PARTY SYSTEMS OF THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES: A NOTE ON CURRENT RESEARCH DISCUSSIONS AND OBJECTIVES

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"Party systems of the V4 countries:
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The emergence of contemporary party systems in the countries of Central Eastern Europe date back to the period of dramatic change – of social, political and moral compromise - following the collapse of communist statehood and the commitment to establish democratic society. One of the principal demands of the opposition to the communist governments of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary was ford the possibility of political self-organization among citizens and their participation in the governance through democratic elections, resulting from the decades-long exclusion of the parliaments of the V4 countries from the process of developing of competitive political space[1].

A new field of research appeared at the end of the 20th century: it covers the dynamic process of modernization and socio-economic reforms in the countries of the V4. It raised new issues and outlined new perspectives for research in political science. The very object of political process research in this region became first very popular with West European and American political scientists and their colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe. Secondly, there was an obvious demand not only within the scientific and academic community but also with international research centers and "think tanks" striving to understand the scale of political changes and predict the development of political processes in the so-called "new democracies".

[1] Before falling under Soviet dominance, political parties either ceased to exist or were transformed into communist-satellites, which turned parliament into rubber stamps for the decisions of the leading (communist) party.

Analyzing research papers addressing this issue enables us to single out several problematic fields. Thorough study of those fields gave rise to several research areas.

The first issue of principal importance for political transition research in the region in general and in party systems in particular was the general question *of the unique or universal character of political process in the countries of the Central Eastern Europe*. How applicable can the experience of political research be in the framework of "transit paradigm" to this very region?

The initial methodological intention for such research was derived from the experience of comparative studies of the establishment of "new democracies" in Southern Europe in the 70s and in Latin America in the 80s[2].

The most notable research projects were implemented by Russian as well as international researches: T.A.Alekseeva, A.U.Melvil, G.I. Wanstain, J. Wojnicki, G.V. Golosova, G.V. Leiphart, L.F.Shevtsova, M.V.Ilina, A. Agh, R.Herbut, T. Fitzmaurice, H. Kitshelt, P.Lewis and others[3].

One of the key considerations in the research of party systems in this subregion was *the question of the universal character of political transformation*

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[2] This problem was discussed at the Forum of political researchers of Central Eastern Europe in the Institute of international relations and political science of Vilnius University in July, 2000.

[3] Алексеева Т.А. *Демократия как идея и процесс.* // Вопросы философии. – 1996. № 6., Алексеева Т.А. *Современные политические теории*. Москва. РОССПЭН. 2001, Мельвиль А.Ю. *Демократические транзиты (теоретико-методологические и прикладные аспекты)*. М., МОНФ, 1999., Мельвиль А.Ю. *И вновь об условиях и предпосылках движения к демократии* // Полис, 1991, № 1., Мельвиль А.Ю. *Методология «воронки причинности» как промежуточный синтез «структуры и агента» в анализе демократических транзитов.* // Политические исследования. 2002. № 5., Ванштейн Г.И. *Посткоммунистическое развитие глазами западной политологии* // МЭиМО, 1997. № 8., Голосов Г.В. *Партийные системы России и стран Восточной Европы.* М., Весь мир, 1999., Лейпхарт А. *Демократия в многосоставных обществах.* М.; Аспект пресс, 1997, Lijphart, A. *Democratisation and Constitutional Choice in Czecho-Slovakia, Hungary and Poland 1989-91 //* Journal of Theoretical Politics, 1992. p. 207-223., Шевцова Л.Ф. *Восточная Европа: «момент истины» еще впереди?* // Полис, 1991, № 1., Шевцова Л.Ф. *Куда идет Восточная Европа?* // МЭиМО, 1990, № 4., Ильин М. В. *Ритмы и масштабы перемен (О понятиях "процесс", "изменение" и "развитие" в политологии*). // Полис. 1993. № 2., Ильин М. В., Мельвиль А. Ю., Федоров Ю. Е. *Демократия и демократизация*. // Полис. 1996. № 5., Agh A. *The Emerging Party System in ECE*. Budapest University of Economics, 1992., Antoszewski A., Herbut R. *Demokracje zachodnioeuropejskie: analiza porównawcza*. Wrocław, UW, 1997., Antoszewski A. *Wzorce rywalizacji politycznej we współczesnych demokracjach europejskich*. Wrocław, UW, 2004., Fitzmaurice T. *Politics and Government in the Visegrad Countries. Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia*. Macmillan Press, 1998. Henderson K., Robinson N. *Post-communist Politics: an Introduction*. London: Prentice Hall, 1997., Kitschelt, H. *Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-communist Democracies^ Theoretical Propositions* // Party Politics. Vol. 1. Nr 4. 1995., Nodia G. *How Different Are Postcommunist Transitions* // Journal of democracy. Vol. 7. Nr 4, 1996., Lewis P. *Political Institutionalization and Party Development in Post-communist Poland* // Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 45, no. 5, 1994

process – and a more particular aspect – the universal character of the process of party system establishment. According to the first point of view (Agh, Antoszewski, Herbut, Fitzmaurice, Henderson, Toka), which was presented in the research papers of the 90s (rooted in the Anglo-American political research tradition), political processes in the post-communism countries were a part of the so-called "*third wave of democratization"*, when the countries of the region had to undergo step-by-step stages of democratization (understood as a part of de-communization process). Party systems had to gradually go through stages beginning with legal institutionalization by means of parliament elections (which are partly open at the first stage – that is implementation of the "contract character of transformation" concept[4]) until the consolidated competitive party system had been established. In other words, according to this very approach the post-communist transformations are understood as a part of the global tendency towards democratization, though a quite specific one.

Another point of view, perhaps the most comprehensive and well-grounded one, was given by Michael Roskin[5] in 1993 and reflected an appreciation of the rapidity of changes, which took place in this region in the early 90s. In the framework of this approach the *post-communist developments in the Central Eastern Europe are seen as a specific phenomenon.* The researcher has no methodological grounds to compare this phenomenon with Latin American and the Southern European examples of democratization, let alone the stable democratic systems of "old" European countries.

Due to rapid pace of modernization, Central Eastern Europe was limited in time available for the gradual development of political organizations and party systems. The collapse of the communist political state system was sudden. It resulted in a great number of unstable political institutions and became a factor in the institutional instability of the party system in particular. This process can be illustrated by the quasi-party organizations which emerged in all the countries of the region in the form of loose political clubs rather than parties. An example of that is highly polarized party system in Poland after the elections in 1991, when the lower chamber of Parliament was represented by

[4] In Poland – government and opposition talks, known as "Round Table" talks
[5] Roskin M. *The Emerging Party Systems of Central and Eastern Europe* // East European Quarterly, vol. 27, Nr 1. March 1993. s. 48.

more than two dozens parties, movements, blocs and coalitions[6]. The parties of Central Eastern Europe (except for the post-communist, or "successor parties" to the communist ones) did not have any real experience with political activities, political competition, and party capacity building. Therefore, the concept of parliamentary democracy was not being modernized according to the universal rules of democratization (in prof. Roskin opinion, Hungary was an exception in this pattern, because the communist party was the driving force for the changes there). Parliamentary democracy was being created as a new concept in the political structure of the state, which was based on the institutionalization of party system, newly-shaped electoral space and the principles of political involvement.

Some Russian (A.Melvil, in particular) and European researchers raised the question (which was addressed primarily to the representatives of American political research centers) of the common ground for comparing Southern European and Latin American post-authoritarian transformations and post-communist transformations in Central Eastern Europe. Therefore, the implementation of the transit paradigm in the framework of the research of party system development in these states is not unchallenged.

The process of transformation could not have undergone any universal pattern, which could serve as the basis for theoretical construction or patterned off an objective law of political reality, which was being widely discussed in the research papers and theses of the "third wave of democratization"[7]. Meanwhile, the issue of the objectives and results of the transition itself was put on the agenda. The analysis of contemporary work by both Russian and foreign researchers testifies to the individual, national character of transition results, as the transition from the former, non-democratic environment to a new, different one (Melvil, Ilyin and others). Not denying the inner logics of the transformations (similar scripts and patterns of the institutionalization of the democratic procedures), it's important to emphasize the specific character of political traditions, heterogeneous political environments and the growing pressure from the side of globalizing world.

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[6] See in Chmaj M., Chmaj M. *Sejm „kontraktowy" w transformacji systemu politycznego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*. Lublin, 1996.

[7] See Жуковский И.И., *Партийные системы Вышеградских стран и европейская интеграция. монография*. – Калининград, Изд-во КГУ, 2005. – 118 с.

The second group of research refers to the study of the practical experience of the political systems and parliaments of Central Eastern Europe at the time of political transformations – they are represented by E.Wiatr, G.Golosov, E.Meleshkina, M.Kota, Y.Igritsky, P.Kopetsky, H. Kitschelt, A.Kochetkov, A.Kynev, I.Tarasov, I.Yazhbrovskaya, G.Toka and others[8]. This research was carried out in the framework of comparative (subregional) political studies approaches which enabled the researchers to formulate some universal rules for the studied region in terms of principles of political process development. The comparative theory (considering our research area) focuses on two main aspects of political and political process design. *The first of them is finding out the general and specific features on the regional level in different countries.* The *second one deals with the internal specificity of the political process in the mentioned countries, including issues of the shaping of political parties, dynamics of political involvement, the coalition potential of the parties, and the specific character of parliamentary democracy.*

The fact that the V4 countries have become one of the most interesting areas for the political scientists can be easily explained: these countries

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[8] See См. напраимер: Вятр Е. *Конституционная ответственность в Польше после 1989 года* // Конституционное право: восточноевропейское обозрение. М.: МОНФ, 1996. №2 (15), Голосов Г.В. *Партийные системы России и стран Восточной Европы.* М., Весь мир, 1999., Голосов Г.В. *Форматы партийных систем в новых демократиях: институциональные факторы неустойчивости и фрагментации* // Полис. 1998. № 1., Cotta M. *Building Party Systems after the Dictatorship: The East European Cases in a Comparative Perspective* // Democratization in Eastern Europe: Domestic and International Perspectives. G. Pridham and T. Vanhanen (eds.). L.: Routledge, 1994., Игрицкий Ю. *Становление многопартийности в Восточной Европе в 90-е годы.* М., ИНИОН РАН, 1996., Ишияма Дж. *Партии-преемницы коммунистических и организационное развитие партий в посткоммунистической политике* // Полис. 1999. № 4., Kopecky, P. *Developing Party Organisations in East Central Europe* // Party Politics, № 1 (4), 1995. p. 515-534., Kitschelt, H. *The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe* // Politics and Society, № 20 (1), 1992. p. 7-50., Kitschelt, H. *Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-communist Democracies^ Theoretical Propositions* // Party Politics. Vol. 1. Nr 4. 1995., Kitschelt, Herbert, Mansfeldova, Zdenka, Markowski, Radoslaw, and Toka, Gabor, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation and Inter-Party Cooperation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, Кочетков А.П. *Политические партии и партийные системы* // Вестник Московского университета. Серия 12. Политические науки. 1998, № 6., Кынев А.В. *Воздействие системы государственной власти на особенности системы политических партий* // XXI век: будущее России в философском измерении: материалы Второго Российского философского конгресса (7-11 июня 1999 года). Т.2: Социальная философия и философия политики. 4.2. Екатеринбург: Издательство Уральского Университета, 1999. С.156-157., Тарасов И.Н. *Проблема динамики процесса посттоталитарного развития стран Восточной Европы* // Социально-экономическое развитие России. Проблемы, поиски, решения. - Изд. Центр СГСЭУ. 2000. – с. 51-53., Яжборовская И. *Общественные сдвиги и посткоммунистические партии в Центральной и Восточной Европе* // Форум. Политическая культура и общественные сдвиги. М., 1996., Toka G. *Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in East Central Europe* // Studies in Public Policy, no. 279, 1997.

formerly existed in similar political spaces (people's democracies) and their political, economic and social starting points for modernizing the state have been alike. They constitute a natural area for comparative studies of political space and the evolution of political institutions. Following this trend, we can single out some of the representatives of Russian political comparative studies, whose research contributes a lot to the understanding of the problems in this respect.

Given the national specificity and the historical and cultural grounds for the contemporary political process, the authors agree in the evaluation of the experience of political parties' functioning and the parliamentary decision-making mechanism in general, considering it valuable for the Russian political reality, identifying some solutions in the Czech republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia applicable to the development of Russian party-building and the modification of the legal environment in which the Russian parliament functions[9].

Another popular trend in political research of the region was the *"contract (or agreement) character"* of the beginning of a new political history in the countries of Central Eastern Europe. As a result of change in the political regimes in Central Eastern Europe, a number of countries ceased to exist, and even such painful political processes represented part of the framework of a compromise model of political interest consensus and the practice of political competitiveness implementation. The so-called "agreement character" at the initial stages of the new political history of the countries of Central Eastern Europe became one of the most highly acclaimed research fields for political scientists, both in European countries and among the representatives of American R&D centers and universities.

The research of the party systems of the V4 countries in Russian historiography is often included into a process of a broader, regional analysis.

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[9] Кынев А.В. Институт президентства в странах Центральной и Восточной Европы: сравнительный анализ. Дисс. На соиск. учен. степ. к.п.н. 23.00.02. М., 2002. Кынев А.В. Воздействие системы государственной власти на особенности системы политических партий // XXI век: будущее России в философском измерении: материалы Второго Российского философского конгресса (7-11 июня 1999 года). Т.2: Социальная философия и философия политики. 4.2. Екатеринбург: Издательство Уральского Университета, 1999. С.156-157.Тарасов И.Н. *Проблема динамики процесса посттоталитарного развития стран Восточной Европы* // Социально-экономическое развитие России. Проблемы, поиски, решения. - Изд. Центр СГСЭУ. 2000. – с. 51-53. Тарасов И.Н. *Современный кризис правых партий в Польше* // Социально-экономическое развитие России. Проблемы, поиски, решения. - Изд. Центр СГСЭУ. 2001. – с. 44-48.

Russian researchers tried to find out the specific features of the process of the formation of political institutions in young democracies, defining their research interest through the *theoretical possibility of the implementation of successful practices and decisions in Russian reality*[10]. At the same time, the process of competition between the "parties-successors" and parties, formed for instance, on the Polish political scene as a result of the division in the "Solidarność"[11] became one of the main priorities in Russian historiography. A complex research of party systems of each Visegrad country has not been still finished.

Summing up the analysis of party systems in the countries of Central Eastern Europe, it should be remarked that the main works have a primarily comparative character, offering the political science community the possibility of a quite distinguished perspective of subregional scale. At the same time, according to the author, national and local variations of party system configuration, particular features and specificity of which are not sufficiently worked out at the moment, are not a fully-exhausted area of research. Undoubtedly, the comparative study of parliaments as political institutions in the V4 countries, is simplified by the famous similarity in political cultures of these countries. The existing practice and specificity of political behavior of both political actors and the representatives of political institutions of political systems in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia strongly proves the legitimacy of comparative methodology in the research of elements of political organization of the society, including parliaments.

The study of the processes shaping the modern parliament system in the Visegrad countries is seen as an integral element of a broader research scale – the range of problems of a multiaspect process of sustainable democracy formation in the countries of Central Eastern Europe.

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[10] Тарасов И.Н. *Верхняя палата парламента в процессе посткоммунистической трансформации* // Балтийские исследования. Трансформация социальных и политических институтов: сборник научных трудов / Клуб исследователей Балтийской Европы. Калининград, Изд.-во РГУ им. И. Канта, 2005. – Вып. 3. с. 5-13.

[11] Майорова О.Н. *Правые группировки на польской политической сцене* // Политический ландшафт Восточной Европы середины 9-х годов. М., ИНИОН РАН, 1997.