidate countries obtain the desired EU membership. Within the public discussions of potential EU expansion, some speculation on certain EU ‘leniency’ to candidate countries is being voiced, which these days supports the enhancement of new authoritarian tendencies [Kmezić M., Bieber F. 2017].

DEMOCRATIC REGRESS REASONS IN THE CEE REGION

Liberal democracy narrowing to a larger or smaller extent is presently observed in the CEE countries joining the EU. Following the overthrow of the Communist system, initial euphoria from the democratic changes gave way to growing distrust in formal political institutions and politicians, as well as ongoing criticism of the liberal democracy itself. It should be taken into account that strong liberal political culture able to support stable democratic regimes, never existed in the countries of the region, so these regimes started falling down as soon as economic and/or cultural problems arose, and additional motivation to democratisation evaporated just after the acceptance of certain candidate countries in the EU. A number of authors support this view [Dawson J., Hanley S. L. 2016: 20; Vachudova M., Hooghe L. 2009: 179].

The beginning of the 2008 global economic crisis ‘sprang’ the deformation mechanisms on the still immature liberal democracy in the CEE countries. Obviously, economic crisis will strongly challenge the stability and quality of liberal democracy, as well as undermine legitimacy of democratic political order. J. Habermas laid spe-

cial emphasis on this at the very beginning of the global economic crisis. [Habermas J. 2008]. The writer proved the threat from inadequate political actions related to the financial crisis, which would lead to the collapse of citizens' confidence, lowered democracy quality and, finally, would lead to the end of democratic legitimacy. It is during these years of economic crisis that democratic indices started to deteriorate: the quality of the mechanism of restraint and counterbalance, stability and representative resources of the party system, citizens' approval of democratic norms and procedures, freedom of mass media etc. [Guasti P., Mansfeldová Z. 2018: 74]. The migration crisis of 2015 made populist discourse even more active and pinpointed the issue of the stability of liberal democracy.

Among new EU members, where democratic institutions are still weak, political discrepancies gave birth to considerable doubt regarding the liberal model and democracy as a whole [Bedratenko 2018: 45]. At the same time, it is evident that for most European 'old democracies' the vector of development was not so profoundly deformed by financial and migration problems. We can largely agree with E. Hobsbawm that, despite the 'wind of change', objective conditions to constitute genuine lasting democracies in non-Western countries of Europe had not formed yet [Quoted after: Jović D. 2017: 442–443].

Public opinion surveys testify that Europeans grow increasingly ambivalent about basic democratic values, and many of them even call in doubt the importance of liberal democracy values. For instance, a YouGov survey results show that around half of the population of the 12 surveyed EU countries are committed to illiberal ideas, like countering migration, bias towards refugees and ethnic minorities, excuse for restriction of certain human rights, support of nationalism etc. [Youngs R., Manney S. 2018]. Therefore, we can presume that liberal democracy is threatened not only from 'above' (by governments), but also from 'below' (by citizens) due to their common commitment to illiberal values [Norris P., Inglehart R. 2019].

Therefore, we can speak of a certain 'disappointment scenario' with liberal democracy values which is true for quite a large number of citizens of EU integrated CEE countries. Democracy idealisation and inflated expectations were observed at the start of the democratic transition. However, democratic enthusiasm came into stark contrast with the poor political and economic efficiency of the regimes. Therefore, the young CEE democracies encountered complicated socio-economic issues and are facing political scandals and corruption that deepens the citizens' disappointment with the liberal democracy institutions, contribute towards their withdrawal from active social and political life, provoke erosion of trust in formal political institutions and encourages populists. According to I. Krastev, what the CEE is experiencing now is not just the democratisation crisis, but a genuine liberal democracy crisis which manifests itself in economic failures, civil opposition and liberal cosmopolitanism. [Krastev I. 2016].

Researchers are trying to trace the sources of the present-day illiberal revolution in

the CEE countries. I. Krastev and S. Holmes believe that we do not have to concentrate purely on ideological or economic factors, but search for the answers in political psychology in order to understand the problem. The above scientists believe that the present-day democratic regression is caused by the 'normalcy' policy after 1989, when the main task was imitating the West in order to turn 'normal'. [Krastev I., Holmes S. 2018: 118]. The way to 'normalcy' envisaged importing liberal democratic institutions, using western political and economic 'recipes' and public approval of western values. This literal imitation of western models ended in a number of moral and psychological failures (feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, dependency, lost identity and unintentional insincerity). This imitation was even perceived as a loss of sovereignty, and I. Krastev and S. Holmes use it to explain the surge in authoritarian chauvinism and xenophobia in the CEE countries.

It is also important to emphasise that when looking for the reasons of illiberal democracy strengthening in the CEE countries, it is useful to consider that these were economic and not civil transformations that became the main direction of reforms after 1989 [Szent-Iványi B., Tétényi A. 2008]. This means that economic value was the top priority. Liberal democratic norms and practices have never been fully integrated in these societies; we can regard that as a reason for the present-day liberal democracy crisis, at the same time remembering about the aspect of the historical past.

B. Bugarič and T. Ginsburg prove the existence of a connection between the liberal democracy crisis in the CEE countries and the establishment of guided democracy in Russia [Bugarič B., Ginsburg T. 2016]. The truth is that in the past years the Russian Federation has been strengthening its destructive influence on young democracies in Europe using the following mechanisms: corruption, propaganda, disinformation and support of populists, extremist, marginal, quasimilitary political actors.

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY MANIFESTATION IN CEE COUNTRIES

Let us try and find the manifestations of illiberal democracies in the cases of several countries (Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic), pointing out their peculiarities.

Identification of illiberal transformations in Hungary is the evidence of rapid radicalisation of this country's politics, growth of populism and substitution of liberal democracy for Christian conservative narratives. Withdrawal from liberal democracy values and narrowing of the space for civil society activity has been observed here for decades. An illiberal transition promoted the popularity of populist parties (first of all, Fidesz i Jobbik). The separation of powers principle has been compromised in Hungary, the Constitutional court role has been reduced, and the opposition, media and civil society are under pressure. Constant searches for the enemies of the nation take place and conspiracy theories are produced. Gender equality, same-sex marriages, open society and minorities' rights are defined as existential threats to the survival of the Hungarian nation. The model of the illiberal national state based on labour is idealised. A conservative illiberal national state with a strong vertical power structure,

with an emphasis on history, culture, language, patriotic upbringing, family values and spiritual revival of the nation is being constructed. V. Orban announced they will focus on illiberal 'conservative Christian democracy' with underlying criticism of multiculturalism, antimigrant rhetoric, supporting exclusively Christian family values and traditional family etc.

Poland's democratic façade also hides numerous deformations. A quite strong consensus on the basic elements of liberal democratic order has been maintained for 25 years here (until 2015). Poland's political trajectory changed after the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) political party came to power. The democratic climate of the country has been deteriorating since then due to attempts to impose government control primarily over the court structure and social media; artificial modification of the 'third sector' through redistribution of state and EU funding to government-loyal NGOs; formation of illiberal sectors of civil society and focusing on antimigrant issue etc.

We can see both common and different features between Poland and Hungary in the form of construction of their illiberal democracy models. Both countries are introducing a socio-political model with the preservation of 'traditional values' and a clear national identity being the primary task of the authorities. **J. Kaczyński** and V. Orban are using similar methods; however, the Polish leader is an ideologist expressing the Catholic Church ideology, and the Hungarian prime minister pragmatically focuses on oligarchs. The political methods and institutional structure of the Hungarian regime are evidence of the intensification in the use of authoritative mechanisms, which is the major difference between the Hungarian and Polish models of illiberal democracy. This is primarily manifested in the growing pressure on the civil society and an aggressive position towards the EU. Meanwhile, despite strong antidemocratic deformation, the Polish regime keeps the mechanisms of restraint and counterbalance owing to the proportional election system and the multi-layered structure of the local self-governing bodies.

Despite the recent high level of political power consolidation in the Czech Republic in relation to the liberal democratic transformation of the country, the quality of democracy has been in decline for the past years as well. It gives ground for acknowledging the beginning of illiberal changes. The increased influence of the ANO party and its leader A. Babiš, as well as the political position of the head of state, M. Zeman, pose certain challenges to the Czech liberal democracy. Following the 2017 parliamentary elections, the issue of breaking the liberal pro-European consensus becomes relevant. The 2008 global economic crisis did influence the Czech political system; however, it did not cause the country's turn to conservative nationalism (unlike Hungary and Poland). Instead, new populist centric parties became more active. Appealing to the national identity policy gradually became a politically significant instrument in the Czech Republic, but appealing to the idea of protecting the Czech nation is not so common today (which differentiates technocratic populist A. Babiš, an ethnic Slovak, from conservative politicians V. Orban and **J. Kaczyński**). Therefore, the erosion of

the Czech traditional parties was not caused by the language of cultural or political singularity (unlike Hungary and Poland). Owing to the dominating centrist populism (ANO party), Czech democracy still has none of the full-blown features of an illiberal regime, but the risk of rising to it is increasing greatly, as A. Babiš' technocratic approach to power causes a gradual rejection of pluralism and bears the signs of authoritarian trends.

CONCLUSION

The CEE region is evidently facing serious challenges in the functioning of liberal democracy. These difficulties go above the poor quality of democracy resulting from the heritage of the communist or pre-communist life. A whole range of other factors has given birth to an illiberal transition: authoritarian trends of the ruling elite, weakness of national civil societies; high level of distrust in formal political institutions and politicians; social capital weakness; presence of parties with no social roots and corrupted and inefficient state administration etc. Despite the fact that every CEE country has experienced its peculiar aspect of democratic deconsolidation on a different level, each of these processes is based on the underlying activity of a national illiberal (usually a populist) party that started a conservative nationalist project owing to its electoral success; it concentrated executive power, liquidated or weakened the principle of restraint and counterbalance and exerted party control over governmental agencies etc.

Illiberal dynamic in the CEE countries manifests itself, first of all, in such illiberal tendencies as pressure on the media and freedom of speech, infringement of independence and repressions against civil society. Moreover, it is evidenced by hate speech against migrants' surges in the CEE territories, pressure on female and LGBTI rights and increases in crimes committed on racial and homophobic grounds etc. Therefore, the presence of illiberal characteristics in the structure of democracy became a challenge for the CEE countries which faced an internal split due to the still lingering effects of the 2008 global economic crisis. The 2015 migration crisis additionally enhanced these processes, as it provided a convenient instrument of political manipulations for the right-wing radical nationalist parties.

REFERENCES

- Alam, A. et al. (2008), *Unleashing prosperity: productivity growth in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union*, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank, Washington.
- Bayer, J., (2002), *Rechtspopulismus und Rechtsextremismus in Ostmitteleuropa*, in *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, 31 (3), 265-280.
- Bedratenko, O., (2018). *Vidxid vid liberalizmu v Sxidnij Jevropi ne jde na koryst' Ukrajinu*. In: *Agora*. No 19-20, pp. 44-47.
- Bermeo, N., (2016), *On democratic backsliding*, in *Journal of Democracy*, 27 (1), 5-9.
- Bugarič, B.; Ginsburg, T., (2016), *The Assault on Postcommunist Courts*, in *Journal of Democracy*, 27 (3), 69-82.

- Bustikova, L., Guasti, P., (2017), The Illiberal Turn or Swerve in Central Europe?, in *Politics and Governance*, 5 (4), 166-176.
- Carothers, T., (2002), The End of the Transition Paradigm, in *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (1), 5-21.
- Císař, O., (2017), *Czech Republic: From Post-Communist Idealism to Economic Populism*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Berlin.
- Crowther, W., (2017), Ethnic Condominium and Illiberalism in Macedonia, in *East European Politics and Societies*, 31 (4), 739-761.
- Dawson, J.; Hanley, S. L., (2016), What's Wrong with East-Central Europe? The Fading Mirage of the "Liberal Consensus", in *Journal of Democracy*, 27 (1), 20-34.
- Deneen, P., (2018), *Why Liberalism Failed*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Dresden, J. R.; Howard, M. M., (2016), Aauthoritarian backsliding and the Concentration of Political Power, in *Democratization*, 23 (7), 1122-1143.
- Dzihic, V., (2016), Illiberal democracy. A European issue, in *European Civic Forum Magazine Activizanship*, 2, 30-39.
- Erdmann, G., (2011), Decline of Democracy: Loss of Quality, Hybridisation and breakdown of Democracy, in G. Erdman, M. Kneuer (Eds.), *Regression of Democracy?* Wiesbaden: Springer, 21-58.
- Freedom in the world 2018 (2018), Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FHFITW_Report_2018_Final_SinglePage.pdf (Accessed October 22, 2019).
- Guasti, P., (2016), Development of citizen participation in Central and Eastern Europe after the EU enlargement and economic crises, in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 49 (3), 219-231.
- Guasti, P.; Mansfeldová, Z. (Eds.) (2018), *Democracy Under Stress. Changing Perspectives on Democracy, Governance and Their Measurement*, Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague.
- Habermas, J., (2008), Notes on post-secular society, in *New perspectives quarterly*, 25 (4), 17-29.
- Hanley, S. L.; Vachudova, M. A., (2018), Understanding the illiberal turn: democratic backsliding in the Czech Republic, in *East European Politics*, 34 (3), 276-296.
- Ignatieff, M., (2014), *New World Disorder*. New York Review of Books, 25.
- Jović, D., (2017), *Rat i mit: Politika identiteta u suvremenoj Hrvatskoj*, Fraktura, Zagreb.
- Kelemen; R. D., (2017), Europe's Other Democratic Deficit: National Authoritarianism in Europe's Democratic Union, in *Government and Opposition*, 52 (2), 211-238.
- Kmezić, M.; Bieber, F., (2017), *Western Balkans and the EU Fresh Wind in the Sails of Enlargement*. Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group.
- Kochenov, D., (2008), *EU Enlargement and the Failure of Conditionality: Pre-Accession Conditionality in the Fields of Democracy and the Rule of Law*. Kluwer Law International.
- Krastev, I., (2016), What's Wrong with East-Central Europe? Liberalism's Failure to Deliver, in *Journal of Democracy*, 27 (1), 35-39.
- Krastev, I.; Holmes, S. (2018), Explaining Eastern Europe: Imitation and Its Discontents, in *Journal of Democracy*, 29 (3), 117-128.
- Krastev, I., (2007), The Strange Death of the Liberal Consensus, in *Journal of Democracy*, 18 (4), 56-63.
- Levitsky, S.; Ziblatt D., (2018), *How Democracies Die*, Crown Publishing Group, New York.
- Luce, E., (2017), *The retreat of western liberalism*, First Grove Atlantic, New York
- Merkel, W., (2004), Embedded and Defective Democracies, in *Democratization*, 11 (5), 33-58.
- Merkel, W., (2008), Plausible Theory, Unexpected Results: The Rapid Democratic Consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe, in *International Politics and Society*, 2, 11-29.
- Norris, P.; Inglehart, R., (2019), *Cultural Backlash: The Rise of Authoritarian-Populism*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

- Plattner, M. F., (2015), Is Democracy in Decline? in *Journal of Democracy*, 26 (1), 5-10.
- Puhle, H. J., (2005), Democratic Consolidation and «Defective Democracies». Retrieved from https://www.uam.es/Derecho/documento/1242659688189/doc10_4.pdf?blobheader=application/pdf (Accessed September 11, 2019).
- Romanjuk, O., (2017), Ščo take «defektni demokratiji i jakymy vony buvajut', in *Visnyk Nacional'noho universytetu «Jurydyčna akademija Ukrajinny imeni Jaroslava Mudroho»*, 2 (33), 114-123.
- Schimmelfennig, F., (2007), European Regional Organizations, Political Conditionality, and Democratic Transformation in Eastern Europe, in *East European Politics and Societies*, 21 (1), 126-141.
- Sedelmeier, U., (2014), Anchoring Democracy from Above? The European Union and Democratic Backsliding in Hungary and Romania after Accession, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52 (1), 105-121.
- Szent-Iványi, B.; Tétényi, A., (2008), Transition and foreign aid policies in the Visegrád countries. A path dependent approach, in *Transition Studies Review*, 15 (3), 573-587.
- Vachudova, M.; Hooghe, L., (2009), Postcommunist Politics in a Magnetic Field: How Transition and EU Accession Structure Party Competition on European Integration, in *Comparative European Politics*, 7, 179-212.
- Youngs, R.; Manney, S., (2018), Recession and Renewal in European Democracy. Retrieved from <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/02/26/recession-and-renewal-in-european-democracy-pub-75601> (Accessed September 15, 2019).
- Zakaria, F., (1997), The Rise of Illiberal Democracy, in *Foreign Affairs*, 76, 22-43.