

*Conceptualising democracy within the post-Soviet setting:  
A typology of political regime forms*

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ABSTRACT: As regards the democratic potential of the former Soviet states, the scholarly community was divided into an optimistic and a pessimistic camp when communism broke down in 1989-1991. Almost one-and-a-half decade later, neither of these camps' predictions have been confirmed. Instead, hybrid regimes – combining pluralistic and authoritarian traits – have seized the day in the post-Soviet realms. The study of regime change has had a hard time grasping this political phenomenon conceptually. In order to pave the way for empirical research, it is necessary to deal a new deck of cards, to revisit the definitions of democracy with the actual transition processes in mind. The present paper aims to do precisely this. Emphasising both the electoral and the liberal component of democracy, with assistance from classic and contemporary authors, the paper arrives at a fourfold typology of the political regime form. This typology, and the conceptualisation it rests on, is logically exhaustive and able to set dissimilar countries apart. Hence, it provides a useful point of departure for elucidating the post-Soviet transition processes empirically

*The reality of post-Soviet transition processes*

Today, we are witnessing it in the Ukraine. Yesterday, we saw it in Georgia. Tomorrow, we may encounter it in Moldova. Quite a number of the former Soviet republics are caught somewhere between autocracy and democracy, mixing pluralistic traits with authoritarian ones. This was not what the scholarly community, and in particular the study of regime change, expected one and a half decades ago, when communism collapsed. Then, two conflicting voices were heard. From one corner of the ring, the optimists predicted the coming of a glorious democratic future. Francis Fukuyama's (1992) (in)famous thesis on *The End of History and the Last Man* captured most headlines. Yet the optimism was not confined to his, deliberately provoking view. The so-called school of Transitology may at heart have had low expectations (see, e.g., O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986) but it also stressed that at the end of the day, it was only the actors' choices that were of vital

importance (Nodia, 1996: 20); what Diamond (1999: 193) has subsequently termed "...the thesis of the causal primacy of political factors". This led many to adopt a comforting message 'that when it comes to democracy, everybody can do it'.

Staunchly opposed to this view, the pessimists argued that the past of these countries, and the communist legacy in particular, more or less ruled out a steady movement towards liberal democracy (see, e.g., Jowitt, 1992). From the mid-1990s, Samuel P. Huntington's (1996) thesis on *The Clash of Civilisations* took this point to its logical extreme, claiming that a fundamental gap separated most of the former Soviet countries from the West – and, by extension, from liberal democracy.

Bunce (1999: 758) has captured the identified dichotomy eloquently:

"Thus, there were those whose scenario for post socialism was gloomy, with images of disarray, despair, and despots as the 'civilizations' of liberalism and state

socialism clashed with one another. The picture that emerged in other investigations was a rosy one, however. Here, the argument was either that certain elements of the socialist past were helpful to a liberal outcome, or that the socialist past, while illiberal, had been decisively defeated. In either event, the premise, if not the promise, was that eastern Europe was well positioned to become precisely that: the eastern half of Europe.”

Five years into the twenty-first century, the reality of the post-Soviet transitions has not conformed to any of these views. Instead, what has been termed ‘hybrid regimes’ (see Diamond, 2002) have come into existence, neither closing rank with the liberal democracies nor drifting toward their authoritarian pasts. Interestingly, though mixed, these novel political regime forms seem to have a lot of intrinsic stability (see, e.g. Carothers, 2002).

The present paper sets out to develop a typology of political regime forms that is capable of capturing this unexpected political occurrence. The dependent variable that needs to be conceptualised is thus the variants of political regime forms found in the post-Soviet setting.

Seeking to elucidate the different political paths within the former Soviet avenue promises a very fruitful point of departure for comparative work. Quoting Fish (1998: 214) on the entire edifice of former communist countries, “...this region furnishes an exceptionally promising laboratory for assessing which factors facilitate – or at least accompany – democratization and which do not”. This is so because

these countries, 28 in all, were engaged in a political-cum-economic transition, or at the very least an upheaval, at approximately the same time, namely 1989-1992. In addition, the countries are strikingly different in everything from socio-economic development over ethnolinguistic composition to chosen strategies of reform. In other words, the setting contains the optimal combination of similarities and differences for engaging in comparative endeavours (see Bunce, 1995). Needless to say, this is even more the case when confining the scope to the 15 Soviet fellow travellers as is done in the present paper.

#### *Why conceptualise?*

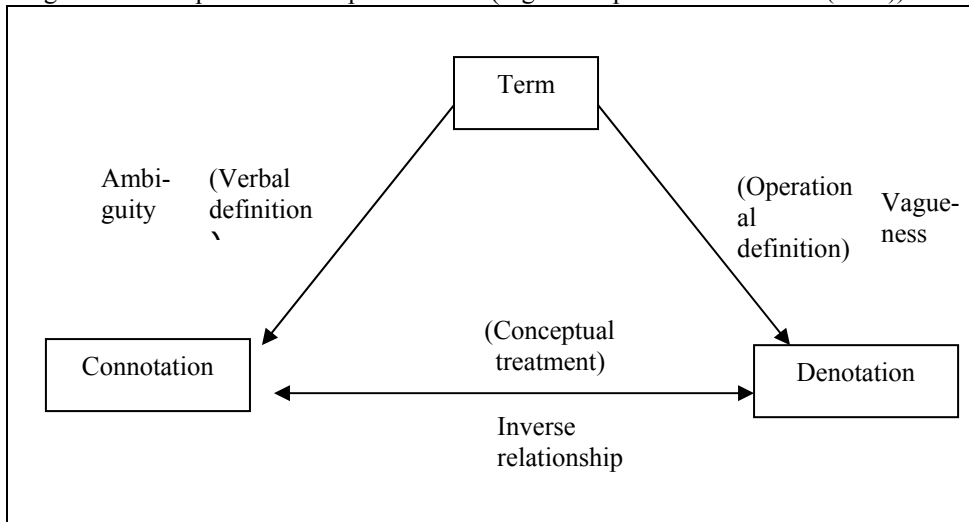
“In a very crucial sense there is no methodology without logos, without thinking about thinking”. Thus asserts Giovanni Sartori (1933) in his classic article on conceptualisation, published in *The American Political Science Review* in 1970. Sartori’s point is straightforward: before we can even think about measurement – in order to validate or falsify a given causal claim – we must solve the logical problems of conceptualisation.

Quoting Gerring (1999: 357-358),

“‘Concept formation’ conventionally refers to three aspects of a concept: (a) the events or phenomena to be defined (the extension, denotation, or definiendum), (b) the properties or attributes that define them (the intension, connotation, definiens, or definition), and (c) a label covering both *a* and *b* (the term)”.

These three aspects are illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: The aspects of concept formation (Figure adapted from Bartolini (2004))



*How to conceptualise?*

Few voices of dissent exist on the subject of why to conceptualise. However, the opinions differ when it comes to the ‘how to’ question. Sartori (1970, 1984) champions a very rigorous approach, in which he observes a number of rules. His (1970:1041) focal point is the so-called ‘ladder of abstraction’: “We make a concept more abstract and more general by lessening its properties or attributes. Conversely, a concept is specified by the addition (or unfolding) of qualifications, i.e., by augmenting its attributes or properties”. To solve the corresponding problems, Sartori (1984) proposes ten rules for concept formation.

*One best way?*

Sartori has subsequently been criticised for his uncompromising attitude to the rigour of concept formation. Gerring (1999) has pointed out that such a scheme sets up a straightjacket, hindering good scholarship. This is so because concept formation is an uncertain process, riven by choices, or trade-offs, to use his term. It is, in his opinion, a struggle between eight competing considerations, these be-

ing familiarity, resonance, parsimony, coherence, differentiation, depth, theoretical utility and field utility. “Concept formation is a fraught exercise – a set of choices which may have no single ‘best’ solution, but rather a range of more-or-less acceptable alternatives” (Gerring, 1999: 367).

What Gerring emphasises is that the relevance of a concept hinges on the particular research project. That is, it is pretentious – and flawed – to seek to provide the ultimate clarification, valid through space and time, of a given concept. Instead, Gerring advocates, the scholar should reveal all his interim considerations and make the process of concept formation transparent. “Writers have an obligation to state explicitly why (on the basis of which criteria) certain properties and terms were chosen, or excluded” (Gerring, 1999: 391). To paraphrase, the validity of the definitions depends in the last instance on whether it is possible to understand the researcher’s goals and the way these are produced.

Gerring’s criticism of Sartori’s scheme makes sense. However, his eight guidelines for concept formation are them-

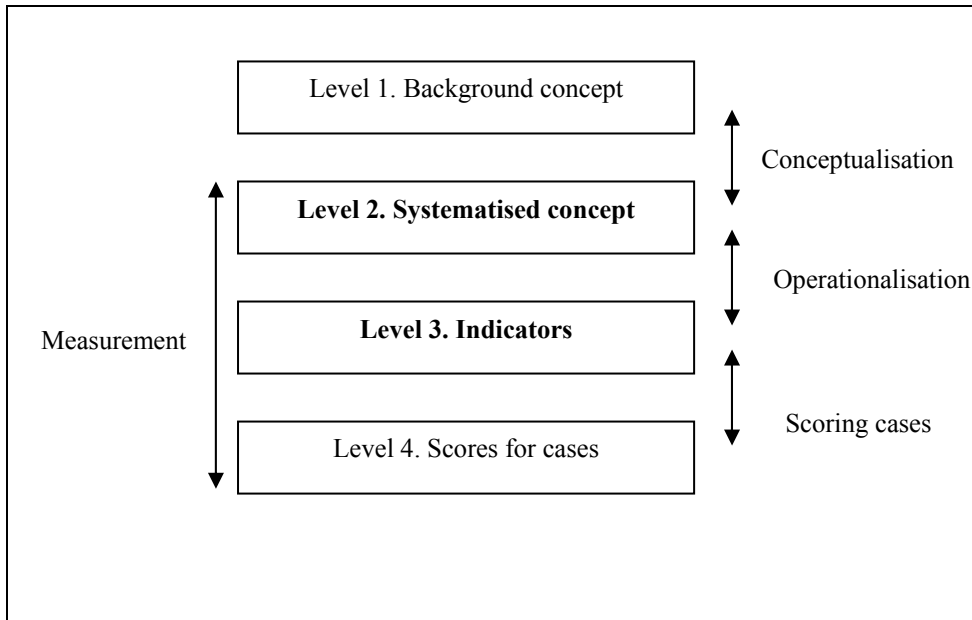
selves fraught – as a body. For the present purposes, the multiple controlling necessary in such a process of multiple trade-offs leaves the analytical quest in an unnecessary state of flux. Hence, I opt for Sartori’s model of layered concept formation or levels of abstraction. That said, the subsequent definitional endeavours will not follow Sartori in an overly rigorous way. What does this mean in practice? Firstly, the idea of the ladder of abstraction will be the focal point whereas Sartori’s various rules will not be observed in any systematic way. Secondly, I will keep in mind Gerring’s emphasis on the boundedness linking the definitions to the actual

field of research, in this case the post-Soviet transitions. Or in the words of Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (1997: 31): “Conceptual definitions are neither true nor false....concepts are symbols that permit communication. Conceptual definitions are either useful for communication or research, or they are not”.

*Layered concept formation*

Sartori distinguishes between three levels of abstraction: the high level, the medium level and the low level (1970: 1041). In more recent times, Adcock & Collier (2001) have elaborated on this ladder, dividing it into four levels as illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2: Levels of conceptualisation and measurement - Figure adapted from Adcock & Collier (2001)



Using this ladder in a coherent way ensures that the observations (level 4) meaningfully capture the ideas contained in the concepts (level 1 and level 2). The most abstract – or general, as Adcock & Collier prefer to term it – level is that of the

background concept. This is a playground where little disagreement exists because the concept carries almost nothing with regard to negation, i.e. what it is not. Descending the ladder, we move down to the level of the systematised concept. Here,

the researcher is compelled to take a stand, to specify what the connotation of the concept is not capturing. Hereafter, we reach the levels of the indicators, that is, the operationalisation of the concept. At this point, we must declare the denotation of the concept and present a way to measure this. To borrow again from Sartori (1970: 1045), “The definitional requirement for a concept is that the *meaning* is declared, while operational definitions are required to state the conditions, indeed the operations, by means of which a concept can be verified and, ultimately, measured”.

#### *Some definitions of democracy in the literature*

Defining democracy from scratch would be a bold quest, and it would also be a foolish one. A plethora of definitions already exist within the literature, definitions that are impossible to escape as a theoretical frame of reference. The logical point of departure for the subsequent conceptual endeavours is, thus, to present an overview, and a discussion, of these competing definitions. Starting with the most modest connotation, I will in turn discuss the advantages of moving (or not moving) towards ‘thicker’ definitions.

#### *Democracy as an electoral engine*

“Democracy is a political *method*, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political – legislative and administrative – decisions and hence incapable of being an end in itself, irrespective of what decisions it will produce under given historical conditions. And this must be the starting point of any attempt at defining it.”

Thus asserts Joseph A. Schumpeter (1974: 242) in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, originally published during the Second World War. This leads him to the following definition: “...the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for peo-

ple’s vote” (269), the free competition for the free vote, that is.

Elections have often been the cardinal point in definitions of democracy, Schumpeter’s is merely the most influential of these. The electoral strand within the theoretical literature simply argues that free contestation for political leadership is what, at the end of the day, separates autocracies and democracies.

This ‘procedural’ definition has had an impressive longevity. In 1991, Huntington employed it in his influential *The Third Wave. Democratization in the late Twentieth Century*. According to his interpretation, democracy has two dimensions: contestation and participation. To quote, “Democracy is consolidated to the extent these in-system responses become institutionalised” (266), i.e. when the regime form passes the so-called ‘two-turnover test’, two alternations in government as the consequence of free and fair elections.

In the latest decade, electoral definitions have mostly been linked to quantitative research on the requisites of democracy (see, e.g., Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub & Limongi, 1996). The reason is straightforward. The Schumpeterian definition lends a helping hand when seeking to classify a large number of countries in a uniform way. The electoral emphasis remains attractive exactly due to its limited connotation. It is a concept that is very much amenable to empirical research.

Viewing democracy as an electoral engine may facilitate empirical endeavours yet it is not unproblematic. To quote Diamond (1999: 9), “...such formulations may still fail to give due weight to political repression and marginalization, which exclude significant segments of the population – typically the poor or ethnic and regional minorities – from exercising their democratic rights”; thus painting too flattering a picture of the democratic merits of the countries scrutinized.

This problem – what Terry Karl has termed ‘the electoral fallacy’ – is espe-

cially serious in the current empirical context where many countries are able to pass as democratic when employing an electoral definition yet not when further requirements are put forward (see Diamond 1999: 10). With such a modest connotation, the denotation covers a very large cluster of countries that have very little in common in substantial matters. Hence, it makes sense to expand the connotation of the concept of democracy. Fortunately, the marketplace of ideas is full of such offers.

Before we take a look at some of these, one thing should be made clear. It is possible to stay in Schumpeter's vein of thinking, i.e. to keep his interpretation of democracy as a method, while expanding the connotation of the term. Like pearls on a string, we thus keep *the* one necklace yet add new content to it. This is obviously only possible for so long, since, at some point, we will in fact be toying with

Figure 3: Dahls seven criteria for Polyarchy

1. Elected officials.	Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
2. Free and fair elections.	Elected officials are chosen in the frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
3. Inclusive suffrage.	Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
4. Right to run for office.	Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for the suffrage.
5. Freedom of expression.	Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socio-economic order, and the prevailing ideology.
6. Alternative information.	Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by laws.
7. Associational autonomy.	To achieve their various rights, including those listed above, citizens also have a right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.

another kind of jewellery – and hence a different necklace. This cut-off point should not go unnoticed.

*The seminal notion of 'Polyarchy'*

The most influential elaboration of the Schumpeterian definition dates back to 1971 – revisited in 1989 – when Robert A. Dahl conceived his concept of *Polyarchy*, crafted as an empirical approximation of the ideal notion of democracy. To quote Dahl (1989: 220),

“Polyarchy is a political order distinguished at the most general level by two broad characteristics: Citizenship is extended to a relatively high proportion of adults and the rights of citizenship include the opportunity to oppose and vote out the highest officials in the government”.

To spell it out, Dahl divides this definition into seven criteria; any political regime form capable of fulfilling these earning the status of polyarchy:

Dahl's definition has many merits, adding liberal components to the electoral ones as it does. However, it also suffers from some of the same problems as its Schumpeterian predecessor. Dahl, too, emphasises the procedural aspects in themselves, while neglecting the capacity to uphold these procedures. To be fair, he (1989: 221) asserts that:

"It is important to understand that these statements characterize actual and not merely nominal rights, institutions, and processes. In fact, the countries of the world may be assigned approximate rankings according to the extent to which each of the institutions is present in a realistic sense."

However, he does not include this requirement directly into his list of criteria – it remains a background condition, hence leaving it to the empirical investigation. If this was in itself sufficient, he might just as well have defined polyarchy as a regime form where both electoral and liberal rights are respected, without spelling it out into seven requirements. The criterion of the rights being actual rather than nominal thus remains stipulated.

Before I elaborate on this criticism theoretically, I will briefly touch upon the empirical problems that derives from adhering so strenuously to a procedural view only. The concept of polyarchy was well-suited to distinguishing between the emerging democracies at the time of its conception and in the subsequent two decades, i.e. in the 1970s and 1980s – a period when the global dominance of democracy was still trembling in the balance. However, as Diamond (e.g. 1999) has repeatedly pointed out, the present wave of democracy, boosted by the dominant liberal paradigm, is unique in two respects. One is its extensive scope, engulfing much of the globe as it does. The other is its intrinsic shallowness, something that cannot be appreciated by Dahl's procedural definition, as the flaws lie in

the actual workings of the democratic institutions.

In a nutshell, Dahl's criteria are in themselves unable to set dissimilar countries apart in the chosen post-Soviet setting. Once again we encounter a need to elaborate on the connotation. As stated, the problem is that Dahl does not explicitly spell out the point about the rights being actual; he does not add a requirement concerning the effective function of the democratic institutions to the list. This indicates that we should expand the connotation on this very point.

#### *Bringing the state back in*

It seems appropriate to lend Dahl a final word before departing from his definition of polyarchy. In his book from 1989 *Democracy and Its Critics*, he (216) rightly makes the following observation:

"The point of this thumbnail history is to emphasize that movements to democratise the governments of national states in Europe and America did not begin with a tabula rasa. In the countries that were the main centres of successful democratization from the end of the eighteenth century until 1920, legislatures, systems of representation, and even elections were already familiar institutions"

This is indeed the case but one more things ought to be stressed: the character of the state apparatus. "Historically, liberty – secured through constitutional, limited government and a rule of law – came about before democracy both in England and, in varying degrees, in other European states" as Diamond (1999: 4) points out.

Dahl spends little time on the fact that the liberal state came into being before democracy in Western Europe. He is, after all, preoccupied with the representative aspect, not the character of the state. To reiterate, Dahl formed his thoughts concerning democracy – as did Schumpeter – in a time and setting where the representative, or procedural, aspect did indeed set countries apart. However, this is less the case today. To quote Zakaria (2003: 17),

“Over the last half-century in the West, democracy and liberty have merged. But today the two strands of liberal democracy, interwoven in the Western political fabric, are coming apart across the globe. Democracy is flourishing, liberty is not”.

This is, albeit with a different emphasis, exactly the same observation as I have earlier borrowed from Diamond: that the ways of electoral and liberal democracy are parting these days. To capture these political dynamics we are in need of a more state-centred approach – only thus can we truly appreciate the liberal component of democracy. This is not least the case within the chosen post-Soviet setting where liberal state capacity, and in particular the rule of law, was, at best, stipulated after the breakdown of communism (see, e.g., Bruszt, 2002).

What we need at this point is some thorough theorising about the state and democracy. Or, to be more precise, the judicial element of the state. As Diamond (1999: 11-12) rightly tells us:

“Freedom and pluralism, in turn, can be secured only through a ‘rule of law’, in which legal rules are applied fairly, consistently, and predictably across equivalent cases, irrespective of the class, status, or power of those subject to the rules... This in turn requires a legal and judicial system and, more broadly, a state with some capacity. Thus Juan Linz’s dictum: “no state, no *Rechtsstaat*, no democracy”.

Before we proceed any further, it is necessary to go back to Schumpeter’s original definition for a moment. One of his main points stands in stark contrast to the one about to be made here. “We have seen that the democratic method does not necessarily guarantee a greater amount of individual freedom than another political method would permit in similar circumstances”, he points out (1974: 271). To illustrate this, he (1974: 243) delivers a quasi-historical example in the footnotes: “...Witness the most famous of all trials.

Pilate was, from the standpoint of the Jews, certainly the representative of autocracy. Yet he tried to protect freedom. And he yielded to a democracy.”

This quotation vividly demonstrates that Schumpeter thinks of democracy only in popular terms, not in terms of a liberal state. This has a curious implication. Not surprisingly, he does stress the importance of having a usable state for the stability of democracy. However, instead of making it part of the dependent variable, he transforms it into an independent one; and he (1974: 293) writes:

“As a third condition, democratic government in modern industrial society must be able to command, for all purposes the sphere of public activity is to include – no matter whether this be much or little – the services of a well-trained bureaucracy of good standing and tradition, endowed with a strong sense of duty and a no less strong *esprit de corps*.”

This quotation pinpoints the difference between the Schumpeterian definition and that of his successors. Today, while still defining democracy as a political method it is most often perceived as a method that safeguards liberty from arbitrary actions, be they conceived by the state or by other citizens. Hence, what to Schumpeter is an independent variable of stable democracy has become part of the dependent variable itself. This brings us to the next stop on our theoretical journey: Guillermo O’Donnell. In 1993, O’Donnell published a working paper titled *On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems*. His (1993: 11-12) point of departure is an observation akin to those quoted previously, namely that “...in many areas the *democratic*, participatory rights of polyarchy are respected. But the *liberal* component of democracy is systematically violated”. On this background, O’Donnell (1993: 10) invites us to remember the most critical aspect of a genuinely liberal state: the existence of a universalistic legal order, one that “...can

be successfully invoked by anyone, irrespective of her position in society". The rule of law, in its classical liberal interpretation, is the criterion that needs to be added to Dahl's concept of polyarchy in order to arrive at a fuller coverage of what is most properly termed *liberal democracy*.

Note that by adding the rule of law to the Dahlian list of criteria we have not departed from the Schumpeterian idea of democracy as a method. We have merely underlined that, as a method, it must be able to ensure that the collective decisions are implemented according to the constitutional rules – thus defending the citizens against legal arbitrariness.

#### *Considering the attitudes*

Having added this pearl to the necklace, should we proceed further, enriching the connotation even more? A number of oft-cited scholars have in fact done so. In their tour de force through *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, published in 1996, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (5-7) define consolidated democracy as a political situation in which democracy has become 'the only game in town' – behaviourally, attitudinally and constitutionally.

Having stressed the need for democratic procedures and for a state capable of making these effective, we have already covered the behavioural and the constitutional dimensions, respectively. However, we have so far stopped short of any 'attitudinal requirements'. What is it, more precisely, that Linz & Stepan advertise for? One quotation suffices to shed light on this (1996: 5),

"Attitudinally, democracy becomes the game in town when, even in the face of severe political and economic crises, the overwhelming majority of the people believe that any further political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic formulas".

This requirement is problematic empirically as well as theoretically, however. To

start with the empirical issue, within the post-Soviet avenue, hardships of socio-economic character have been ubiquitous since the first step onto the democratic path one-and-a-half decades ago. In many of the countries in question, the economic output has decreased by between one third and one half compared to the pre-independence level (see The World Bank's World Development Indicators). In such circumstances, one can hardly expect the population to remain sanguine concerning the transition process in general. A lack of faith in democracy may represent nothing more than a general feeling of loss. Hence, the attitudinal dimension may cover something other than the loyalty to democracy – there may, so to say, be a validity problem in applying it empirically.

As regards the theoretical issue, the attitudinal component is not really complementary to the criteria discussed in the preceding sections. Adding attitudes does not represent an elaboration of the understanding of democracy as a method, or as a political regime form; it represents an entirely new theoretical track. Travelling down this path is not desirable – as Schumpeter rightly pointed out more than 60 years ago, and it is a subject that is today best treated in the so-called Quality of Democracy-discussion (see Diamond & Morlino, 2004).

The same objections apply to the close relative of the attitudinal component, the focus on civil society. The most important contemporary author espousing the 'civil view' is Robert Putnam (1993, 2000). One quotation effectively elucidates his (2000: 336) claim:

"That democratic self-government requires an actively engaged citizenry has been a truism for centuries. (Not until the middle of the twentieth century did some political theorists begin to assert that good citizenship requires simply choosing among competing teams of politicians at

the ballot box, as one might choose among competing brands of toothpaste)". Once again, the requirement is too elusive empirically and covers a different aspect theoretically. As for the chosen setting, it is hard to imagine that a viable civil society can be established overnight, not least in a situation of socio-economic aridity. Theoretically, what it is important to emphasise is the extent to which the state secures a free-space for such organisational activity (and through Dahl and O'Donnell we have already covered that aspect). Again, what matters is the presence of what may be termed a *liberal state*, not the extent to which people actually engage in independent organisational activities.

Having completed this theoretical excursion, and having made the case for an extended version of Dahl's notion of polyarchy as the best theoretical way to capture liberal democracy, it is time to spell out the conceptual definitions of democracy. This is the purpose of the remaining part of the paper.

#### *Conceptualising democracy*

We now turn away from the broad theoretical discussion and towards the actual conceptualisation bearing the former points in mind. In the subsequent pages, the aim is to descend the ladder of abstraction sketched earlier, in turn elucidating the connotative and denotative definitions of democracy, i.e. of the dependent variable of this research project.

#### *The background concept*

Tackling the level of the background concept should not cause much confusion. Little disagreement exists with regard to this the most abstract definition of democracy. Quoting Diamond (1999:8).

"By and large, most scholarly and policy uses of the term *democracy* today refer to a purely political conception of the term, and the intellectual shift back to an earlier convention has greatly facilitated progress in studying the dynamics of democracy, including the relationship between politi-

cal democracy and various social and economic conditions".

Both of these propositions seem sound to me. Firstly, defining democracy as a *political regime form* is in line with the tradition of viewing it as a method going back to Schumpeter. Secondly, even on the most abstract level this connotative definition paves the way for analysing the importance of socio-economic factors as independent variables of democracy, something that is obviously not possible when these are included directly into the dependent variable. We do not, so to say, risk confusing apples and pears.

We still have a long way to travel conceptually, though. At the present stage, our problem is the very tangible one that democracy is logically only one value along the variable of political regime form. Hence, we need to spell out what democracy, as a political regime form, *is and is not* in detail, also as regards the connotative definition. This forces us to move to the level of the systematized concepts.

#### *The systematised concept*

Reviewing 150 recent articles on the subject, Collier & Levitsky (1997) identify a conceptual mess including more than 550 subtypes of democracy. This confusion is situated on the level of systematised concept. That is, the many subtypes – or 'democracy with adjectives' as Collier & Levitsky call them – differ from each other on the connotation, "...on the range and extent of political properties encompassed by democracy", as Diamond (1999: 8) puts it.

On the background of this plethora of offers, Collier & Levitsky (1997: 450-451) issue a warning against participating in the outbidding of 'democracy with adjectives', i.e. to conceptualise novel ideal types meant to capture the 'mixed' character of post-authoritarian regimes. I will pay due consideration to this timely note and stay within the conceptual mainstream, paying attention to concepts such as autocracy, electoral democracy, illib-

eral democracy, and liberal democracy (see, e.g., Diamond, 1999).

With the theoretical discussion of the preceding sections in mind, I have thus far advocated an understanding of liberal democracy that has three requirements: the first is fulfilled by Schumpeter's electoral criterion, the second by the Dahl's criteria concerning free expression and associational autonomy, and the third by O'Donnell's criterion of the presence of a liberal state upholding the rule of law.

One thing is immediately clear: not all countries within the post-Soviet setting will be able to pass this threshold. In fact, my tentative expectation is that most will fall short. In order to capture the dependent variable, we must allow for variation with regard to the political regime form, to specify the various theoretical values on that particular variable. What logically follows from the criteria put forward is that I have conceptualised the political regime form as having two dimensions:

Figure 4: A typology of political regime forms

		Liberal component	
		+ Liberal state	% Liberal state
Electoral component	+ Electoral democracy	Liberal democracy	Illiberal democracy
	% Electoral democracy	Liberal autocracy	Illiberal autocracy

Thus, we have developed a theoretically sound analytical scheme that exhausts the background concept, spells out the possible variants in a systematic manner, and, hence, covers the dependent variable that the paper set out to elucidate, that is, the possible political regime form in post-Soviet countries. The last thing remaining on this level is to specify the connotative definitions of these four types:

1) Liberal democracy is a political regime form that combines the presence

of one electoral and one liberal. This is the connotative space that I am covering at the level of the systematised concept. Hence, I have arrived at a twofold classification.

The first concerns the electoral component of democracy. Here, a country may either be classified as an electoral democracy or not. To elaborate, either the country fulfils the Schumpeterian criterion of free and fair elections for political leadership or it does not. The second concerns the liberal component. Here, a country may be classified either as having a liberal state or not. To elaborate, either the state apparatus is able to uphold the liberal rights through a rule of law or it is not able to do so.

When fusing these classifications we arrive at a typology covering the political regime form as illustrated in figure 4.

of i) free electoral competition for political leadership with ii) the presence of a liberal state able to uphold the rule of law.

2) Illiberal democracy is a political regime form that combines the presence of i) free electoral competition for political leadership with ii) the absence of a liberal state able to uphold the rule of law.

3) Liberal autocracy is a political regime form that combines the absence of i) free electoral competition for political

leadership with ii) the presence of a liberal state able to uphold the rule of law.

4) Illiberal autocracy is a political regime form that combines the absence of i) free electoral competition for political leadership with ii) the absence of a liberal state able to uphold the rule of law.

Within the chosen post-Soviet setting we should expect to identify states belonging to at least type 1, type 2, and type 4, respectively. Type 3, while being theoretically meaningful and with empirical examples in the past, is not to be expected in the world of today (see Diamond, 1999).

#### Indicators

After much travail, we have now descended to the denotative level, to the operational side of the conceptual coin, that is. As indicated by the term, Adcock & Collier (2001) advocate that we turn the attention to the actual indicators meant to capture the chosen concept empirically. Some caution may be in order, however. This paper aims only to deal with conceptual matters, not empirical measurement. Also, operational definitions – i.e. definitions that in themselves incorporate the identification of the empirical references

– are extremely complicated matters, not least within the study of regime change.

I follow Sartori (1984: 34) in arguing that the social scientist is faced with three, separate operational problems.

1) The border problem (to be settled by denotative definitions)

2) The membership problem (to be settled by précising definitions)

3) The measurability problem (to be settled by operational definitions)

In this paper, it is only the first of these three problems that will be treated. I will seek to settle the denotative side of the coin for each of the four types identified at the level of the systematised concept and I will do this by employing an elaborated version of Dahl's criteria for polyarchy. Luckily, it is only necessary to expand the scheme with one category, namely the rule of law. Instead of seeking to reinvent the wheel, I will use Diamond's (1999: 11) formulation as criteria, i.e. whether "...legal rules are applied fairly, consistently, and predictably across equivalent cases, irrespective of the class, status or power of those subject to the rules".

Figure 5: The elaborated version of Dahl's criteria for polyarchy

1. Elected officials.	Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
2. Free and fair elections.	Elected officials are chosen in the frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
3. Inclusive suffrage.	Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
4. Right to run for office.	Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for the suffrage.
5. Freedom of expression.	Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socio-economic order, and the prevailing ideology.
6. Alternative information.	Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by laws.
7. Associational	To achieve their various rights, including those listed above,

autonomy.	citizens also have a right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.
8. The rule of law	Legal rules are applied fairly, consistently, and predictably across equivalent cases, irrespective of the class, status or power of those subject to the rules.

This brings us to the following denotative definitions with respect to the four types:

1) Liberal democracy is a *political regime form where all 8 criteria are fulfilled*.

2) Illiberal democracy is a *political regime form where all the former 4 criteria are fulfilled, whereas the latter 4 criteria are more violated than fulfilled*.

3) Liberal autocracy is a *political regime form where the latter 4 criteria are fulfilled, whereas the former 4 criteria are more violated than fulfilled*.

4) Illiberal autocracy is a *political regime form where both the former 4 and the latter 4 criteria are more violated than fulfilled*

#### Conclusions

To conceptualise democracy is not an easy task. It is one of those riddles that does not have one right solution. Instead, the chosen definition must reflect the research question posed – and the empirical reality placed under scrutiny. To paraphrase, the validity of the definition is ultimately a function of the conceptual considerations themselves. The researcher must play with upon cards, make his in-

terim considerations explicit and make his definitions logically coherent.

In the present paper, I have attempted to develop a conceptualisation of democracy capable of capturing the reality of post-Soviet transition processes. To do so, I have departed from Schumpeter's classic electoral definition, yet, have maintained his emphasis on democracy as a method. Assisted by Dahl's notion of polyarchy and O'Donnell's focus on a liberal state capable of upholding the rule of law, I have arrived at a typology of political regime forms. It divides the theoretical property space into the four types of liberal democracy, illiberal democracy, liberal autocracy and illiberal autocracy, respectively. In emphasising both the electoral and the liberal element of democracy, the typology exhausts the dependent variable of the political regime form. Also, it is able of setting dissimilar countries apart, depending on their ability to pass the electoral and the liberal threshold, respectively. This typology presents a fruitful point of departure for empirical research on post-Soviet transitions.

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