Three Stages, Three Groups and Three Paradigms of Post-Soviet Transformation

TIGRAN TOROSYAN
Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences, Armenia

HAYK SUKIASYAN
Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences, Armenia

Even two decades after the start of the post-Soviet transformation, discussions on theoretical grounds of that process are still ongoing. While a decade ago it was possible to unequivocally assert that it is not the continuation of the third wave of democratisation and that the theories and models of regime transitions, recorded before the collapse of the USSR, can only to a first approximation be applied to the post-Soviet transformation study, later doubt was cast upon the existence of a general paradigm for the process. Nevertheless, several patterns are evident in the process, and the article examines the modelling possibility of that exceptionally complex and multivector process.

Keywords
 Post-Soviet transformation, democratisation, regimes, stages, paradigms

Post-Soviet Transformation: Continuation of the Third Wave or a New Phenomenon?

The first estimates regarding the essence of the post-Soviet transformation phenomemon, brought forth after the collapse of the USSR, were overly optimistic. Even experts, well-informed of previous transition processes, did not see a need for specific approaches, and applied existing theories and models in order to analyse and interpret it. S. Huntington[1], in particular, considered it a minor twilight continuation of the third wave of

---

[1] **Huntington S.** The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century. Norman and London, University of Oklahoma Press. 1991.

democratisation, leading to the steady establishment of democratic regimes in the countries undergoing that process. As A. Melville mentions, many researchers, describing and analysing political developments in the world, understood modern political transformations exceptionally in the framework of clear linear logic – transition from authoritarianism to a consolidated democracy[2]. It is no coincidence that in the paradigm formulated from the results of the first decade of that process, a key role was assigned to elections[3]. Indeed, elections are an important mechanism for assessing the post-Soviet transformation process and its achievements; namely because directly involved in this process are political powers representing both the government and the opposition simultaneously, all the government bodies – legislative, executive and judicial – and the quality of elections can be considered an assessment of their integral activity. However, already at the beginning of the early 2000s, it became clear that in the paradigm of such a complex, system-creating and multivector process, elections cannot have a crucial role given that solutions to problems depend not only on autorities activities, but on the efficiency of state and public structures, structures as yet either incompletely formed or defective. Through elections it is possible to change only the autorities, but not improve the nature of structures. It is no coincidence that one and a half decades after the beginning of the process, an idea of a new paradigm was proposed, assigning key importance to a system-building structure – the multiparty system[4]. Others questioned the existence of a general or prevailing paradigm for the post-Soviet transformation, considering it a myth[5]. It was becoming obvious that the third wave of democratisation and the post-Soviet transformation are various phenomena, and the following at least five essential differences between these processes play an essential role:

- post-Soviet transformation has a dual nature: both pluralistic democracy and a market economy should be created on its basis, while in the countries of the third wave, the grounds of especially the second nature were

---

[2] **Melville A.,** On the Trajectory of Post-Communist Transformations, *Polis*, 2004, 2, 65-75. (in Russian)

[3] **Carothers T.,** The End of the Transition Paradigm, *Journal of Democracy*, 2002, 13, 1, pp. 6-21.

[4] Ibid

[5] **Gans-Morse J.,** Searching for Transitologists: Contemporary Theories of Post-Communist Transitions and the Myth of a Dominant Paradigm, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 2004, 20, 4, pp. 320-349.

present,

- the third wave included countries with lower socio-economic and industrial levels, where it was easier to implement privatisation and a social development strategy,

- a national issue did not exist in the countries of the third wave, while the overwhelming majority of post-Soviet states had to cope with that challenge as well,

- one can speak about the existence of a civil society in post-Soviet transformation countries with too much reservation, at embryonic stage levels; moreover, they were hearths of nongovernmental instability rather than mechanisms for compromise solutions to problems,

- the international situation in the 1970s was more favourable and stable than that in the 1990s.[6]

These differences suggest that the two processes have completely different natures, therefore, the differences of problems, faced by the countries and societies involved in the process, are essential. What is more, various measures, approaches and models are required for the solution of essentially different problems. Thus, in the initial phase of post-Soviet transformation, when state and public structures were just being formed, and the countries undergoing this process had the same problems, it was possible to use a common paradigm and already existing principles and models, established concerning the third wave of democratisation. However, during the next stage of developmental path selection for each country, it was necessary to apply models and theories developed for that unprecedented process; moreover, no longer in the framework of a single paradigm, but for each group of countries having chosen different paths.

The End of the Common Stage and the Selection of Diverging Paths: A Three-Element Process with Three Possible Outcomes

Several events of 2004 finally confirmed opinions that the post-Soviet transformation cannot be viewed as the continuation of the third wave of democratisation. It is a unique process, which for different groups of countries, has various courses and directions with completely different outcomes. After the large-scale expansion of the European Union, as well as

---

[6] **Terry S.,** Thinking about Post-Communist Transition: How Are They? *Slavic Review*, 1993, 52, 2, pp. 333-337.

after "colour revolutions"[7] in several countries, post-Soviet states were divided into three groups according to their trajectories and emerging future:

- new EU member states that had formed democratic regimes,
- countries that had declared the formation of democratic regimes a constitutional goal, had accomplished some results in that direction, but still retained a number of essential features of authoritarianism,
- countries that were moving towards deepening authoritarianism, and some of them – towards the establishment of totalitarian regimes.

Obviously, while during the first decade of the transformation of these countries, they may have had a number of common features, and general theories could have been used for the evaluation, interpretation and prediction of their progression, it would become more and more difficult afterwards. Moreover, dividing countries into the aforementioned three groups allows to state that for the countries in the first and third groups, post-Soviet transformation can be considered accomplished because the development problems, typical of these countries, and their study are quite comparable to problems and their study that existed both before post-Soviet transformation and today in dozens of other countries, and there is no need to process a paradigm or theory. The countries in the first group, in particular, should already be considered in the same plane with other EU member states, with their specific problems and development opportunities. The problems of countries in the third group do not differ significantly from problems in other countries having deep-rooted authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, and their courses can later be observed out of the plane of post-Soviet transformation. The situation is different for the countries in the second group, among which Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, and according to the estimates of some experts, also Azerbaijan – with a number of reservations – can be classifed. It is no coincidence that exactly these countries are included in the EU "New Neighbourhood Policy" (launched in 2004) and "Eastern Partnership" (launched in 2008) projects. The choice of democracy as a type of regime is still possible for those countries. However, as V. Gelman mentions, previously used democratisation models of political transformation analysis in post-Soviet societies are obviously insufficient for understanding the processes of

---

[7] **Torosyan T., Vardanyan A.,** "Color Revolutions": antecedents and consequences, Public Governance, 2005, 3, pp. 90-101. (in Armenian)

transformation in these countries[8]. T. Karozers's conclusion was much more radical: the study of the post-Soviet transformation experience through the previously formed transition theory is inefficient and should be denied[9].

It should be noted that those estimates were formulated in the early 2000s, when economies began stabilising and demonstrating signs of development of the aforementioned countries in the second group, and structures were almost completely formed, etc. However, A. Melville, quite fairly noted that although institutional stability and regime consolidation may provide some gains, in themselves they are far from constituting a consolidated liberal democracy[10].

According to Carothers, as a result of post-Soviet transformation, in the early 2000s, delegative democracies[11] were formed, which are not only certain hybrid political regimes[12] that incorporate separate elements and attributes of democratic and authoritarian regimes, but are also false democracies, which merely simulate some of the formal attributes of a democracy (for example, elections and a multiparty system)[13]. One of the reasons behind the temporary success of such simulations is the lack of effective research tools and approaches and the difficulties of processing solutions for specific issues. The primitive application of Western models, for the purpose of solving post-Soviet transformation problems, leads to the formation of formal structures doomed to failure, and afterwards – to political crises, major social upheavals, political polarisation, etc.[14] As with other complex processes aimed at developing systems, in the case of post-Soviet transformation, mechanistic thinking is not applicable[15]. It is no coincidence that even two decades later, approaches and paradigms related

---

[8] **Gelman V.,** Post-Soviet Political Transformations, *Polis,* 2001, 1, pp. 15-29. (in Russian)

[9]**Carothers T.,** A sober look at democracy, *Pro et Contra,* 2005, 1, pp. 73-80.

[10]**Melville A.,** On Trajectories of Post-Communist Transformation, *Polis,* 2004, 2, pp. 65-75. (in Russian)

[11]**Carothers T.,** The End…

[12] **Diamond L.,** Thinking About Hybrid Regimes, *Journal of Democracy*, 2002, 13, 2, pp. 21-35.

[13]**Melville A.,** Transnationalisation of world politics and its "antiphases". Political Science in Modern Russia. M., 2004., pp. 136-137. (in Russian)

[14] **Torosyan T.,** Post-Soviet Transformation of Social System , Yerevan, 2006, p. 34. (in Armenian)

[15]**Torosyan T.,** Post-Soviet …, pp. 40-43.

to the study of the "post-Soviet transformation" phenomenon continue being reviewed. Only in respect of the progression of countries in the second of the aforementioned three groups can one talk about a new post-Soviet transformation paradigm, in the context of the democratisation process.

Obviously, in such a paradigm, the multiparty system – as a system-building structure – should be of crucial importance because the parliamentary majority and the opposition, which form the structures of the political system, stem from it[16]. Indeed, the multiparty systems formed in countries involved in the post-Soviet transformation have essential specificities[17], and the application of political theories, created for the purpose of and as a result of previously existing transformation studies, periodically also encounter difficulties during the research of multiparty systems in post-Soviet countries[18]. The complexity of the problem stems not only from that fact, but also from the matter of the post-Soviet transformation process entering a new stage, in which it has essentially grown given the characteristics of individual countries undergoing that process, in addition to the rapidly increased importance of a completely new course, formed in international relations with the launch of the process.

The Civilisational and Geopolitical Factors of Post-Soviet Transformation

The answers to the following two questions gained paramount importance in terms of the further course of the post-Soviet transformation or the democratisation of countries in the aforementioned second group:

- What factor influenced post-Communist countries to be divided into three groups with different courses and directions?
- What factors can be more effective in terms of the further courses of countries in the second group?

According to D. Cameron, the process of democratisation was successful in those post-Soviet transformation countries which started cooperating with the European Union earlier, and this success is due to the

---

[16] **Torosyan T.,** Wreck of the Multiparty System, Available at www.168.am/2013/03/07/192008.html (in Armenian)

[17] **Poghosyan L.,** Optimisation Problems of the Multiparty System's Institutionalisation in Post-Soviet States, *Armenian Journal of Political Science*, 2014, 1, pp. 63-80.

[18] Ibid

influence of that European institutions.[19] Of course, in the process of European integration, it is difficult to overestimate the role of European institutions, but based on the logic of this hypothesis, Romania and Bulgaria, which had signed a cooperation agreement with European Union in 1993, should have been the first countries to join with this organisation. However, in 2004, three Baltic countries and Slovenia, which had signed an agreement only in 1995 and 1996 respectively, were included among EU member states rather than the aforesaid countries, along with the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary, which had signed an agreement in 1991. Moreover, Cameron's hypothesis is not complete also in terms of the division into the aforementioned three groups. However, the thesis statement, contrary to Cameron's, fully explains both the aforesaid contradiction and the separation of post-Soviet transformation countries in the above-mentioned three groups. The thesis is as follows: the success of the democratisation process in post-Soviet countries heavily depends on the pre-Soviet course of those countries and the reminiscence concerning it[20]. It is no coincidence that all EU member states having joined by 2004 had appeared in the socialist camp after World War Two; even after being involved there, they did not adapt to the reality (particularly, riots in Hungary in the 1950s, in Czechoslovakia – in the 1960s, in Poland – in the 1970s, etc.). At the time of the collapse of the USSR, pre-Soviet reminiscence and a generation that preserved pre-Soviet values still existed in those countries; whereas, among Central and Eastern European countries, the Communist regime in Bulgaria in the 1970s-1980s was closest to the Soviet regime, and under Ceausescu, a rigid totalitarian regime was established in Romania.

In terms of the courses of post-Soviet transformation countries, the defining role of values and traditions – and therefore, of national characteristics – was already obvious in the late 1990s. Ph. Roeder attached great importance to national transformation, which implies a formation of nation states along with the transformation of social consciousness[21]. Even S. Huntington, one of the main authors of the notion of linear post-Soviet transformation development in the early 1990s, later claimed that the

---

[19] **Cameron D. R**. Post-Communist Democracy: The Impact of the European Union, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 2007, 23, 3, pp. 185-217.
[20] **Torosyan T.,** Post-Soviet …, p. 94.
[21] **Roeder Ph.,** People and States after 1989: The Political Costs of Incomplete National Revolutions, *Slavic Review,* 1999, 58, 4, pp. 854-882.

transition of Western values to other civilisational environments, their "Westernisation", is not only impossible but also immoral in its consequences because modernisation and economic development do not require cultural "Westernisation" and do not necessarily lead to it. Generally, the European (Western) path selection cannot be the only or even the correct way[22]. Civilisational and value factors had a determining influence during the second stage of post-Soviet transformation. The countries undergoing that process belonging to the Western civilisation chose the path to European integration and eventually joined the European Union, the countries belonging to the Islamic civilisation chose the totalitarian regime, and the countries belonging to the Orthodox civilisation or that had been in that environment for several centuries, appeared in the second group and had difficulties selecting a civilisation. Russia had a special position as an axis of the Orthodox civilisation. As L. Nikovskaya mentions, the mechanical reproduction[23] of Western ideas and political experience is not applicable to the Russian society, and Russia continues searching for its particular path.

It is not hard to perceive that the allocation of post-Soviet transformation countries within the aforementioned three groups in the early 2000s, and the second stage of the process are best explained by civilisational and value congenialities and differences in those countries, as well as the reminiscence and experience of organising public life in the pre-Soviet period.

There were two events symbolising the beginning of the third stage of post-Soviet transformation, – that of strengthening geopolitical influences. First, the speech of the President of Russia at the 2007 Munich Conference on Security Policy[24], by which Russia expressed sharp disagreement with the United States policy towards forming a unipolar world; then in August, 2008, during the Russian-Georgian Five-Day War, which heralded that Russian-American rivalry in the post-Soviet area is entering a phase of hard

---

[22] **Huntington S.,** The West: Unique, not Universal, *Political Affairs*, 1996, 75, 6, pp. 28-46.

[23] **Nikovskaya L.,** Problems and Peculiarities of Democratic Transformation in Contemporary Russia), (in Russan). Available at
http://rapn.ru/?grup=573&doc=1661   (16.11.2013).

[24] Vladimir Putin, Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 10, 2007,
Available at http://globalsecurity.org/…/2007/putin-munich_070210.htm

confrontations[25]. At least over the past three centuries, the Eurasian Heartland[26] analysis of developments – in the South Caucasus in particular – reveals three patterns: at the beginning of each century, the balance in zones of influence, established between influential countries, collapses; during the following 25-30 years, a new struggle for the redistribution of zones of influence takes place, a new balance is established afterwards[27]. The new period of decisive operations of that struggle, which started after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was launched with the aforementioned events in 2007 and 2008. The EU Eastern Partnership programme was of key importance for the subsequent developments. Although initially the course of events was reminiscent of the previously failed New Neighbourhood Policy, the situation was exacerbated dramatically after the Vilnius Summit in November, 2013. The European Union intended the summit to be a turning point in the relations between the EU and the countries involved because it expected four of those countries – Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova – to sign free trade and association agreements. While it was relatively safe to predict that the agreements would be signed by Georgia and Moldova, by the beginning of September it was clear that Armenia would not sign such agreements; then the behaviour of the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych, having a special role in that quartet, created a completely new situation.

Not only did Yanukovych, adventurously lost in the sinuous "trade" relations of the "European Union - United States - Russia" triangle, not perceive that he was losing control of the realistic view of the situation and the possibility of control, and resulting from the subsequent revolution, also his power, but also turned Ukraine into a main arena of the U.S.-Russian confrontation in the process for establishing a new world order. Moreover, while in Russian-Georgian issues a non-main role was reserved for the European Union, in the case of Ukraine the organisation appeared in the foreground. Moreover, the EU's active engagement in geopolitical

---

[25] **Torosyan T.,** Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo: Conflicts, Negotiations and Geopolitics, Yerevan, Tigran Mets Publishing House, 2012. (I Armenian)
[26]**Mackinder H.,** The Geographical Pivot of History, *The geographical Journal,* 1904, 23; **Mackinder H.,** Democratic Ideals and Reality, London, Constable and Company, 1919.
[27] **Torosyan T.,** The Return of Turkey, *Russia in Global Affairs,* 2009, July-September, 3, pp. 120-129.

competition through its policies significantly reduces the importance of the value system, which has for a long time been one of the EU's defining factors. Although in the course of the post-Soviet transformation, the European Union has undergone significant alterations in terms of both its constitution and the impact in international relations, it is also noticeable that in geopolitical competition it has to cope with difficult challenges in the framework of the "values or interests" dilemma[28].

The Vilnius Summit and the following events demonstrated that the process of establishing a new world order has entered a decisive phase and has become the most influential factor in the post-Soviet transformation. With the final policy choice of the countries in the "waiting" group (Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova) between Western and Orthodox civilisations, or integration environments, the post-Soviet transformation will be complete.

Concluion

Two decades of results and progression of post-Soviet transformation demonstrate that:

1. It does not have a linear nature, but is a complex and multivector process, that has had three stages development, three paradigms, and the countries involved in that process can be devided into three groups, based on their trajectories and possible future courses.

2. The three stages of this process have had different durations, but features of key importance – in terms of the course and outcome of each – have clearly differentiated them. In the longest and opening stage, in Eastern and Central European countries, which had been part of the former socialist camp, as well as in newly independent states, created after the collapse of the Soviet Union, completely new regimes were formed. This stage can be considered a statehood-forming phase. The second stage can be called a

---

[28] **Krastev I.,** Europe's Democracy Paradox, *The American Interest*, VII, 4, March-April, 2012, pp. 41-47.

phase of path diversion based on value systems, and the third stage, a dominance phase for the geopolitical factor.

3. While during the first stage of statehood-forming, the courses of the countries involved did not differ significantly, in the second stage these countries were divided into three groups, according to the value systems they avowed. The first one can be called a full democracy group, the second one – a "waiting" group, and the third one – a group of rigid authoritarianism or totalitarianism.

4. While in the first stage one could, with some reservations, talk about the existence of a common post-Soviet transformation paradigm and about the possible employment of such theories and tools previously applied for studying such phenomena, in the second stage three completely different paradigms were to be observed according to the aforementioned groups. It can be considered that for the first and third groups of countries, the second stage completed the post-Soviet transformation, and the third stage can be observed only regarding the "waiting" group of countries. Having gradually gained dominant influence, the geopolitical factor will have a crucial role in their further courses.