

PhD student Maral Galym

L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan

Associate professor Akbota Zholdasbekova

L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan

The main features of modern democracy: Central Asia and Latin America

Among all developing countries the example of exercising democracy as a governing regime in Latin American and Central Asian regions is especially multifaceted. If throughout the 20th century, the political regimes of a number of states in Latin America were subject to the oscillation between democracy and authoritarianism (totalitarianism), Central Asian region was under the total and strict control of one party, following one regime, which collapsed only at the end of the century. For instance, in some countries (Argentina, Chile) of Latin America democratic or partially democratic regimes were established only for a certain period, while none of Central Asian states have experienced democratic development at that period. However, since the late 70s of the last century all Latin American states (except Cuba), and at the afterglow of 20th century – all Central Asian countries underwent serious transformation processes. Those processes, in case of South American continent, took place in different countries with an unequal degree of intensity. The result of transformational political changes was the collapse of old authoritarian political institutions and the emergence of new – “democratic” or “transitional” forms of government. Nonetheless, many of those countries are still far from the enduring polyarchies of the Western model of democracy.

Analyzing the political changes and the current situation in both regions, we ought to mention the civilizational features of the countries of these regions. For instance, it is well known that Latin American civilization and culture were formed in the process of interaction of three layers - autochthonous (Indian) and two introduced

- European (Iberian) and African [1]. According to the Central Asia, we all know their previous lifestyle (nomadic) and how was it difficult to change it, besides the consequences of such changes. We cannot deny that the historical experience plays no less, and sometimes a large role in the emergence and stability of democratic institutions. In countries where democratic institutions existed earlier, democracy takes root much easier than in countries that do not have such experience. Therefore, the brief narration and analysis of the process of transformation into democratic states may give more detailed causes of how the current situation appeared in Latin American continent and Central Asian region.

According to the history of Latin America, at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, from all countries of the continent Costa Rica was the only country which had the political regime most closely corresponded to the standards of liberal democracy. Over the next ten years, they all changed to elected civilian governments. Moreover, each of common features has specific characteristics and a certain shade, which makes it possible to speak of a special type of democracy and its most striking models - Brazilian, Argentinian, Mexican, Chilean [2].

In case of Central Asia, the term of democracy and all institutions of democracy were in a slightly different understanding than in the entire world. The traditions of local self-government and participation of most of the population in public life, if they even had existed, they were in an inconspicuous amount. The Bolsheviks worked hard to form stereotypes of the Soviet and post-Soviet people about what democracy is. For the Bolsheviks and their leaders, democracy is a tool for consolidating the power of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. Hence the contempt for democratic institutions: parliamentarism, separation of powers, an independent judiciary and the media. Revolutionary expediency is above all. And definitely above all democratic formalities there [3].

In order to analyze the current situation in Latin America, it is useful to consider some more prominent examples of democratic transformation. One of the first countries where the process of liberalization started, and then became a symbol of the third wave of democratization in Latin America, was Brazil. The transition period

ended with the adoption in 1988 of a new Constitution - the most democratic in Brazilian history [4]. The Constitution proclaimed a democratic rule of law based on the principles of sovereignty, citizenship, human dignity, social values of work, free enterprise and political pluralism.

In case of Argentina, the first step towards democracy was the abolition of repressive legislation, the restoration of the constitution, and the proclamation of civil rights and freedoms [5]. The legalization of political parties, trade unions and other public organizations was accompanied by an increase in mass political activity. But the weakness of economic policy led the current government to the failure on the following elections. As it is clearly seen, most liberal leaders of the country were strong in some areas and were weak in others.

In Chile, the transition from authoritarianism to democracy was, perhaps, the most painful in the continent. According to E.A. Fedyakov, "the political system of Chile in the period of 1973-1988s is based on three axes: the power of the armed forces, economic success and the power of General Pinochet" [1]. However, the evolution of their views was largely influenced by the process of peaceful democratic transformation in Spain and Portugal [6]. In addition, the processes in the USSR during the "perestroika" period, as well as the crisis and subsequent collapse of the world socialist system, became an important catalyst for the ideological evolution of Chile.

The next more prominent example of transition is Mexico, which is also comparable with USSR. In the XX century Mexico had a dominant party regime for over 70 years [7]. The party system of Mexico, on the one hand, demonstrated the possibilities and limits of the use of institutions - first of all, electoral legislation, as well as informal rules and practices - to maintain the stability of the political regime and the dominance of a single party, and on the other hand, it confirmed the existence of democratic institutions in the country and their exercising. Nowadays, democratic institutions are still working with failures; there is no agreement among the population and political elites on a number of basic socio-political issues. This was clearly evidenced by the contestation of the results of the presidential elections during the "cactus revolution" in 2006.

Among the potential risks to which democracy is exposed in this region today, the main danger is still represented by its specific shortcomings – inefficiency and weakness of government, bureaucracy, corruption, which can provoke serious protest moods and conflicts. Owing to this, the increased social expectations of citizens in relation to democracy were most clearly manifested in the events of recent years. The previous years of 2013–2015 were a period of active protests that engulfed many countries in the region (Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Ecuador, Argentina, Venezuela, Guatemala, Honduras) [8]. By taking into an account all those differences under specific circumstances and motives of discontent in Latin American region, it is possible to form some general requirements people have for the functioning of civil institutions. These requirements were related to the implementation of democratic procedures, increasing the responsibility of political leaders, the timeliness of the reforms, fairness and transparency of elections. The topics of the inadmissibility of corruption and the need for economical spending of budgetary funds, a significant part of which, according to the protesters, should be directed to solving priority tasks for society, have acquired fundamental importance: ensuring security; improving health and education systems; housing construction; development of urban infrastructure. The latter demand was especially evident in Brazil, where mass demonstrations took place against the holding of the World Cup.

According to Argentinian political scientist Daniel Zovatto, the ineffectiveness and weakness of the state in performing its most important functions (primarily ensuring the safety of citizens), problems of governance and corruption give rise to disrespect for the law, and fraught with exacerbation of conflict situations and with the spread of violence. These factors are perceived by the majority of citizens of the countries of the region as a real threat [8].

Moreover, today we can see that young generation does not interested in the political life of the countries, they do not participate in elections, they mostly stay away from political career, and they just do not trust the politicians. The famous Chilean historian and political scientist Carlos Huneeus in the article “Youth? - At a Distance” wrote that “in the old days, parties paid considerable attention to students. Now ... this

is not happening, which creates a distance between the parties and the students. Young people no longer participate in elections and do not vote for systemic parties” [9]. Could this trend be evidence of a crisis not only of the usual political models, but also of civil society as a whole as a phenomenon of modern life and a necessary condition for the development of democracy? It is known that civil society in Latin America has always been resilient and resilient to the most adverse influences.

As it was noted by the Argentinean political scientist Isidro Aduriz, “we are talking about qualitative changes that creates the format of a new era, about changes in values, institutions, rules, procedures and forms of civil expression” [10]. This is a positive outlook on the future of civic culture, which is constantly changing in accordance with the time, but does not disappear anywhere.

Speaking about Central Asian countries, we mostly describe the situation in the entire Union of Soviet Socialist Republics which had been dominating for seven decades of the last century. The fact that population had “got” their political and civil rights, it was only in theory, in practice it was totally opposite. Also, the Soviet government carried out targeted repressions against real and potential opponents of the Soviet state; all political parties other than the communist were banned; citizens did not have the right to freely discuss and make decisions on this or that issue; there were no laws that would force the state to protect and exercise the rights of citizens. Besides, the Communist Party itself merged with the state apparatus of the Soviet Union and represented one structure. The communist ideology was recognized as the only right one, all other ideological trends were prohibited. As the heritage from Soviet times, currently independent post-Soviet states still do have those traces (scars) in form of democratic features.

In comparison with other countries of the Central Asian region, Kyrgyzstan has a relative democracy. Since 1990, it is already the sixth president - Sadyr Japarov has been ruling in this former Soviet republic. They came to this through two revolutions by fighting for the chosen path of building a democratic society, as well as making efforts to stop family and clan rule. In both cases, the basis of the dissatisfaction of the population was that the power was usurped, family and clan rule was developing in the

country [11]. However, after the 2010 revolution, when the Provisional Government headed by R. Otunbayev, which replaced the Bakiyev regime, transferred power to A. Atambayev in 2011. According to these general presidential elections, Kyrgyzstan was able to see the first peaceful transfer of power. Nowadays, the Constitution of Kyrgyzstan, adopted in 2010, does not specify the form of government of this Central Asian republic, but on January 10, 2021, according to the results of the referendum, 81.30% of voters voted for the presidential form of government in Kyrgyzstan [12]. Moreover, in the Reporters Without Borders rating on freedom of the press, Kyrgyzstan is in 82nd place as of 2020 - above all its neighbors, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine [13]. This example looks astonishing and gives other neighboring countries aspiration to find the brand new way of their own democracy and fight for it.

Another striking example is might be Kazakhstan. In case of our country, we clearly see that the country does not have fully democratic regime: the country had been ruled by one person almost three decades till 2019; the press is not fully free; the number of people who participates on elections is only 77,4% (in 2019) and on parliamentary even less – 63% (in 2021) [14]; moreover, current legislation has more restrictions and punishments. However, what do we know about the history of national democracy? It is well known fact that during several centuries after Kazakh Khanate were created, there was free and transparent elections, there was free people who had rights to move freely, there were even fair and objective judges in so-called court. We cannot blame on socialist regime for all the current heritage we have got from the last century, because there was another factor as mentality, as inclination to indulgence.

Summarizing this research work, we can make a conclusion that democracy in Latin American region is different from other regions, it has a lot of complexity and vast history. It is clearly seen that the history of region still has an impact, still reflects on further development of each country. Therefore, seems like people cannot forget and cannot start trusting to their government and to be certain about their future. Besides, the government is still weak, it does not fully “functioning” and fulfil its obligations. In our opinion, it looks like the government hesitates how to act in order to make it right, to make it in the “democratic” way. While the case of Central Asia is

totally opposite: there are too ambitious and powerful governors who does not want to surrender their power to someone else, and do everything is possible to keep the “throne”. According to Western analysts, there has to pass some time to get rid of Soviet mentality and move to democratic way of development.

The conflict between ethical norms and moral values of democracy, on the one hand, and a reality far from these norms, on the other, is a serious problem of modern society. This problem cannot arise in a period of democratic transition and overcoming authoritarian legacy, when completely different issues are on the agenda. Modern Latin Americans and Central Asian people expect from democratic governments not only effective economic and social policies, but also observance of moral guidelines - overcoming corruption (primarily in the highest echelons of power), reasonable budget spending, ethical and responsible behavior of political leaders. The disappointment and distrust of broad social strata can become the main political challenge of modern democracy [9].

In order to find the main features of democracy in the region, we can say the following: Latin America can be claimed as a democratic region once the local population and the local authorities (or government) can collaborate and hear each other. As we see that people are asking their government to perform its obligation properly and just to pay attention on them; while the government does not have any clue how to act in order to avoid people’s unrests. Definitely, those countries have a lot to do before claiming themselves as democratic, but we see how long and complex was their way towards “now” and how much it needs to get into “democracy”.

Saying about Central Asia, over thirty years have passed since the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of new independent states on the territory of Central Asia. It would seem that the time is sufficient for the formation of effective democratic and market institutions. But if the market mechanisms have started working, even not in a perfect way, then there are very few successes in democratic construction. Whoever and in whatever way come to power, most often turns into an irreplaceable authoritarian governor. There was one exception: Kyrgyzstan. But even there, the experience of democratic institutions was still very short-lived.

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