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AUTHORITARIANISM AS A ‘WICKED PROBLEM’ IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Authoritarianism as a ‘Wicked Problem’ in Contemporary International Relations

This study explores the concept of authoritarianism. The author defines this concept as a form of a political system in which the power and material resources of the state have been centralised, appropriated and put at the disposal of either an individual or an elitist group in power. In this way, the possibilities of integrating the authoritarian state with global international relations are limited, and the vital administrative institutions of the state have been manipulated and appropriated. The applied research method allows for interpreting the discussed issues in a complex – albeit specific – systemic form, characteristic of not only politically fragile or declining countries and regions but also of politically stable and economically developed ones. The author’s analysis presents and reinterprets the issue of contemporary authoritarian regimes in the context of international relations in terms that not only define but often legitimise some of the most despotic, autocratic and hegemonic forms of political systems in modern times.

Keywords: authoritarianism, democracy, dictatorship, political regime, the rule of law, ‘wicked problem’.

INTRODUCTION

The challenging encounters of the international community with authoritative regimes of various domains characterise the basic features of 'wicked problems', especially in the context of the changing global security paradigm. So far, 'wicked problems' have been very controversial due to their complex nature and the difficulty in defining them precisely. Yet in political practice, especially in conflict resolution strategies, actions based on erroneous assumptions, goals and values can have serious consequences (e.g. resolving armed conflicts and complex crises in regional policy). Moreover, attempts to solve 'wicked problems' can have unforeseen consequences. Due to the complexity, interconnectedness, and numerous cause and effect factors contributing to 'wicked problems', attempts to get to the bottom of them – as they are implemented – often reveal new facets of the additional difficulties. Some of these consequences can be negative and cause unexpected harm. In addition, these consequences can provoke further disputes and conflicts about the nature of the problems and what is needed to resolve them. However, it is not practically possible to pre-test any solution.¹

These complications are easily noticeable in the arena of authoritarian states, the context of the legitimacy of power and the international community's responses dealing with the issue of those states, especially those affected by armed conflict. The extensive literature, and numerous documents and discussions of agencies dealing with conflict resolution in authoritarian states, confirm this.² In this context, defining the problem of state instability and fragility is based on several research strands, presenting different but often overlapping views. These include, but are not limited to, analyses in development economics, comparative politics, international relations and conflict studies. The definitions developed by humanitarian organisations, peacekeeping forces, command staff and military analysts present a slightly different perspective.³ Undoubtedly, efforts

¹ Cf. H.W.J. Rittel, M.M. Webber, *Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning*, „Policy Sciences” 1973, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 155–169.

² Cf. Z.K. Brzeziński, C.J. Friedrich, *Totalitarian Regimes and Autocracy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1965; G. O'Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics*, University of California Intl, Berkeley 1973; S.P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 2006.

³ Cf. D. Carment, P. Stewart, S. Yiagadeesen, *Security, Development, and the Fragile State: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Policy*, Routledge, London 2010, pp. 158–190.

to define the 'wicked problems' of authoritarian states have resulted in the development of many analytical tools and methodologies for assessing the situation, as well as the definition of general guidelines relating to crises.⁴

Nevertheless, these issues are significant in political practice, especially regarding International Relations (IR). Therefore, the international community's actions concerning authoritarian regimes based on erroneous assumptions, goals and values can have serious consequences (e.g. the resolution of armed conflicts and complex crises in the regional policy). In a sufficiently blunt manner, the lack of stabilisation and often degenerate condition of state administration structures and the aspect of 'causing conflict' in areas of international politics display the ambiguities of the conceptualisation, i.e. exposing the essence of present-day authoritarian regimes. After all, the proposed concepts concerning policy-building and peace-building processes are widely recognised, and the terminology is still common. In any case, the proper presentation of the problem of contemporary authoritarianism, taking into account its complex specificity, is of great importance to international discourse on political instability in many areas of the modern world, and in the mutual relations between authoritarian countries and the international community in the context of a political economy that allocates significant forces and resources – both material and human – to resolve crises and build a constructive level of mutual understanding and cooperation.⁵

Unfortunately, the term 'wicked problems' regarding authoritarian states cannot be clearly defined. The *differentia specifica* of the problem depends on many different factors, leading to the creation of different concepts and is associated with a pluralistic debate about the nature of specific issues and their potentially constructive solutions. In other words, (1) the 'wicked problems' associated with authoritarian regimes consist of many interdependent factors and cause-effect relationships. These factors are challenging to identify *a priori* and often become apparent only in the context of a specific socio-political situation and particular solutions. The proposed resolutions usually have many – often even contradictory – goals that require reaching 'reasonable'

⁴ Cf. US Agency for International Development (USAID), *Conducting a Conflict Assessment: A Framework for Strategy and Program Development*, Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, Washington, DC, April 2005.

⁵ Cf. J.J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Col. – London 2000.

compromises. As a result, misunderstandings about the causality and objectives of the actions taken contribute to difficulties in defining the problem and developing constructive solutions. In this sense, (2) there are severe difficulties in finding clear and unambiguous answers to the many complex issues surrounding authoritarian regimes. Moreover, even in the case of the applied solutions, the specificity of 'wicked problems' concerning authoritarian regimes seems to go beyond the moral uniqueness and distinctiveness of good and evil. In other words, the solutions proposed in these cases are often 'sufficiently good' factors that are politically determined or conditioned by limited information or material resources.

Referring to research by Horst W.J. Rittel and Melvin W. Webber, who first introduced the term 'wicked problem', the perception of success or failure varies according to stakeholder positions and perspectives. In this sense, every wicked problem is essentially unique.⁶ Therefore, due to the complex interaction of various factors, connections between different aspects of the problem, the specific socio-political context and *a priori* knowledge limitations, the impact of the international community on authoritarian regimes often requires non-standard solutions and the adaptation of appropriate methods that consider the specific socio-political situational context. Moreover, all the relevant aspects of a given problem are rarely visible before an attempt is made to solve it. It requires acquiring appropriate knowledge, the possibility of applying it in practice and the ability to adapt to a dynamically changing political environment.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL TRENDS

After World War II, virtually all countries of the former Soviet bloc, namely Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Eastern and Southeast Europe, as well as the Soviet Union itself and a certain number – at least theoretically – socialist republics in Central, Eastern and Southeast Asia, functioned on a one-party system of local government with a communist or socialist authority. These include European countries such as East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and Yugoslavia in Europe, but also Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. However, the most intriguing member of this group seems to be China, where the Communist Party

⁶ H.W.J. Rittel, M.M. Webber, *Dilemmas...*

managed to make an ideological transformation and survive the end of communism as the ruling party.⁷ In fact, communist countries constituted the largest single group of authoritarian one-party regimes in the twentieth century.

Yet, with the collapse of the Soviet system and the accompanying socio-political de-legitimisation and revolutionary collectivist ideologies, the situation in the world changed radically. After the fall of the 'Iron Curtain' in Europe, some CEE countries democratised and became members of the European Union – several of them, including Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, regained independence, democratised their political systems and became members of the European Union. As a result of the end of the bloody Balkan wars that led to the fall of Yugoslavia, new states appeared on the map of Southeast Europe. Some of them, such as Croatia and Slovenia, joined the EU.⁸ As a result of the systemic transformation, some countries of Central and Eastern Europe took the form of government referred to as the 'hybrid regime', with authoritarian tendencies. These include countries such as Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Moldova and Belarus adopted authoritarian systems of power under presidents who chose to maintain close ties with Russia. During the independence transformation, Ukraine was balanced between democratic and autocratic tendencies.⁹ A similar development took place in Moldova, Georgia and Armenia, and was associated with the emergence of bloody armed conflicts.¹⁰

In Africa, when the colonial era ended in the second half of the twentieth century, many newly independent states quickly found themselves under authoritarian rule. It was only during the last wave of systemic transformation that many of them transformed towards the democratisation of state structures (including Tanzania, Ghana, Botswana, Mali, South Africa and Tunisia).¹¹ In practice, many of

⁷ T. Liu, *The Political Legitimacy of the Communist Party of China from the Perspective of Constitution*, „Asian Journal of Social Science Studies” 2018, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 71–76.

⁸ T. Schumacher, *The Mediterranean as a New Foreign Policy Challenge? Sweden and the Barcelona Process*, „Mediterranean Politics” 2001, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 81–102; P. Roter, A. Bojinović, *Croatia and the European Union: A Troubled Relationship*, „Mediterranean Politics” 2005, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 447–454.

⁹ A. Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 2014, pp. 99–143.

¹⁰ A. Zagorski, *EU Policies towards Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus*, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Geneva 2002; J. Bruder, *The US and the New Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) Since 1991*, in: R. Fawn, *Managing Security Threats along the EU's Eastern Flanks*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2020, pp. 69–97.

¹¹ N. Cheeseman, J. Fisher, *Authoritarian Africa: Repression, Resistance, and the Power of Ideas*, Oxford University Press, New York 2021, pp. 82–86.

the post-independence African political regimes were ruled by single parties with socialist leanings (Angola, Algeria, Ethiopia, Benin, Mozambique, Somalia or the former People's Republic of the Congo) or parties with typically conservative-right views (e.g. Malawi or the former Rhodesia), as well as by nationalist one-party systems (e.g. Burundi, Cameroon or Chad). These parties were often formed during liberation struggles against former colonial powers. Nevertheless, after regaining independence, African states – from the 1960s/1970s to 1990/1991 – constitute some of the most important and thought-provoking resources of various – sometimes quite bizarre – cases useful for the analysis of authoritarian and one-party systems of government power, as well as the most extensive array of different political parties with a Marxist-Leninist origin outside the former 'Soviet bloc'.¹²

In practice, formal one-party governments were only a weakly veiled form of the so-called personalist government based on the clan or tribe. In other words, they were a typical example of neo-patrimonial rule, where the possibility of participating in the structures of power and its profits was associated with belonging to the 'proper' tribal community and loyalty to its patrimonial rule. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the specificity and type of authoritarianism, where – theoretically – one-party governments overlap in practice with personalist governments (a highly distorted power structure). North Korea is the extreme case of this kind of 'formal' one-party government – and is, in fact, an utterly malformed power structure based on personalist control. In this context, formal one-party rule has taken on the bizarre character of an absolutist, personalist monarchy that is 'owned' by the Kim dynasty and its henchmen.¹³ Similar problems can be seen in the Middle East and North Africa region. In this case, the systemic specificity of the Middle East and North African states may become a rich source of inspiration, especially for research on authoritarian issues of a military nature, as well as for analyses of complex civil-military relations. Both in the 1950s/1960s, and especially in the 1980s and 1990s, the countries of the region generally had a one-party system of political authority and, to a large extent, an outright socialist approach that additionally related to Arab nationalist ideology (e.g. Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Syria and South Yemen). However, over time,

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 88–104.

¹³ A. Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, Oxford University Press, New York 2013.

various forms of systemic transformation developed political systems of power specific to this world region, characterised by centralised state administration structures. Their specificity resembled centres of political power typical of the monarchical system of such countries as Morocco, Jordan or countries located in the Persian Gulf region (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain Qatar). Moreover, those Middle Eastern states were not only characterised by militarised one-party governments but also showed features typical of neo-patrimonial regimes – and generally to a much greater extent than in the case of sub-Saharan African countries.¹⁴

Practically from the very moment of their independence at the turn of the 1990s, similar features were displayed by the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. Most of the countries in the region were characterised by a patrimonial system of power based on personalist leadership. Many local political leaders held critical political positions back in the Soviet times. They took office shortly after their countries regained independence.¹⁵ The few exceptions deviating from the regional pattern were Georgia¹⁶ and Armenia,¹⁷ located in the South Caucasus. After years of personalist leadership, Kyrgyzstan also returned to a multi-party system.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the dominant trend in the region was authoritarian personalist dictatorships.

However, these regimes differed from the authoritarian military dictatorial systems typical of Latin America. In fact, the only Latin American country that did not experience long authoritarian rule by military juntas in the twentieth century is Costa Rica.¹⁹ An essential characteristic of such governments was the fact that they were based on personalist leadership. Good examples of this were, for example,

¹⁴ S. Yom, *The Context of Political Life: Geography, Economics, and Social Forces*, in: *Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa: Development, Democracy, and Dictatorship*, ed. S. Yom, Routledge, New York 2020, pp. 39–77.

¹⁵ M. Aydın, *New Geopolitics of Central Asia and the Caucasus; Causes of Instability and Predicament*, Strategic Research Center, Ankara 2000, pp. 1–12.

¹⁶ J. Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, Congressional Research Service Report RL33453, Washington 2014, pp. 39–42.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 34–37.

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, *Political Transition in Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Prospects*, Osh – Brussels 2004; M.A. Blackwood, *Kyrgyz Republic Set to Hold Snap Presidential Election and Constitutional Referendum after Parliamentary Elections Annulled*, Congressional Research Service Report IN11517, Washington 2020.

¹⁹ P.J. Meyer, *Costa Rica: Background and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service Report R40593, Washington 2010.

the governments of Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua,²⁰ Juan Perón in Argentina²¹ and the political regime of the Duvaliers in Haiti, as well as the government administration led by Alberto Fujimori in Peru.²² Nevertheless, the dominant form of government for this region was military dictatorships.

In this context, a significant Latin American experience concerning various types of authoritarianism is direct political involvement by the United States, which, in pursuit of the Truman doctrine of containment of communism, supported many military and civilian dictatorships, mainly right-wing ones. These included the governments of Castillo Armas in Guatemala,²³ Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay,²⁴ Humberto Castelo Branco in Brazil,²⁵ Hugo Banzer Suárez in Bolivia,²⁶ Augusto Pinochet in Chile,²⁷ the military junta under the leadership of Juan María Bordaberry in Uruguay²⁸ and the military rule of the junta led by General Jorge Rafael Videl in Argentina.²⁹

In other words, the late 1970s was a period of autocratic rule by military juntas for most Latin American countries. Admittedly, in the 1980s and 1990s, the political situation of the continent changed, and most regimes of the time underwent a process of democratisation. Nevertheless, in a few cases, mixed types of military juntas, as well as civilian and military bureaucratic political regimes, still existed. These points indicate the need for a scientific reworking of the typology of authoritarian governments and systems. After all, the Latin American experience has contributed to the development of significant academic analyses of the mechanisms of operation and

²⁰ B. Diederich, *Somoza and the Legacy of U.S. Involvement in Central America*, Markus Wiener Publishers, Princeton, NJ 2007, pp. 300–309.

²¹ B. Wulffen, *Das Phänomen Perón: Populismus in Lateinamerika*, Books on Demand, Norderstedt 2018.

²² J.M. Burt, *Violencia y autoritarismo en el Perú. Bajo la sombra de Sendero y la dictadura de Fujimori*, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Lima 2011.

²³ W. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York – London 1993, pp. 76–79.

²⁴ C.R. Miranda, *Stroessner Era: Authoritarian Rule in Paraguay*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO 1990.

²⁵ T.E. Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil, 1964–1985*, Oxford University Press, New York – Oxford 1988, pp. 18–65.

²⁶ W. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions...*, pp. 13–16.

²⁷ P. Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*, The New Press, New York 2013, pp. 161–174.

²⁸ W. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions...*, pp. 13–16.

²⁹ P. Scatizza, *Anti-Subversive Repression and Dictatorship in Argentina: An Approach from Northern Patagonia*, in: *The Argentinian Dictatorship and its Legacy Rethinking the Proceso*, eds. J. Grigera, L. Zorzoli, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2020, pp. 47–66.

specificity of modern authoritarian political systems, in both their bureaucratic and military forms.³⁰

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century in Latin America, there has been a tendency to seize power by authoritarian left-wing governments that have incorporated into their political strategy elements of populist rhetoric and efforts to restore the existing political order (a new form of class struggle, the issue of redistribution of national wealth, etc.).³¹ An excellent example of this leftist regime is Venezuela, under President Hugo Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro.³² Although their presidencies exhaust the features of personalist governments, the dominant aspect of their regimes is a strongly exposed populism.

This century, however, there is a renewed trend towards the return of authoritarian populist rule, this time on the left, which – in combination with anti-American populist rhetoric – can be seen in many Latin American countries. The best example of this is the already-mentioned Venezuela.³³ Although such governments present a typical personalist style of leadership, the defining feature of their rule is the strongly emphasised populism. Although not all populist leaders in Latin America promote a clearly authoritarian political strategy in their governments, populism or neo-populism can now be seen as a significant inspiration for global trends emphasizing populism understood as a critical tool legitimising their political power.³⁴ Moreover, apart from authoritarian concepts highlighting the deliberate dismantling of democratic state structures, enabling the transition to authoritarian rule and the personalisation of hegemonic powers, populism has become one of the most important and intriguing issues in research on the problem of authoritarianism that affects the politics of fragile states, both locally and globally.

In other words, in fragile states, the operation of most political regimes can be characterised as a sort of 'authoritarian arrangement' whereby citizens relinquish their political rights in favour of stability

³⁰ W. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions...*, pp. 87–148.

³¹ J. Auyero, P. Lapegna, F. Page-Poma, *Patronage Politics and Contentious Collective Action: A Recursive Relationship*, „Latin American Politics and Society” 2009, vol. 51, no. 3, pp. 3–22.

³² C. Peñaloza, *Chávez, el delfín de Fidel: la historia secreta del golpe del 4 de febrero*, Alexandria Library, Miami 2014, pp. 379–392; I. Oner, *Nicolas Maduro: A Populist without Popularity*, European Centre for Populist Studies, Brussels 2021, pp. 5–7.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 8–19.

³⁴ V. Morales, M. Barros, *Populismo y derechos ciudadanos: anotaciones sobre un vínculo errante*, „Latinoamérica. Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos” 2018, no. 67, pp. 119–144.

and socio-economic security. However, the possibility of using authoritarian decision-making mechanisms in non-democratic countries has not been thoroughly investigated. Thus, the popularity of authoritarian regimes is a severe analytical challenge for contemporary political scientists and experts on international issues. As the governance systems mentioned above are examples of 'by design' rather than 'by default' authoritarianism, the theories of democratisation of state structures focusing on obstacles and preconditions determining the formation of a constructive democratisation process cannot accurately explain this trend.

AUTHORITARIANISM IN ITS DIVERSITY AND MULTIDIMENSIONALITY

Based on political pragmatism, authoritarianism concerning most fragile states can be defined as a specific type of political agreement – a repetitive game between the citizen and the authoritarian power that seeks to legitimise its political actions, in which economic benefits and political rights are determined by the costs incurred by the political regime to provide the citizen with the proper goods and services. However, the above 'contract' ceases to function in the event of a persistent armed conflict, a military coup or intensely repressive and despotic dictatorships. The fact that authoritarian regimes enjoy considerable public support suggests that their rule does not remain in power solely through repression or other forms of – more or less – masked persuasion. So what are the sources of the persistence of authoritarian regimes in fragile states? The argument analysed in this article is that authoritarian regimes persist thanks to sufficient authoritarian legitimacy as measured by the degree of subordination and compliance with the political strategy presented and implemented by their governments.

It is a process inscribed and justified on a broader spectrum of attitudes, aspirations, beliefs, values and social expectations. However, it is about several ways of ruling that are not only typical of authoritarian regimes – such as, for example, various control strategies, symbolic violence or various forms of social and psychological technics. The mass media play an essential role here, creating, among other things, social divisions and political strategies of the 'divide and rule' type. In this context, all authoritarian regimes must resolve two fundamental

issues. First, dictators fear threats from the masses they rule. This is the problem of authoritarian control. The second, separate challenge to authoritarian power is the co-governance of the political elite. It is a problem of the authoritarian division of powers. Most importantly, however, the solution to these issues is shaped in a distorted public life space in which authoritarian politics takes place. In other words, in authoritarian systems, no independent authority can enforce agreements between crucial political actors, and violence is the final arbiter of the conflicts that arise.

According to Juan J. Linz, authoritarian regimes (1) adopt a limited, non-responsible form of political pluralism, as opposed to the political monism of totalitarian regimes and the essentially unlimited pluralism of democratic systems; (2) do not have an extensive ideology – unlike totalitarian regimes – but instead exhibit distinct mentalities; (3) do not use extensive or intensive political mobilisation of the civil society, unlike totalitarian regimes – except at some points in their development – but are characterised by civic 'political apathy', unlike in democratic systems where citizens are expected to engage politically and participate in public debates;³⁵ (4) are characterised by political governance exercised either by a single leader or by a small leadership group, where power is exercised within formally ill-defined limits (as opposed to democracy, where power is exercised within a limited arrangement of guaranteed rights and freedoms, and an official system of checks and balances), but which are, in fact, somewhat predictable (as opposed to the unpredictability of state terror exercised by totalitarian regimes).³⁶

As seen from these considerations, authoritarianism is fundamentally different from totalitarianism, which is also undemocratic. In the authoritarian system, the rulers control only state structures without exercising absolute omnipotence over society. In this sense, authoritarian power is usually satisfied with dominion itself, and the object of its aspiration is exclusively political government. Therefore, in authoritarianism, only politics is a restricted area, and outside of it, there is relative freedom. The rulers seem to say: leave us political power; do what you want on other

³⁵ J.J. Linz, *An Authoritarian Regime: Spain*, in: *Cleavages, Ideologies, and Party Systems: Contributions to Comparative Political Sociology*, eds. E. Allardt, Y. Littunen, The Academic Bookstore, Helsinki 1964, pp. 297–298.

³⁶ J.J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO 2000, pp. 263–265.

issues. Authoritarianism is, in effect, a somewhat defensive system. It rigorously controls politics, while other areas of public life are not the subject of the rulers' aspirations. Authoritarian governments tell citizens what they are not allowed to do, and what is not forbidden becomes permitted. Authoritarianism must not be motivated by a totalitarian ideology, and the authoritarian state does not try to disseminate a specific system of political ideas deemed only proper. Authoritarianism is thus fundamentally different from totalitarianism, which is an undemocratic political system.

However, authoritarianism as a system of exercising political power may differ depending on the time and place, assumptions made and goals pursued. Yet it retains its essential features. It is characterised by the fact that, under authoritarian systemic conditions, political power is not chosen in free elections or is not derived from the consent of the ruled and – as such – is not subject to social control. This kind of systemic invariability of authoritarianism separates it from democracy, which is multi-faceted and functions not only at the systemic level but also at the level of sources and foundations. In other words, democracy is dynamic, while authoritarianism and despotism are static and – in their essence – always unchanging. The most primordial systems of power that emerged at the dawn of humanity were generally authoritarian. However, similar principles of exercising power characterise contemporary extreme forms of authoritarianism. The common denominator here was always the same: an imposed authority based on force was not subject to the control of the community members within which it operated.

Authoritarian regimes are based on institutions that ensure the permanence and irrefutability of the ruling power. There is limited political pluralism in countries controlled by an authoritarian regime, provided that the entire society is not opposed to the political leaders. Ideology, displaced here by the features of the authoritarian personality, does not play a significant role, nor does the formal and legal definition of the scopes and methods of exercising power by a leader or an exclusive in-group exercising authority. The efficiency of the government apparatus capable of neutralising opposition is high, as is the political passivity of a society controlled by censorship and – *de facto* – deprived of the possibility of choosing power.

EXPLICITNESS, PARTICULARITY AND DISSIMILARITIES

The classifications of authoritarianism can be various, as it is easy to identify many differentiating criteria. Depending on the main political goal of the regime, one can speak of reactionary, conservative and revolutionary authoritarianism. Reactionary authoritarianism is rare. It is represented by a system inconsistent with existing reality and wants to restore the old political and social solutions, which are already widely regarded as archaic.³⁷ Conservative authoritarianism is a system referring primarily to the unity of the nation, proclaiming the value of the state and often manifesting a deep attachment to tradition and religion. This authoritarianism regards itself as a guardian of order and traditional values that it intends to defend against various innovations and social experiments. On the other hand, revolutionary authoritarianism aims to destroy the system of power based on the traditional values and principles of socio-political performance, and build a new radical order. Overall, such political systems usually have deep-seated 'leftist predilections'. Revolutionary authoritarianism as a form of rule prevailed in many Third World countries in the postcolonial era.³⁸

Considering this taxonomy, authoritarianism, understood as a political system – along with the radicalisation of its character – gradually increases the intensity of applied coercion as well as restrictions of civil liberties. However, the above process takes various forms: authoritarian democracy, multiple forms of dictatorship, totalitarianism, etc. Thus, there are numerous arrangements of authoritarian political regimes: always authoritarian (despots, dictatorships), almost always authoritarian (theocracies, absolute monarchies, military autocracies), often authoritarian (fascist states, socialist states) and only sometimes authoritarian (authoritarian democracies). However, the concept of authoritarianism, which as a concept is too broad and imprecise, blurs the possibility of a clear division of the system of authorities into democratic and authoritarian ones.³⁹ However, this kind of imprecision results primarily from the common belief that all power can – and should – pretend to be an

³⁷ R. Ficek, *Tanzania. Narodziny i funkcjonowanie państwa*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2007, pp. 199–208.

³⁸ B. Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930–1975*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 2004.

³⁹ J.J. Linz, *Totalitarian...*, pp. 159–261.

authority. In the concept of authoritarianism, one can distinguish between the positive sense of authoritarianism, consistent with the idea of a democratic system, and the negative – the anti-democratic denotation of authoritarianism. Nevertheless, tied closely to democratic standards, genuine freedom accepts authority just as proper authority recognises the need for freedom. In other words, an authority that does not somehow develop freedom and independence to one or another extent becomes authoritarian.⁴⁰

Authoritarianism, as a rule, does not recognise the necessity of political diversity, which appears abnormal and threatening to those in power. Therefore, one of the features of this type of regime is its eternal struggle with the ‘real enemy’ or – if there is no such enemy – the imaginary one. Usually, but not necessarily, such systems also exist through violence. By establishing governments that are not responsible to society and by permanently guaranteeing power and privileges to a few, authoritarianism is constantly under threat, and rulers are inevitably accompanied by a fear of the end of their power and control. This fear becomes a special kind of energy that continually increases the use of violence in government practice. As a result, an authoritarian system exists if the legitimising force that supports it persists. When it breaks down, this system is doomed to collapse. The above regularity also fully applies to totalitarianism. Why some authoritarian regimes remain stable while others fail is worth asking in this context.

As a result, referring to the research aimed at clarifying the durability and longevity of authoritarian political systems, it is necessary to emphasise the importance and significance of the three pillars of stability: legitimacy, repression and co-optation. In this context, co-optation refers to the process of ‘inviting new members to join an elite ‘power-holding’ group, usually with the aim of managing the opposition and thus maintaining the stability of the political regime. Yet outsiders are ‘co-opted’ by assigning a degree of power based on their elite status, expertise or potential abilities relevant to achieving assumed commitments and programme goals.⁴¹ Of particular importance here is including the legitimacy issue to explain the functioning of politically

⁴⁰ G. Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, Chatham House Publishers, Chatham, NJ 1987, pp. 185–189.

⁴¹ J. Gerschewski, *The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes*, „Democratization” 2013, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 13–38.

stabilised autocracies.⁴² The analyses were carried out to confirm that the processes that strengthen statehood occur within and between the three pillars of stability mentioned above. In other words, these functions are based on exogenous enhancement, self-enhancement and mutual enhancement.

FORMS AND METHODS OF AUTHORITARIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTROL

Maintaining social control is a fundamental issue for not only authoritarian systems of power but also for any political system, international relations and all socio-political life. A requirement for public order is a prerequisite for social integration and realising critical political goals in each country. Nevertheless, attempts to create socio-political stabilisation, as well as internal order, are associated with imposing a single value system on the entire diverse society, which may become a source of severe conflicts and violence.

This is because all power systems use rules that regulate and govern the behaviour of various actors from the political spectrum. They include multiple types of laws, directives or standards that differ in not only the degree to which they are respected and valued but also the reasons for their observance. Therefore, coercion, self-interest and legitimacy are classic forms of social control. Each of these forms generates compliance – or non-compliance – with the rules of functioning of the society through a different – alternative – control mechanism. While each of these forms can be analytically separated from the others, in practice, they are rarely found in pure form. In fact, in an authoritarian state, they function at various levels, as well as in specific conditions – depending on specific situations and socio-political strategies – in both form and content.

One of the primary forms of maintaining power and social control is a coercive strategy based on the threat of using force – including military force – to influence decision-making by political opponents. Coercion refers to the relationship of asymmetric party-political power between actors in the political arena. However, this asymmetry is used as persuasion aimed at changing the behaviour of the weaker

⁴² A. Dukalskis, J. Gerschewski, *What Autocracies Say (and what Citizens Hear): Proposing four Mechanisms of Autocratic Legitimation*, „Contemporary Politics” 2017, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 251–268.

party. The operational mechanism of oppression is fear, or 'coercion'. In this sense, fear breeds consent. An actor from the political spectrum who obeys the rule because of coercion is motivated by the fear of punishment from the stronger side of the political dispute. Regardless of the political system and the type of power, coercion as a political strategy involves actions that a given state – not even necessarily authoritarian – takes against other, usually hostile, state or non-state entities. It is to prevent 'malevolent' entities from acting against a given state (deterrence strategy) or – on the positive side – to force them to take appropriate action (compulsion strategy). In practice, coercion takes the form of threats or the possibility of using military force to deter the opponent. From the analytical point of view, coercion is something other than persuasion, the use of brute force, or declarations of war and authorisations for the full use of military intervention⁴³

Mainly, coercion is expressed through the strategy of either deterrence or compulsion. However, compulsion appears to be much more challenging to implement successfully in political practice than the concept of deterrence. The main reason is the difficulty of persuading 'hostile' political actors to withdraw from their actions. One of the most noteworthy systematisations of the coercion concept distinguishes between several strategies of 'punishing' political adversaries, increasing the risk of possible hostile actions on the part of the enemy, as well as preventing hostile entities from achieving their strategic goals. Therefore, efficient coercive diplomacy operations can, in many cases, have a deterrent impact on other states or non-state actors. At the same time, the reputation for a lack of determination can undermine a deterrence strategy as well as the effectiveness of a national security strategy.⁴⁴ The specificity of the application of this principle is irrelevant, except as an indication of what behaviour will – and will not – be associated with punishment. If a socio-political system relies on coercion to motivate adherence to its rules, it must

⁴³ T.S. Sechser, *A Bargaining Theory of Coercion*, in: *Coercion: The Power to Hurt in International Politics*, eds. K.M. Greenhill, P. Krause, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2018, pp. 55–76.

⁴⁴ Effective coercive diplomacy is expressed in a clear demonstration of potential threats resulting from – possible – hostile actions against a given country, which is also associated with many factors determining the effectiveness and expansion of the application of successful coercion. Cf. D. Byman, M. Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2002, pp. 10–24; R.J. Art, K.M. Greenhill, *Coercion: An Analytical Overview*, in: *Coercion: The Power...*, pp. 3–32.

commit enormous resources to enforce submission to the authority and oversight of opposition circles, which is not easy for most fragile states.⁴⁵

The importance of the coercion issue for the entire model of maintaining power and control of society by authoritarian systems is related to marking a clear pole (extremum) on the whole triad of social control mechanisms (coercion, self-interest and legitimacy). The emphasis on various threats (internal as well as external) and the effectiveness of the state in generating this measure of social compliance takes place at the expense of paying attention either to the normative content of the rules or to more complicated calculations of self-interest by individual actors from the political spectrum. Coercion is a relatively simple form of social control and, as such, appears to be ineffective from the point of view of the central government. It generally does not result in voluntary submission. Moreover, coercion and repression tend to generate various kinds of trauma and strengthen the attitude of resistance. Even if, in the short term, they cause submission, such behaviour is directed against the normative premises inspiring the actions of citizens or social groups subordinate to the state.⁴⁶

As a result, any use of coercion entails a disproportionate burden on valuable – albeit limited – social capital and reduces the likelihood that an individual or a society will comply without referring again to the use of coercion in the future. For this reason, few authoritarian systems rely primarily on coercive measures. However, in some situations, all political systems must consider the need to use force. Nevertheless, coercion and repression are costly mechanisms of controlling society. Additionally, they are entirely unfit to regulate activities requiring citizens to display any form of creativity or enthusiasm. In other words, political stability and social orders based on coercion have a strong tendency over time, either to collapse because of their own instability or to limit the use of coercive measures by seeking to legitimise their political strategies and create predictable and constructive expectations among civil society.⁴⁷

The second possible form of controlling civil society is fostering people's belief that submission to an authoritarian state promotes

⁴⁵ S. Tretyakov, *The Concept of Legal Coercion and Power-Conferring Legal Regimes*, „Russian Law Journal” 2017, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 35–37.

⁴⁶ M. Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1987, pp. 40–48.

⁴⁷ S. Tretyakov, *The Concept...*, pp. 44–45.

their own interests. It is often assumed in social sciences that such calculations of self-interest are the basis for the functioning of most social institutions. This view suggests that any rule followed by individuals is the result of an instrumental and calculated appraisal of the practical benefits of following – or not following – politically correct rules. However, it relates to a highly instrumental approach to social structures and other people. Therefore, the task of the authoritarian state apparatus is to develop and compile coherent elements of the political strategy in such a way that citizens themselves consider it the most rational and attractive option in the process of shaping effective state administration structures. If the authoritarian power properly shapes and manages the stimuli intensifying the control of the civil society in terms of its own benefit, self-interest should allow for the stable coexistence of even very different socio-political structures. In the context of an authoritarian state, socio-political interaction is shaped as a form of exchange, and the resulting obligation as a kind of contract. Individual decisions are calculated to maximise profits, and administrative organisations are the pillars of the cumulative principal-agent contractual relationship. Therefore, the fundamental political act is consenting to a contract.⁴⁸

However, self-interest must be clearly defined as a valuable and functional category encompassing a wide range of state-civil society relations. Boundaries covering self-interest issues need to be clearly indicated so as not to cover all other elements relevant to civil society control. In this sense, self-interest is related to coercion because both categories are forms of utilitarianism. When an actor is presented with a situation of choice that involves threats of retaliation or where others have manipulated the available options, the models of self-interest and coercion will follow the same logic and predict the same outcome: a risk-neutral political actor should compare the benefits that can be obtained with the cost of the penalty multiplied by the probability of criminal sanctions. In other words, these two types of solutions are expressed in the fact that the basis of the obligation to comply with standards is prudence.⁴⁹ The reverse of this thesis is the so-called logic of deterrence. In other words, self-interest involves self-limitation on the actor's part, while coercion works through external restraint.

⁴⁸ D.O. Sears, C.L. Funk, *The Role of Self-Interest in Social and Political Attitudes*, „Advances in Experimental Social Psychology” 1991, vol. 24, pp. 26–39.

⁴⁹ D.P. Ellis, *The Hobbesian Problem of Order: A Critical Appraisal of the Normative Solution*, „American Sociological Review” 1971, vol. 36, no. 4, p. 695.

It expresses a significant difference in understanding the complex structure of incentives on government and the resulting acceptance of the required civil society. In other words, the model of coercion is only interested in the threat and use of physical violence. In contrast, the self-interest model can be boiled down to several essential factors of social and psychological nature, physical stimuli and many other factors that discourage the acceptance of the proposed solutions.⁵⁰

On the other hand, the distinction between self-interest and legitimacy can be seen in the difference between interest understood as *bonum commune* and strict self-interest. All three models (coercion, self-interest and legitimacy) assume that the actors from the political spectrum are 'interested' in pursuing their welfare, and, therefore, self-interest must contain more elements. The actors are concerned about acting rationally when they pursue their goals, but one does not know *a priori* what the plans are and whether they serve the national *raison d'état* in the long run. In this context, what counts is what results from the calculation of possible benefits and the situation in which the actor defines it. Does the actor take for granted the existing structure of relations and institutions and try to improve his position in it, or does he imagine his situation as unique at every point of the decision and try to make it as favourable as possible? The former implies actions aiming at the status quo, in which at least some rules or relationships are accepted and generally unquestioned. The realisation of interests occurs within a structure that the actor takes for granted. Here, one can say that the actor is 'interested'. The latter indicates 'self-interest' in the strict sense of the word, which means a continual reassessment of each principle and relationship from an instrumental point of view – nothing is certain or nurtured gratuitously, only for one's own benefit. This position is fixed, not variable. Self-interest is necessarily amoral in relation to obligations to others; others are mere objects to be used instrumentally. It does not exclude cooperative behaviour.⁵¹

A society where adherence to the rules is primarily based on members' self-interest will exhibit several distinctive features. First, any loyalty of the actors to the system or its rules will be determined by whether the political system provides benefits. Actors continually calculate the expected profit from staying in the structure and are

⁵⁰ D.O. Sears, C.L. Funk, *The Role of Self-Interest...*, pp. 67–82.

⁵¹ Ch. Jencks, *Varieties of Altruism*, in: *Beyond Self-Interest*, ed. J. Mansbridge, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1990, pp. 54–67.

ready to abandon it immediately if any alternative promises more benefits. Such a system may be stable when the arrangement of 'profitability' guarantees the appropriate profits. In this way, 'selfish' actors from the political spectrum will be more inclined towards revisionism than to shaping the political *status quo*. Second, long-term relationships between stakeholders are difficult to maintain because actors do not value the relationship itself, only the benefits it brings.⁵² Consequently, a socio-political system based mainly on narrow self-interest will be unstable and politically less integrated.

Another form of control of civil society is the belief in the normative legitimacy of the principles and rules shaped by the legitimate organs of state power – in this case, the structure of the authoritarian state. Thus, legitimacy contributes to the political coherence and credibility of power structures providing a fundamental reason why citizens should follow established rules. When a citizen is convinced that the rules are legitimate, the question of compliance is no longer motivated by the mere fear of retribution or the calculation of self-interest but rather by an inner sense of moral duty. In this context, legitimacy can be defined as a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions.⁵³

An essential aspect of the legitimation process is the internalisation by citizens of external content and standards presented by power structures. In other words, the internalisation of the legitimation process is characterised by the fact that the outer sphere constitutes the sense of one's own interests in the civil society – at the intersubjective level – defining the set of laws, norms and rules present and functioning in the community. The above set of standards and regulations will be legitimate in the dimension of civil society if citizens internalise its content and realise the importance and specificity of their specific interests in the context of superior and objectively functioning political principles and rules.

Certainly, legitimacy as a tool of social control is much more effective. It has a definite advantage over coercion, especially in reducing execution costs and creating citizens' apparent 'freedom' – although it seems to be more expensive in the short term. Moreover,

⁵² D. Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, Macmillan Education, Houndmills – Basingstoke – Hampshire 1991, p. 27.

⁵³ M.C. Suchman, *Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches*, „Academy of Management Review” 1995, vol. 20, no. 3, p. 574.

legitimacy is not essential to maintaining social control. Nevertheless, the lack of legitimacy imposes high costs on the administration of the authoritarian state. Legality facilitates the operation of socio-political organisations that require enthusiasm, faithfulness, loyalty, discretion and organisational dispersion, as well as sound judgement. Because it is so problematic, societies will seek to subject it to justifiable rules. The powerful will aim to secure consent to their power from at least the most important among their subordinates.⁵⁴ In other words, 'the maintenance of social order depends on the existence of a set of overarching rules of the game, rules that are to some degree internalised, or considered to be legitimate, by most actors. Not only do these rules set goals, or preferences, for each member of society, but they also specify the appropriate means by which these goals can be pursued.'⁵⁵

Indeed, coercion, self-interest and legitimacy relationships are undoubtedly complex and rarely exist in their pure, idealised form. Historically, they have a similar model and elements because most social structures first emerged from a relationship of coercion or individual self-interest. Nevertheless, once established, they can evaluate and shape the development of various forms of legitimacy. It is sometimes suggested that legitimacy is a derivative of coercion because the social consensus on which legitimacy rests can also be created by force and coercion. Many legitimate power relationships widely accepted today began in their genesis as coercive relationships (this applies to virtually all modern liberal-democratic states).

Nevertheless, the smooth functioning of the authoritarian system seems to be one of the most motivating forms of legitimising regimes. It does not mean, however, that legitimacy and coercion are the same phenomena. Even if legitimising power began as coercion, legitimacy itself – as a product of internalisation – works differently from the power relationship from which it emerged. Regardless of its origin, the structures of legitimate power relations function differently from structures of coercion or self-interest.

CONCLUSION

At present, the international community is faced with many demanding, multidimensional and often daunting challenges in both foreign policy and global security strategy. It is concerned primarily

⁵⁴ D. Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power...*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ M. Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity...*, p. 13.

about several threats posed by authoritarian regimes, including the issue of trade wars, international terrorism, nuclear weapons proliferation, the uncontrolled arms race, the illegal arms trade, the possible spread of various types of pandemics, broadly understood 'ecology' or multiple kinds of political and economic pressures aimed particularly at fragile and politically unstable states. While confronting these aspects of life in authoritarian regimes is essential, Western liberal democracies are also faced with a much more severe and paramount problem that – in the long run – may hamper the fundamental issues defining liberal-democratic doctrine and the systemic specificity of Western states.

Even today, contemporary scientific centres analysing the current trends in international politics emphasise the strategic importance of many significant challenges posed by confrontation with the political doctrine of authoritative regimes. Such challenges include not only a direct threat to the functioning of liberal democracies (e.g. military interventions, economic pressure, propaganda war, various forms of political pressure, etc.), but also attempts to depreciate, discredit, question and – as a consequence – replace democratically liberal norms (e.g. promoting authoritarian regulations, models, norms, and ideas), as well as activities aimed at destabilising and slowly deconstructing the current international order based on the liberal-democratic vision of the rule of law.

One can spot the promotion of authoritarian ideas by contemporary autocratic regimes, with emphasis on the current military conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Therefore, there is a danger that authoritarian forces will become much stronger and more assertive, and Western countries may become weaker, politically less effective and dispersed. In this way, international politics may also become a less friendly environment for liberal-democratic ideas shaping the current *status quo* in the dimension of global politics. In such a situation, the democratic states of the West will be forced to give up their areas of influence, or they will have to take the risk of a military confrontation. In the face of competition with the populist ideas of authoritarian states and an intensified propaganda war, liberal-democratic values and – consequently – the authority of the Western world basing its foreign policy on the paradigm of liberal-democratic values, may become compromised.

Moreover, the risk of a confrontation with authoritarian states threatens ideological coherence and integrated cooperation between

Western states, which will be afraid to accept the growing costs of 'excluding' themselves from the influence of authoritarian states (e.g. dependence on natural resources), or take the risk of engaging in military competition. Thus, intensified efforts to separate Western powers from each other will negatively impact mutual international cooperation, which may pose a real threat to strategic alliances, both transatlantic and European ones, in the vital area of foreign and security policy. It will force a paradigm shift in virtually all dimensions of the state's functioning. The entire area of economic activity will have to be subjected to intensified efforts to forge divisions, and thus to separate the Western powers from one another, breaking down historic alliances. Western organisations and companies will be forced – one way or another – to adopt appropriate procedures, norms, rules and expectations that will be increasingly influenced by the economic concepts of authoritarian states and will inevitably impact the global specificity of international relations.

Individual authoritarian states, as well as their decision-makers, will be able to build sufficiently strong structures of mutual acceptance and support, both economically and politically. Analysing the current international situation, as these pressures develop, the multipolar political order now taking shape seems to be less based on liberal-democratic principles. The answer to the despotic tendencies of authoritarian regimes should, as a result, be multidimensional.

Therefore, liberal-democratic states should develop appropriate action strategies. What is more, it is necessary to focus on cooperation that involves the determination and constructive approach of action among civil society –ideologically, politically or economically – strengthening internal stability and determination in implementing its development initiatives. Fragility, stagnation and internal divisions in liberal democracies enable authoritarian states to shape alternative undemocratic norms and procedures in international politics, thus negatively affecting their Western rivals. Solving the political disputes and economic problems underlying these misunderstandings and conflicts seems to be the most effective way of defending against the authoritarian tendencies of political opponents. However, more radical measures are required in the short and medium term.

In the interests of democratic liberal political systems, a renewal, restructuring and improvement of historically strategic alliances are required. Western democracies are united in an integrated system of institutions operating internationally. Therefore, the challenge posed

by authoritarian political systems calls for the effective use of the ties between the countries of the West even in the case of differences and issues of dispute (e.g. the diverse nature and complexity of international trade). In other words, liberal-democratic states need to go beyond crises and focus on lasting historical alliances that condition effective economic development and political stabilisation both locally and internationally.

In today's globalised world, liberal democracies are forced to compete in all spheres of political and economic life. International rules, principles and norms play an essential role here. The threat to the liberal order does not only affect countries with established liberal-democratic political systems but also other regions of the world, as well as international institutions operating on a global scale. In this sense, liberal democracies need a positive and effective programme to engage in the global competition to take over new areas of influence. In other words, liberal-democratic systems must work out an appropriate development strategy that is also attractive to countries devoid of a democratic state of law. It would be an excellent alternative to authoritarian regimes' demanding and expansive policies. A vital expression of this is the political initiative and commitment to international relations, increasing expenditure on the promotion and support of the concept of a democratic state of law, as well as human rights, and – above all – effective administrative structures of the rule of law, both locally and internationally.

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