

EXPLORING THE “GREY ZONE”: THE THEORY AND REALITY OF “HYBRID REGIMES” IN POST-COMMUNISTIC COUNTRIES^{1,2}

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The new multiple-configuration of the international relations and especially the break-down of the non-democratic regimes of the Soviet-type created the need for scholars to address new classifications of emerging regimes. The contribution of the presented text to the debate on ‘hybrid regimes’ is twofold. The authors strive to wholesomely introduce the debate, genealogy and intellectual background of this line of research, exploring if it is possible to employ the concept of ‘hybrid regimes’ to define the character of selected cases and simultaneously, if it is possible to change the paradigm of classification of studied regimes in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. In this text, the authors understand various conceptualizations of “hybrid regimes” as a unit on a different level on the “ladder of abstraction”. Therefore the authors emphasize the theoretical employment of ‘hybrid regimes’ as a ‘meta-concept’, analysing the recent development in Hungary.

Key words: hybrid regimes; grey zone of regimes; East-Central Europe; Hungary.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the one-party non-democratic regimes of the Soviet bloc fell, and the new multipolar world configuration has started taking shape, political scientists need to address the classification of regimes that are hard to fit into traditional typologies. The necessity to re-imagine the regime classification is reinforced by the increasing number of democratic transitions and the reverberating third wave of democratisation. Due to the significant change of the research subjects –

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i.e. the political regimes – in recent decades, political scientists have suggested alternative typologies and new terminologies. Or, to be more precise, they introduced new conceptualisations of political regimes. The change of the regime's character, however, does not only concern the large group of actors of the former post-communistic bloc, Pacific Asia or Latin America. The end of the Cold War saw the emergence of new states, which frequently deviated from the ideal types of liberal democracy or slightly different types of non-democratic regimes.⁴

As expected, this situation has opened the door for more than two decades of debate on so-called 'hybrid regimes', which has become an inseparable part of the broader discussion on the nature of democracy, authoritarianism and the examination of the character of the regimes as such. In the present day, it seems entirely inconceivable that the topic of 'hybrid regimes' could be omitted from research. The reason for this is that the plethora of regimes on the political map can be categorised into these classifications and concepts. It is difficult, if not impossible, to categorise these political systems and states using classifications created in the past.

The exceptionally turbulent development of political regimes in the countries of the former Soviet bloc serve as the primary motivation for this study. Related to the 'westernisation' of a large group of the central European countries, which in the first decade of the 21st century became part of the vital integration-oriented organisations established exclusively, or besides other factors, on the democratic nature of its members (as the Council of Europe, European Union or NATO). Political scientists have mostly agreed on the fact that these countries have successfully undergone the transition from non-democratic regime of the Soviet type towards liberal democracy and have become a part of the group of classical, consolidated liberal democracies (see Kubát 2005, 163; Hrdličková 2011, 72–77; Bureš, Charvát, Just and Štefek 2012; Heydemann and Vodička eds., 2013). However, the seemingly firm democratic foundations in many newly established democracies quickly began to crumble as the economic crisis erupted in 2008, followed by the subsequent period of polycrisis in the European Union (see Ágh 2019). This period saw, among other aspects, the rise of populism in numerous European countries and non-liberal tendencies, which gained traction in some countries in central and eastern European (see Kubát, Mejstřík and Kocián 2016). Adding to this was the failure of the so-called Arab spring, as well as the subsequent migration crisis in the context of the civil wars in the Middle East and the North African (MENA) countries.

The primary aim of this text is to clarify and refine the debate on hybrid regimes from a theoretical perspective, as it is not firmly anchored in scholarly research. This debate was (and still is) not only dynamic but also visibly linked to the tendencies to prefer, at least partially, innovation over the effort to establish generalisations as to the crucial foundations of a theoretical framework. As J. Bílek notes in his text on hybrid regimes, the research effort often resembles a contest of who will sooner come up with an even more ground-breaking concept, rather than an effort to resolve existing research problems (Bílek 2015, 213). Hence, many diverse conceptualisations have been introduced (and are still

⁴ Nonetheless, we do not consider the third wave of democratisation the only source of the 'hybrid' regime's debate. An important influence was without doubt the evolution of the so-called Asia model of democracy with the limited liberal elements. After all, L. Diamond, J. J. Linz and S. M. Lipset had already introduced their concept of 'semi-democracy' in 1988 (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1988). Furthermore, the influential work of Zakaria on non-liberal democracies (Zakaria 1997) also focuses predominantly on countries other than the post-communistic bloc of Central and Eastern Europe.

being created today) which are then ungainly applied by even the most renowned scholars, leading to a vast number of methodological errors and unclarities.

This paper has two primary goals. Firstly, from the theoretical perspective, the aim is to wholesomely introduce the debate, genealogy of research and intellectual background from which the specific concepts of 'hybrid regimes' emerged, and to present the broader context of the debate over the character of political regimes. The second goal is to examine the concept of a 'grey zone of regimes' by T. Carothers (2002) which surpasses by its essence all the other concepts, and we understand it as a 'meta-concept'. We strive to answer the (twofold) research question:

RQ1a: Is it possible to reliably employ the 'meta-concept' of the 'hybrid regimes' when attempting to define the character of regimes that are being analysed?

RQ1b: And, simultaneously, is it possible to start thinking about these particular regimes in a different classification than the classical category of liberal democracy, under which they were grouped for some time after the transition from a non-democratic regime of Soviet-type?

The new state of polycrisis in the EU and the de-democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe, or to be more precise, the evident transformation of the character of these regimes, present challenges when analysing the existing concepts related to the contextually different characters and types of regimes that do not fall in the liberal democracy category. We contribute to the academic debate by answering the question if the current situation of unfinished or insufficient consolidation of political regimes in certain new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe is a sufficient impulse to change this paradigm. In other words, we aim to examine if instead of the long-standing classification, it is beneficial to start thinking about these regimes primarily in the context of 'meta-concept' of 'hybrid regimes' and to perceive them as 'non-democratic non-authoritarian regimes' (Gilbert and Mohseni 2011, 271).

The study is structured as follows. In the introductory, the theoretical part and critical concepts are examined. As we will demonstrate, these concepts form an integral part of this line of research. This section aims to familiarise the reader with the genealogy of the origin of the hybrid regime concepts in the context of the debates about many deviations from classical ideal types of democracy, authoritarianism on the other side of the continuum and to provide a critical reflection on these concepts. When the exploration of 'hybrid regimes' is considered, from the beginning we encounter a great number of unclarities, methodological errors, and, by many existing conceptualisations, what we could call 'conceptual confusion' (Gilbert and Mohseni 2011). Precisely for that reason, it is imperative to open this analysis with a discussion on the development of these concepts and our perception of its content as well as usefulness. In the second, empirical part of this article, we will then test if understanding 'hybrid regimes' as a 'meta-concept' on real-life cases from the Central and Eastern Europe (in particular, Hungary) is useful. The concept is here applied in accordance to its name, as the 'grey area of regimes' in which we believe the analysed countries can be found, albeit in different measure, form and character, and manifestations of particular features subjected to analysis.

2 THE PHENOMENON OF 'HYBRID REGIMES' AND ITS GENEALOGY IN ACADEMICAL RESEARCH

As pointed out by L. Diamond, before the disintegration of the bipolar constellation, there were periods when determining whether a given state was a democracy or not was relatively easy. Alternatively, at least, there was more or less a universal consensus about the appropriate answer (Diamond 2002, 21). Nevertheless, as was mentioned in the introduction of this article, with the disintegration of the bipolar world order and the fading away of the third wave of democratisation (Huntington 1991) a plethora of new regimes emerged, which are impossible to categorise under the existing classical typologies easily.

Although the term 'hybrid regimes' appeared in literature at the turn of the 80s and 90s of the 20th century, predominantly due to the study of T. L. Karl focused on El Salvador (Karl 1995), the discussion about regimes that stand somewhere 'in between' started much earlier. For instance, the concept of the 'quasi-democracy' proposed by S. Finer or the concept of the 'near polyarchy' created by classical author R. Dahl (Dahl 1971). The actual term 'hybrid regime' is preceded by the concept of so-called 'weakened authoritarianism' (*dictablanda*) and 'weakened democracy' (*democratura*) (Schmitter and O'Donnell 1986), which originated from the analysis of Latin American states. As L. Diamond points out, the existence of a multiparty configuration originating from the electoral systems in South American countries shows that evidence of authoritarianism was not foreign even in the era of the 60s and 70s (Diamond 2002, 23).

Before we launch into the effort to present the evolution of 'hybrid regime' research, it is necessary to focus on the term 'regime' itself and the question of how to perceive it within the analysis. The cornerstone here is the precise separation of this unit of analysis from the state itself which quite often presents an arduous task for political scientists. As V. Dvořáková, R. Buben and J. Němec (2012, 45) bring to attention, 'in political science we encounter moments, where the types of states are arbitrarily interchanged, and there is a lack of agreement on whether particular characteristics belong to the state or the regime'. The development in the perception of this term hampered its application and many authors brought into the discussion individually adapted concepts, which were to a certain degree in contradiction or lost their usefulness or applicability over time. It is thus necessary to examine the current situation around the term 'regime', especially when studying hybrid regimes. From all the possible definitions we selected the one created by L. Morlino, who defines a regime in a way which is applicable for this text also when it comes to the empirical part: 'as regards the term "regime", consideration will be given here to "the set of government institutions and norms that are either formalized or are informally recognized as existing in a given territory and respect to a given population"' (Morlino 2010, 29). We have to point out though, that the nature of the 'hybrid regime' lies particularly in the relationship between the formal and informal functioning of a regime and its institutions (Karl 1995).

One of the fundamental theoretical and methodological problems that the current analysis of regimes had to address was the determination of the boundaries where, so to say, 'one regime' (or concept) ends, and where it begins. Considering that the examined regimes can be located on the spectrum from 'liberal democracy' to 'authoritarianism', it is necessary to define these limit points. T. L. Karl and P. Schmitter tackled this task in their text 'What democracy

is... and is not' (1991), which not only fits the given period but can also be directly applied to the analysis of regimes. The authors lay down eleven basic conditions which must be present in order to consider this regime from the functional perspective as a democracy (Karl and Schmitter 1991, 107). We regard this text to be a contribution to the academic debate, which is more empirically bearing than the never-ending discussion on which the definition is fundamental when it comes to the future research and the debate itself.⁵ However, as J. Bílek reminds us, pointing towards the work of G. Goertz (2006), in order to present a methodologically 'untainted' concept in social sciences, it is necessary to define both ends of the spectrum. That is, every concept should dispose of both a positive definition (democracy) and a negative one (authoritarianism) (Bílek 2015, 219).

On the foundation of the facts mentioned earlier, there are two possible approaches to grasping hybrid regimes from a theoretical standpoint. The first one is dichotomous, which perceives a hybrid regime as an 'incomplete' democracy or 'incomplete' authoritarianism. Between these concepts, we can categorise for example the text of Levitsky and Way (2010), but also as a particular predecessor the approach of P. Schmitter and G. O'Donnell (1986) mentioned above. If we want to examine hybrid regimes as a specific and independent type of regime, it is logically necessary to employ a trichotomous approach, in which we introduce the term 'hybrid regime' next to terms of 'democracy' and 'authoritarianism'. Between these seminal works that inspired this approach, we see as an initiative the contribution of T. L. Karl (1995) and (Bílek 2015, 215).

3 HYBRID REGIMES AS A 'META-CONCEPT'

Due to the methodological complexity that we mentioned before, and primarily due to the variability, we believe that it is prudent to regard hybrid regimes as a 'meta-concept'. This is because, despite all the doubts about its applicability, we can say that the particular subtypes can be incorporated in this concept in full length, no matter if one or the other approach is chosen. It is then only up to the researcher which of the specific approaches they will employ in the empirical research. They can understand hybrid regimes as weakened types of the outside points of the spectrum democracy, thus authoritarianism. Or they may employ the trichotomy variant and perceive a 'hybrid regime' as a distinctive category as does, for example, the inspiring text of J. Bílek (2015). In both cases, there are concepts we can see as attempts to deal with the 'grey zone' (Carothers 2002), and we can label them 'hybrid', yet with a higher degree of abstractions and a higher degree of analytical units.

At the turn of the century the approach towards terms related to 'hybrid regimes' started to change and instead the so-called 'adjective democracies' (Merkel 2004; Zakaria 1997; Collier and Levitsky 2007) and other concepts based on the adjective 'authoritarianism' started to appear (Schedler 2006; Schedler 2013; Levitsky and Way 2010). This was caused by the fact that political science research started to emphasise authoritarian aspects and tendencies rather than democratic ones, which were logically in high demand after the disintegration of the bipolar world division (Gilbert and Mohseni 2011, 273). As R. Brooker mentions (2014, 35), this approach is based on a disillusion of sorts which

⁵ A great explanation on possible interpretations of democracy, various definitions and their application are present in the works of Š. Drahoukoupil (2014) and J. Bílek (2015).

appeared in the relationship towards the reality of numerous unsuccessful transitions, starting with the disintegration of the eastern bloc and linked to the ablation of the third wave of democracy. To a certain degree, this approach influenced the entire subsequent discourse as well as the consideration of regimes in 'the grey zone' and it shifted the debate into its current shape, in which adjective authoritarianism prevails over adjective democracies.

The next question which needs to be addressed when analysing 'hybrid regimes' is the matter of their origin. Due to the fact that as the first decade of the 21st century drew to an end, about 30% of the world's states (containing about one third of the world's population (Morlino 2010, 28)) were categorized under the 'meta-concept' of 'hybrid regimes', it is clear that the mere assumption of cultural and geographical (or regional) fragmentation brings more trajectories and feasible points of origins of hybrid regimes. However, T. Carothers mentions that there is one facet that newly emerged regimes share, which is a general movement 'away from dictatorial rule toward more liberal and often more democratic governance' (Carothers 2002, 6). This was certainly true in the period when T. Carothers introduced his text (2002). However, that reality changed with the polycrisis, as will be delineated in the following part of this text. These foundations and suppositions then contribute to the dispersion of research and the lack of its embeddedness as E. Baracani (2010) points out in *Democratization and Hybrid Regimes: International Anchoring and Domestic Dynamics in European Post-Soviet States*. While the last four decades of the 20th century are characteristic for the number of democratic regimes rising across regions, the first decade of the 21st century is to a certain degree its reversal, which political scientists, including Carothers, could not have anticipated. The increase in democratic regimes has stopped and, on the contrary, we see certain indications of their 'erosion' (Baracani 2010, 1). This is exactly why it is necessary to focus on the situation in Central and Eastern Europe, in which this matter is a direct concern.

From the theoretical standpoint, there are several elementary variations on the emergence of a 'hybrid regime'. For Central and Eastern Europe which is studied in this paper, the most important variation appears to be those that can be labelled 'weakening' of the limit points of the continuum: democracy and authoritarianism. Specifically, the weakening of democratic institutions and (to a certain degree) the demand for this process, the character of the given regimes necessarily changes by the fact which became elected representatives. The political regimes in this instance go through the process of de-democratisation (see Nef and Reiter 2009; Szymański 2017; Bogaards 2018). The fact is that the 'wild' transformation which followed the dissolution of the Soviet bloc contributed very little to aid the establishment of a high quality 'participative political culture' in the sense of the comparative study by G. Almond and S. Verba (1989).⁶ The shift from liberal democracy towards certain 'hybridity' is also addressed by L. Morlino (2010, 46), who points out that this can lead towards a type which he calls 'democracy without law' or 'democracy without state' and adds this category to the typology of hybrid regimes based on three criteria.

In the presented text we thus understand hybrid regimes as a 'meta-concept' of sorts, which includes many sub-conceptualisations which manifest on the continuum between democracy and authoritarianism and we, therefore, employ a dichotomous approach, albeit with a full understanding of its methodological unclarities. Simultaneously, we believe that a trichotomous approach would be too restrictive in its application on the realities of the analysed regimes,

⁶ The study *Civic Culture* was originally published in 1963.

especially when we consider the different intensity of the explored characteristics and their effects within the regimes.

4 THE 'GREY ZONE OF REGIMES': REFLECTING ON THE CONCEPT OF T. CAROTHERS

One of the goals of this article is to introduce T. Carothers's concept of hybrid regimes. The seminal work of T. Carothers will thus be the focus of the following section. We consider this approach to be conducive especially in the context of Central and Eastern Europe and the large dynamic in the development of the character of regimes in this region. Simultaneously it overlaps with the concept which we are presenting when it comes to the application of the concept of 'hybrid regimes' on the empirical research of the transformation of regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. This concept views 'hybrid regimes' as a 'meta-concept', an analytical unit, whose subcategories are the partial conceptualisations originating from seminal authors, such as L. Diamond (2002), S. Levitsky and L. Way (2010), Gilbert and Mohseni (2011), Merkel (2004) and A. Schedler (2006, 2013). In this case, we believe that Carothers's view and conceptualisation of the 'regimes of the grey zone' is (despite many partial methodological shortcomings) the best applicable concept in explaining 'hybrid regimes' as a 'meta-concept'.

As Š. Drahokoupil writes (2014), the proliferation of different concepts at the end of the last millennium reached a state where an actual 'labyrinth of hybrid regimes' emerged. These concepts are often built on such a different foundation that they become conflicting and contradictory (Gilbert and Mohseni 2011, 272), even though the debate is still on the 'hybrid regimes'. That is part of the reason why we decided to employ the concept of T. Carothers, who surpasses these 'conceptual battles' as an analytical unit in its essence. It is not the goal to delineate the exact 'borders' or boundaries of liberal democracy or authoritarianism, and for this reason we do not try to define these ideal types on the limits of the continuum. Additionally, we do not perceive 'hybrid regime' as a 'distinctive category of political regimes' or an 'Independent Type of Political Regime' like Bílek (2015), although we consider his text to be one of the most crucial contributions to the methodological and theoretical debates on 'hybrids'.

As we mentioned before, the concept of T. Carothers is one of the most used and quoted. The so-called 'grey zone' of regimes, a term which Carothers came up with (2002) explains many things, yet it cannot tackle all the challenges that the study of 'hybrid regimes' comes with. The concept is built on a comparative-historical approach. It compares and presents the transformations of the characters of political regimes between the 70s and 90s of the 20th century. The author mentions the trends in seven different regions, which lead to a critical redrawing of the political landscape (*ibid.*, 5). In this foundation, he tries to point out that the differences between individual cases are so significant that it is entirely redundant to introduce the 'transition paradigm' into the classification of 'hybrid regimes'. This paradigm is defined in five points and, Carothers states originated from the pressure from government, quasi-government and non-governmental groups in the US in the 80s when any change of regime was seen, interpreted and presented as 'democratic transition'. This paradigm became the main analytical framework. As Carothers also mentions, 'high-level officials were regularly referring to the worldwide democratic revolution' (*ibid.*, 6).

As a part of his definition of 'transition paradigm', Carothers introduces five fundamental suppositions, from which he proceeds. The first one is crucial, as it sponsors all the others. According to Carothers, every state which is on the trajectory from dictatorship to a more liberal form of government can be seen as a regime in transition 'toward democracy'. This situation can be observed especially in the 90s (ibid., 6). Carothers also reflects on what was occurring during the research of 'hybrid regimes' themselves, namely that the demand for democratic regimes also forms the academic discourse. The second requirement which is formed by the whole 'transitional paradigm', is the reality that the process of democratisation on its own is created by certain phases, which are defined as 'opening', 'breakthrough' and 'consolidation'. The regimes then linearly go through these phases. As the third, Carothers sees the belief in the decisive power of elections (ibid., 7). The fourth is the specific environment in which the transition takes place: the level of economics, own history, form of institutions and other structures. However, to these he does not attribute too much value. The fifth prerequisite of the whole paradigm is the notion that the process of democratisation takes place only in fully institutionalised consolidated states (ibid., 8–9).

Carothers then calls for abandoning the paradigm defined in this way while defining political regimes and their research. His text functions as a criticism of these suppositions, where he mentions that only 20 out of 100 states that were at that time seen as "in transition" can today be perceived as democratic. In the group of such democratised states stands especially the region of Central Europe. On the other hand are the failures primarily in East Asia and Latin America (ibid., 9). Naturally, we must mention that the text of Carothers was published in 2002, so his assumptions about the nature of a regime in these regions, including the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, may not be current. Nevertheless, that does not hamper the usage of his concept as a 'surpassing' approach as a 'meta-concept' as we perceive it, linked to the theoretical view of hybrids as such. An interesting fact is that Carothers did not assume that a different trajectory in the development of specific regimes would take place. He does not mention in his text that a consolidated democracy can be 'weakened' to such a degree that its character would be changed and the regime would fall into the 'grey area'.

Carothers, when it comes to building his conceptualisation, is not dealing with an exact delineation of the characteristics of regimes in the 'grey zone', which lowers the intensity of this concept on the ladder of abstraction. However, he avoids many methodological problems when operationalising his terms. However, he tries to describe what he called 'broad political syndromes' (ibid., 10) which he finds specifically where regimes in the 'grey zone' are concerned.

Firstly, he mentions so-called 'feckless pluralism', which manifests within countries and regimes that have a relatively high degree of political freedom, alternation of governmental structures between subjects with different political opinions and uninfluenced elections. Simultaneously, though, we can find defects in the basic democratic system, as it is a minimal degree of civic participation outside of elections or perceiving elites as corrupt or 'rotten'. This is also based on the fact that the civil service does not function efficiently, and it is not capable of supplementing the function of primary institutions related to healthcare, education or other services (ibid., 10– 11).

The second of the 'political syndromes' is the so-called 'dominant-power politics'. The regimes in the 'grey zone' do show evidence of political competition; however, with certain limitations. Those appear in the existence of a movement,

party, family grouping or a specific leader who dominates over the system to such a degree that the probability of alternation reaches zero. Simultaneously, and distinctively to the regimes functioning with 'feckless pluralism', the governing structures to a certain degree merge with the state. Therefore, the elections cannot be labelled objective and untainted. However, governing structures are trying, especially for the eyes of the international community, to evoke this image to gain broader support, while 'bending' the whole electoral arena (ibid., 11–12). Although Carothers attributes a certain degree of 'stability' to the regimes with both 'syndromes', he points out at the same time that it is not easy to achieve a successful transition to liberal democracy. In the first case mentioned, the political structures respect some rules not in direct contradiction with the essence of liberalism. However, the power is passed from one to each other and back, and they are entirely separated from civil society. For the second time, the governing elites allow opposition only to the degree that they can resist the pressures from society (ibid., 13–14).

Carothers thus comes up with an approach that does not have the goal within the period we focus on to create clear typologies of regimes and to be categorised into a specific scheme. Instead, he notices two levels that manifest with the group of regimes in the 'grey zone' and separates them with clear functional differences which are the essence of their existence. In the very end of his text, Carothers completely rejects the 'Transition paradigm' as a product of a time restricted period and at that time points out and demands the necessity to employ different work and analytical frameworks in the context of the research of 'grey zone' regimes than as was done until then with the 'transition paradigm' (ibid., 200). In order to put all abovementioned theory into practice in the broader context, it is necessary to emphasise the particularities of democratisation in Central-Eastern Europe in the opening of the empirical part of this text.

5 THE SPECIFICS OF DEMOCRATISATION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

To understand how and why the apparently increasingly consolidated democracies of Central Europe began to crumble, we first need to understand what the particularities of their democratisation were. For that reason, we summarize the discussion on the democratisation of the post-communist states.

The discussion on the democratisation of countries of the post-communist area is from its beginnings linked to several important questions. Among the most significant is the question of whether and to what degree the former communist states present specific situations incomparable to the democratisation of 'standard' non-democratic or, to be exact, authoritarian regimes. Political scientists relatively quickly agreed that communism had such specific consequences that the democratisation of these states would be completely different compared to those of other states. Noteworthy, for example, is the concept of 'triple transition' introduced by Clause Offe, which highlights the necessity of change in three dimensions: the democracy, the market and the stateness (Offe 1991). In some cases, this has been extended by a fourth dimension, the nation, and therefore formed 'the quadruple transition' (see e.g., Kuzio 2001). From the beginning, scholars have simultaneously strived to find the key to separate post-communist countries into two or more groups. This was supposed to show evidence of different prerequisites when the anticipated velocity, as well as the intensity of democratisation, is considered.

In the first analyses that focused predominantly on Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria and in some instances also on the specific case of the German Democratic Republic, or to be precise on the area of former eastern Germany, it was expected that transforming countries would face 'certain negative effects in the short term. This includes higher inflation, unemployment, social mobility, pressure on workers etc.' (Di Cortona 1991, 327). It was also expected that differences among post-socialist countries existed with regard to the prospects of transition. 'For Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Poland it will be easier to overcome these problems: because of the role that West will assure; because certain innovative elements had already been introduced into the economic system in the past (Hungary, but also Poland); because of the tradition of an industrial capitalist economy (Czechoslovakia and Germany)' (Di Cortona 1991, 327).

Di Cortona used the economic situation as the main point of view. Samuel P. Huntington, in his seminal contribution, used another standpoint which leads to the same result. Huntington chose the countries from the third wave of democratisation based on some democratic experience before World War II. The same group of countries was formed in this case (Huntington 1991, 271). Huntington saw East Germany as extremely favourable, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland as quite favourable for the relatively quick and successful democratisation. Romania and Bulgaria were contrariwise named as indifferent or unfavourable (Huntington 1991, 273).

A very significant contribution to the elaboration on the division of the post-communist area was made by Hungarian political scientist Attila Ágh in his book *The Politics in Central Europe* (1998). Ágh argued that the development in the first decade after the Iron Curtain fell clearly shows that in the post-communistic area we can distinguish two ideal types of countries: 1) the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, in which the transition can be perceived as re-democratisation, and 2) the countries of the Balkans, which ought to undergo a 'complete' democratisation process (Ágh 1998, 7). He thus follows Huntington's idea of certain democratic experiences from the period before the emergence of the non-democratic Soviet-type regime. The extraordinarily bad performance of countries established after the disintegration of Tito's Yugoslavia lead without doubt to Ágh's relatively optimistic conclusions about the countries of the Visegrad group. The development after 2008, however, constitutes an important turning point in the sense of (de)consolidation, both in the development of post-communistic countries of Central and Eastern Europe and regarding the social science analysis. This development is very often called the backsliding of democracy interconnected with the growth of populism and de-Europeanization (Ágh 2016; Szymański 2017). After two decades of optimism, interrupted only by 'partial deviations'⁷ political science had to return to the beginning of the debate on perspectives of democracy in post-communist area.

In connection to this, many authors returned to older sociological or interdisciplinary analyses, which in the beginning of the 1990s had already identified crucial structural differences between countries of Central and Eastern Europe and countries of Western Europe. These were in regard to either their heritage of communism, or to more long-term divergence or, to be precise, an insufficient convergence between two European macro-regions. Polish historian

⁷ Ethnical conflicts in post-Yugoslavia or, to be precise, the post-soviet area, Meliorism in Slovakia, issues with developing the rule of law in Bulgaria and Romania, which delayed the entrance of both states into the EU.

Piotr Wandycz (2001) points towards the century-long closing of the cultural-civilisation gap, which is discernible between Central and Eastern Europe and the Western part of the continent. The development after 1989 the author understands primarily as the 'final' act in this process (Wandycz 2001, 21). Other authors suggest that the modernisation of Central and Eastern Europe took place in the period of communism, but also in previous periods, only partially, insufficiently and in a twisted manner. Piotr Sztompka (1993) talks about false modernity, while the Slovenian sociologist Ivan Bernik saw Central and Eastern European societies as sub-modern, characterised by only partial and insufficient modernisation (Bernik 2000). Besides, this false modernisation was conducted top-down, and thus as a dictate of modernistic intellectual and partially also political elites. This goes for most of the societies in Central and Eastern Europe, perhaps with the exception of regions where modernisation according to the German model were implemented sooner, as in the case of the Czech Republic, particularly among the elites of larger cities.

Tucker (2015, 14-74), regarding the discussion in Central and Eastern Europe, stated that the CEE countries still struggle with the legacies of the previous epoch (communist, but also older), such as economic backwardness, 'rough justice' and the backstage impact of the post-totalitarian elite.⁸ Tucker and other authors emphasise the pragmatism of late-communistic elites as one of the key motivational factors for the change of the regimes. 'Democracy in post-totalitarian Central and Eastern Europe was the unintended consequence of the adjustment of the rights of the late-totalitarian elite to its interests' (Tucker 2015, 22). In the late-totalitarian regimes 'egoism and manipulate opportunism' were encouraged. The main interest of the late totalitarian elites became to survive, i.e. to maintain the control. Thus, Tucker presents regime changes as 'spontaneous adjustments of the rights of the late totalitarian elite to its interests, its liberation, the transmutation of its naked liberties into rights, most significantly, property rights' (Tucker 2015, 22). This approach is very similar to that of the Czech sociologist Ivo Možný. As Možný (1991) demonstrated in his analysis focusing on the collapse of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia *Why so easy?* (Proč tak snadno?), the group of unsatisfied citizens included a significant majority of the population, but that the most important and driving groups were economically motivated individuals and groups, both from the official and semi-official structures. In this sense, the *homo economicus* had already dominated over *homo sovieticus* before the transition.

Kamiński and Kurczewska (1994) recognise the volatile nature of the post-Communist political elite which overtakes the state institutions in order to realise their own goals and are not prepared to serve the whole society. The electoral changes in government then often mean only the exchange between two political or individual actors with the same goals. This characteristic of political elites in new democracies naturally raises the question of the 'rootedness' of the democratic structure or, to be precise, its changes. It seems that with the first, more distinct crisis, which came after 2008, democratic structures began to crumble. The socioeconomic crisis led to the transformation regression not only in the economy but also in politics (weakness of liberalism and growth of populism). Without welfare, essential parts of the societies in CEE do not support the liberal democracy to the degree which would be able to maintain the quality

⁸ Of course, it can be (and was in the scholarly debate) pointed out that the concepts of 'totalitarianism' do not present a legitimate tool for the study of regimes. It needs to be acknowledged at this point that the authors of this text do not acquiesce to the use of the term 'totalitarianism' themselves, however understand the value of the works of A. Tucker (2015). Instead, authors use more neutral term 'non-democratic regime of the Soviet type'.

of democracy and the democratically functional state. Tucker argues with Ágh, and his beliefs that Central and Eastern European countries had more potential to build democracy. According to Tucker, it is presently more than clear that the legacy of communism is stronger than the legacy of democracy.

Ágh, the prominent defender of the basic positive attitude towards the democratisation of Central and Eastern Europe, follows Tucker's somewhat sceptical approach. In his latest work(s) Ágh (2018b, 31) recognises that CEE underwent radical changes in the last decade and this matter of fact 'necessitate a radical reconceptualization'. In his opinion, three important phases or steps can offer the explanation of the divergence of CEE states from the EU mainstreams development: (1) the absolute 'civilizational' (socio-economic and cultural) deficit before the accession and the emerging relative institutional deficit after the accession (this notion brings us back to the scepticism presented in Sztompka's or Bernik's work), (2) the growing gap between the formal-legal external Europeanization and the substantive internal Europeanization, (3) the concluding de-Europeanization with de-democratization.

Ágh believes that at least some CEE countries reached the formally consolidated democracy, but in the last decade some of them underwent the interconnected processes of democratic deconstruction (backsliding) and started opposing the liberally rooted European integration process. Let us acknowledge that Fukuyama (1995) defines four areas where the consolidation of democracy must occur, namely ideology (normative beliefs), institutions, civil society, and culture. The cultural level labelled in his essay's title as primary symbolises the 'deepest level' including 'phenomena such as family structure, religion, moral values, ethnic consciousness, 'civic-ness', and particularistic historical traditions'. If we generally evaluate the development in CEE in the named categories or areas, deficiencies or paradigmatic differences might be observed in all four. Regarding ideology, liberalism has to compete with nationally and ethnically rooted populism and anti-liberalism, democratic institutions are weak, civil society is limited on small parts of society, and often we observe string 'bad civil societies' (Chambers and Kopstein 2001; Fehr 2016). According to Tucker, one of the biggest problems and failures of the transition in the given region was the establishment of liberal institutions. The 'small illiberalism' at the very beginning, the scarcity of justice that has not been remedied, led to corrupt political democracy and to the larger populist illiberalism that emerged following the economic recession. The aforementioned issues and deficits of Central-European and Eastern-European regimes which underwent the transition, would suggest that these regimes showed or are showing deficiencies which could be the reason to label them differently than consolidated democracies. For instance, in his book *Post-communism and democracy (Postkomunismus a demokracie)* Kubát labelled new democracies consolidated, semi-consolidated and not-consolidated (Kubát 2003, 27). It is possible of course that specific countries can move through these categories. Slovakia, for example, is in Kubát's book classified as a semi-consolidated democracy, while Hungary, on the contrary, is classified as consolidated.⁹ The question, however, is if one of the Kubát's categories (most probably non-consolidated democracies) can be perceived as an equivalent of the 'grey zone of regimes' (Carothers 2002) or, to be precise, of 'hybrid regimes' as the 'meta-concept' in the sense of how authors of this text see it. Kubát's approach, while similar to the that of Heydemann and Vodička in their comparative analysis of ten years earlier, suggests more linear perception in

⁹ We point out that Kubát wrote his text basically in the same time (2003) as Carothers (2002), so the contemplation of a certain de-democratisation in Central Europe and Eastern Europe was not current.

which the countries can gradually move 'up'. However, it does not really count on the possibility of digressing to 'lower' qualitative types of democracy, not dissimilarly to the above-analysed text of Carothers (2002).

On the other hand, Merkel et al. (2006) base their work on the thesis that 'imperfect' or in other words 'less-than-fully democratic regimes' can very often develop from consolidated or, to be precise, liberally-democratic regimes. This approach would be fully in agreement with the concept of de-democratisation and with the dynamics and movement of a higher degree of democracy towards the worsening of the measured indicators, specifically, the weakening of (some) building blocks of liberal democracy. According to Carothers, (2002, 11–12) we would surely discover within the given region the 'syndrome' of 'dominant-power politics' which in his text he stated as one of the symptoms of non-liberality of democracy and confirmation that these regimes belong in the grey zone of regimes. Let us turn our attention now to the case of Hungary, and how such democratic digression can take place in reality and to which degree the Hungarian case can be used for the application of hybrid regimes.

6 HUNGARY: THE ROLE MODEL OR AN EXEMPLARY CASE?

Hungary was, together with the Czech Republic, Poland and, from the second half of the 1990s, Estonia and Slovenia considered to be one of the most significant successes of liberalisation and subsequent democratisation of the communist regime in Central and Eastern Europe. In 1997 these countries were placed in the so-called Luxembourg group, through which the EU gave them the statute of countries that within the group of new democracies belong to the most consolidated, i.e. liberal, democracies. The positive assessment of Hungary in comparison to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe was in this case apparent, even in comparison to partners from the Visegrad group. The electoral successes of the League of Polish Families in the elections for the EU parliament in 2004 or the strongly Euro-sceptic tendencies of Vaclav Klaus as the leader of the Civic Democratic Party or the president of Czech Republic (for comparison see Cabada 2016) raised in the first decade of the 21st century discussions about the rootedness of liberal democracy.

The developments after 2006, connected with the crisis of legitimacy of the ruling socialist party, and especially the long-term economic populism of both major parties led in Hungary to a state of 'chaotic democracy as labelled by Ágh (2018a, 149). Ágh also stresses the 'too high expectations from the new democratic system' mentioning that 'this over-expectation could have been higher than in other ECE countries since Hungary was a much more open country in the 1980s than the others'. Thus, the populist rhetoric and policies of both main political camps (social-liberal and national-conservative) were rooted in social populism as the general trend in the Hungarian development. 's the general picture about the Hungarian developments, the economic and political systemic changes have generated social deconsolidation, with a huge contrast between the formal democratisation and the substantive, performance democracy, as well as with the social exclusion of large masses from the achievements of democratisation' (Ágh 2018a, 143–144). It is important to mention that the inner consolidation of the Hungarian regime was only illusory. The scandal with falsifying statistical data and key economic indicators weakened the legitimacy of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) after 2006, just as the mobilisation of the insufficiently developed civil society by Fidesz, who demanded new pre-term elections, strongly disrupted the democratic character of the regime and opened the way

for questioning the qualities of liberal democracy. The question remains to what degree the quality of the democracy was real or whether it was only a façade of the regime. Here we could refer to the concept of 'hybrid regimes' of T. L. Karl (1995), who was the first scholar use the term 'hybrid regimes' in the field of political science research, and whose work strongly emphasises relationship between 'formal versus informal' functioning of the regime T. L. Karl strongly emphasises.

The super-mixed electoral system, which since 1990 was characterised by its balance of power between two strong political currents, worked in reverse in the situation of strong dissatisfaction of big social groups and the fatal weakening of one of two big political parties, as it even strengthened its effects in the majoritarian part (comp. Charvát 2008). On the other hand, based on the combination of two essential criteria (the scores of executives-parties' dimensions, and the dimension of the federal vs. the unitary state) by 2010 Hungary had already become the most majoritarian case in the group of new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (Bernauer and Vatter 2012, 461). The absolute victory of the national-conservative formation Fidesz in the 2010 parliamentary elections thus marked an important turning point in the development, which came at the time of long-term inter- and intra- crises linked to fiscal and economic issues as well as institutional difficulties in the EU. According to Ágh, (2018a, 149) with this 'began the transition to the authoritarian rule and its political system was reduced to a defective, Potemkin or façade democracy'. Here it is important to point out why the authors understand 'hybrid regimes' as a 'meta-concept' and why it is methodologically imperative when employing other concepts to analyse the character of any studied regime, because many authors work with pre-existing terms arbitrarily without more specific conceptualisation and the understanding of the original concepts. The transformations of the character of Hungarian regimes are, however, non-debatable. For example, J. Charvát (2018, 81-82) labels the development in Hungary after the 2010 parliamentary elections 'absolute reconstruction of the political system'. It is necessary, however, to consider and acknowledge the fact that the complete change of the political system alone does not always have to include the change of the character of the political regime. Among the most important changes he lists the general centralization of power, state regulation of mass media, strengthening the competencies of the general state attorney, abolition of the citizens' competence to refer to the Constitutional Court regarding the inquiry of new legal acts, the general weakening of the Constitutional Court or the purposeful changing of the law about the election of members of parliament. Shortly written, Fidesz: 'by far the largest and the best organized Eurosceptic party in ECE that issued ambiguous declarations and "double talk" on the EU at home in order to keep also the anti-EU voters among their supporters' (Ágh 2018a, 145). Thus, they decomposed the system of checks and balances. As important tools for such decomposition the new Constitution as well as new electoral law are labelled, but also the creation of new institutions with 'tutelary' character. The new Fundamental Law of Hungary ('one-party constitution') took effect on 1 January 2012. Essentially, it was not discussed with the opposition nor within Fidesz itself, where no major debate took place. Landau (2013), in his assessment of the new Hungarian constitution, compares both the text, and the way of its application with such nations like Egypt or Venezuela as examples of 'abusive constitutionalism' and attempt to establish a 'competitive authoritarian regime' (ibid.).¹⁰

¹⁰ We have to mention that the compared units (the states in the Middle East and in Latin America) have completely different (non)democratic backgrounds than countries of Central Europe, such as Hungary.

From the standpoint of the transformation of the regime's character into one showing evidence of 'hybrid', we see signs in the new constitution that help the petrification of the position of Fidesz, regardless of the electoral result. Fidesz took control of key institutions with their people:

- New Media council composed of five members, four of whom were selected by the parliamentary commission exclusively composed of Fidesz, the head of the Council was directly appointed by Prime Minister Orbán. All five members are appointed for a 9-year term (Boogards 2018, 1487).
- After the adoption of the new electoral law, the new national electoral committee was established in 2013. Its seven members were appointed for nine years (Charvát 2018, 93).
- Another example is the Budget Council composed of three members. The head was appointed by the Prime Minister, two members elected by the qualified majority in the parliament; i.e. all of them are Fidesz representatives. The terms of Budget Council members are 6, 9 and 12 years, i.e. the first member should be re-elected no sooner than 6 years. Significant is above all the competence of this new institution: 'The Budget Council can veto the national annual budget adopted by the parliament can fit adds to the national debt. If parliament fails to agree on the budget by the end of March of each year, the president can dissolve parliament and call new elections' (Boogards 2018, 1489).

A crucial legislative element for building the new political regime in Hungary is also the new electoral law. Based on Charvát (2018, 88–95) there did not exist any objective reasons for the electoral reform; between 1990 and 2010 the majoritarian government/coalition was created easily after each election. We must emphasise, though, that after the 2002 elections Fidesz was not able to form a coalition, although they increased the number of mandates compared to 1998–2002. This moment then is often considered to be the reason for the radicalisation of the party (Boskor 2018, 556). Nevertheless, the electoral reform was not discussed with the opposition; as in all other cases of legislative change, Fidesz used the method of 'rolling' against the opposition. Clear and extensive use of gerrymandering may be observed in the process of reducing the number of electoral districts for the majoritarian part of the electoral system from 176 to 106. Also, the change from the two-round to first-past-the-post system rewards the dominant actor – Fidesz. Let us stress that it's not just the elections that create a 'supermajority' that is important, but much more the 'subsequent elections, in which incumbents made extensive use of their advantage. Hungary's particular super-majoritarianism (since 2010) means that Fidesz can change the constitution or appoint the people to the judiciary, electoral, or media bodies without the participation of the opposition' (Szymański 2018; Pozsár-Szentmiklósy 2017).

Again, the new electoral law was introduced by Fidesz 'without meaningful discussion in parliament, without consultation, and without the support of opposition' (Boogards 2018, 1485) and the new electoral system gave a clear competitive advantage to Fidesz (Charvát 2018). Boogards (2018, 1489) concludes that 'Fidesz might lose elections but can hold power through the counter-majoritarian institutions it created, the long-term appointments it made to key positions, and the policies it enshrined in the constitution and cardinal laws.'

As presented, with the fundamental transformation of the legal pillars, unfair electoral law and by taking over the monopoly of the public, and dominance in private, media Fidesz ensured control over the important segments of the

systemic architecture. Also, the increasing pressure on civil society organisations, NGOs, etc. has to be stressed. Furthermore, Fidesz has developed the system of pseudo- or quasi-NGOs and also built 'an extended system state corporatism through state-controlled organisations for all public employees with mandatory memberships, and also, the state-directed social movements have been organised into the fake civil society' (Ágh 2018a, 150). A quantitative analysis of Bertelsmann's transformation index following the development in Hungary in the last decade clearly showed that 'all indicators except the one for tutelary democracy register decline over time' ... Hungary today is seen as a defective democracy according to the BTI' (Bogaards 2018, 1485).

In the context of our analysis we consider Hungary to be a 'hybrid regime' in the sense of abovementioned theoretical approach; that is, in application of 'hybrid regimes' as an umbrella 'meta-concept' under which we can categorize an infinite number of conceptualisations, which in wider analysis deal with 'grey zone of regimes' (Carothers 2002). Precisely, this was the reason why the text of T. Carothers was chosen for a deeper analysis and the subsequent application on the examination of the specific region.

7 CONCLUSIONS

All the analysed steps of the ruling party Fidesz, which show evidence of their antiliberal and populist character, together with the monopoly position of Viktor Orbán, logically lead to considerations about the nature of Hungarian political regime that is to the question about its definition and character. Logically we can move both in the dichotomy on the continuum democracy vs. authoritarianism as well as (reflecting on the aims of our text) primarily linked to the possible 'hybrid' character of the regime and concepts, which we perceive as an analytical unit under the umbrella 'meta-concept' of 'hybrid regimes' as such.

As Bogaards (2018, 1482) emphasises 'there is no scholarly consensus on how to characterize Hungary's contemporary regime' The author also points out that the most pessimist scholars use labels such as 'onset of autocratic, crypto-dictatorial trends', 'semi-dictatorship', 'semi-authoritarianism' or 'elected democracy', with other authors using less negative terms such as 'deconsolidation of democracy', 'democratic backsliding', 'simulated democracy', 'populist democracy', 'selective democracy' or 'diminished form of democracy'; often the adjective 'illiberal' is used (Bogaards 2018; Ádám and Bozóki 2016; Batory 2016). All of these concepts are perceived by the authors of this text as a weakening of democracy to the degree where the regime can be perceived as 'hybrid'.

Bogaards himself (2018, 1482) states that 'Hungary is a deviant *and* exemplary case'. "Orbán has built a diffusely defective democracy weakening democracy across the board but being careful, so far, not to cross the line with autocracy in any of democracy's partial regimes" (Bogaards 2018, 1492). Exactly here we see the construction of a 'phased autocracy' for the 'international audience', which presents one of the prominent features of 'hybrid regimes'. According to Bogaards, thus Orbán pays careful attention so that Hungary does not become 'obvious' authoritarian but maintained in the position of a certain 'illiberal democracy'. At the same time, however, the author clearly points out to the fact that Hungary today is not a functioning democracy and he does not see a perspective in which it could become one: 'Since many of the democratic defects have been constitutionally entrenched, it is difficult to see how an alternation in power – already unlikely in itself – can restore Hungary to a functioning

democracy' (Bogaards 2018, 1491). On the other hand, Ágh (2018a, 138) clearly states that Hungary is on its way to authoritarianism: "The Hungarian case is an "ideal type" or the worst scenario of the decline of democracy and the transition to the authoritarian system in ECE".

The quite significant discord between the two experts, in similar matter as the general terminological diffusion when trying to name the current Hungarian regime thus open the space for using 'hybrid regimes' in the widest possible matter, that is, as a 'meta-concept', which in our view overlaps with the above analysed definition from the works of T. Carothers (2002), of 'grey zone of regimes'. Here Hungary is joined by several other regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as outside of this macro-region (the most often mentioned is Poland). Some analysis, however, suggests that the trends described in the case of Hungary (where according to most of the scholars they reach the highest degree) we see in a larger group of Central and Eastern European countries (see e.g. Tucker 2015; Fehr 2016; Blokker 2012; Cabada 2017).

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