THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY:
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES IN THE TIMES OF SYSTEMIC ANTAGONISM. INTRODUCTION

Pavlo Fedorchenko-Kutuev
National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Polytechnic Institute"
ORCid: 0000-0002-6997-6306

Denys Kiryukhin
Lund University / H. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy of the NAS of Ukraine
OCRid: 0000-0002-3686-3882

From its very birth democracy—as an idea and a set of institutions and practices—has been tensely intertwined with crisis. However, the language of crisis presupposes the presence of success. The very fact that this special issue of the Ideology and Politics Journal is dedicated to THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES IN THE TIMES OF SYSTEMIC ANTAGONISM is a testimony to the spread and robustness of democracy globally. Since it makes sense to discuss a crisis only when the phenomenon in question is "alive and kicking." For the numerous academic commentators, politicians, and policy practitioners, the extinction of Leninism heralded a new age of the democratic preponderance, including new converts to the creed of market democracy from formerly "socialist camp." The post-Soviet plunge into capitalism was both hasty and painful in socio-economic terms. The vast privatization, often in the form of the theft of state-owned property, led to an incredibly uneven accumulation of wealth with a veneer of democratic institutions. At the same time the world was a witness to a spectacular rise of authoritarian China which offered many autocrats with a seductive picture of a well-ordered police state coupled with a market dynamism. Then the Brexit and Trump elevation to the US presidency arrived. Celebrated by supporters as the biggest democratic action in history and a popular revolt against "deep state" respectively, these events have been interpreted as very serious blows to liberal democracy. Putin's re-tailoring of the Russian constitution signaled the turn to flagrant personal autocracy. The entanglement of these events begs for interpretation and explanation. Note also the change in terms of rhetoric. If in the 1970s for Huntington and his associates the crisis was described in the terms of growth of democratic governance, in the 21st century scholars and media commentators warn us about the democratic backsliding and resurgence of authoritarianism. All these elements constitute the rationale behind composing this special issue dealing with the current crisis of democracy. Instead of experiencing a new era after the 'short 20th century' dubbed by Eric Hobsbawm "age of extremes" we have entered uncharted waters of even more "interesting times" (we owe all the definitions in quotation marks to the witty British historian).

The *Democracy Report 2023*, released by V-Dem Institute recently, shows a threatening trend with regard to democracy in the modern world. Its authors note a decrease in the level of democracy compared to the indicators of 1986. According to the Report, today 72% of the world's population live under autocracies and only 13% in liberal democratic regimes. The most significant decline in the level of democracy has occurred in the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, Latin America, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe. In the latter case, the level of democracy has returned to the indicators at the end of the Cold War (Democracy Report 2023: 6). Even in some liberal democratic countries, there are processes that must raise our concerns. For example, the Liberal Democracy Index score of the United States has considerably declined over the past ten years. Or another example: according to the Report, even though the indicators of the level of democracy in Sweden have not changed significantly, the anti-liberal right-wing populist party, the Swedish Democrats, received extremely high results in the 2022 elections. The victory of such political force in a country with a high level of economic development, social stability and well-established democratic institutions is evidence of growing disillusionment with the liberal parties even in such cases.

Finally, as noted in the Report, autocracies are becoming less dependent on liberal democracies economically (in terms of exports and imports), while democracies have doubled their dependence on autocracies over the past thirty years (Ibid.: 7). Of course, the *Democracy Report 2023* also notes the presence of positive trends in political development globally, but in general, the report demonstrated that the state of democracy in the world is a cause for concern.

The study by the V-Dem Institute is interesting, among other things, because it provides additional evidence of the illusory nature of many ideas, which were characteristic of the era of the end of the Cold War. Contrary to expectations and hopes, the legacy of the liberal democratic revolutions of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Eastern Europe proved to be short-lived. For the most part, these societies were unable to establish stable regimes of liberal democracy. Second, economic liberalization has not automatically led to the democratization of political institutions. Moreover, it was the benefits brought by economic liberalization that allowed some authoritarian regimes to strengthen. Finally, it became clear that the idea of the "end of history" as an unconditional victory of the ideology of liberal democracy does not stand up to criticism. On the one hand, liberal democracy has been challenged by the growing strength of nationalism and conservatism. On the other hand, liberal democratic states have not been as effective as they once seemed in countering their own internal threats to democracy. Liberal capitalism emerged triumphant over Leninist/communist regimes. At the same time coping with the challenges of globalization and rising inequality in rich democracies has proved to be no less formidable task. As a result, we see, on the one hand, the growth of "illiberal democracies" (Farid Zakaria), with their characteristic conservatism, nationalism, and populism. On the other hand, we can observe the establishment of regimes of "undemocratic liberalism" (Yascha Mounk), which are distinguished by the rule of a narrow stratum of liberal elites, or elite technocrats.

In both cases, the possibilities for civil participation and decision-making based on communicative action and open dialogue are severely limited.

The political processes that we are witnessing today in different parts of the world, which can generally be characterized as an increase in the negative tendencies of the democratic political system, are the subject of numerous discussions. One of them was an international seminar on "Challenges to Democracy in a Time of Great Changes" organized by the Council for Research for Values and Philosophy (Washington, DC, USA) and Sociology Department, Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute (Kyiv, Ukraine) on May 31, 2021. In fact, the idea of preparing a special issue devoted to the crisis of democracy came from the debates at this seminar. Many participants of the seminar became the authors of the articles publish in the current issue.

The current IPJ issue is divided into two sections dealing with theorizing on crises of democracy and examining case studies of challenges to democracy ostensibly generating both crises and responses to them. The authors both employ and devise the smorgasbord of ideas ranging from time-tested concepts of modernity, modernization, developmental state, conflict sociology and conflict resolution theories to novel breakthroughs, e.g., the idea of political creativity. Although the geography of case studies is mostly confined to "post-Soviet" space, it seeks to increase our knowledge and understanding of perils to democracy of other regions and globally.

The article by Paul D'Anieri opens the section on **Democratic Theory and Practice**. His study aims to examine the causes of the emergence of new authoritarian regimes. The author focuses on the problem of the influence of the distribution of power on democracy and its decline. D'Anieri suggests looking at the problem of the decline of democracy in terms of the balance and imbalance (hegemony) of power. Accordingly, D'Anieri considers political institutions and norms to be a consequence of the distribution of power, the change of which in Russia and Ukraine is the subject of the author's analysis.

In turn, Denys Kiryukhin seeks for an answer to the question of why the majority of post-Soviet states have not been able to fully realize their dreams of building a free democratic society in his article. The subject of his research is the dynamics of the democratic development of Ukraine, which he considers in the context of the growing crisis of democracy in the modern world.

In the next article, Mikhail Minakov provides a picture of the North Eurasian region entering a period of turbulence and violent conflicts. Minakov's account is chock full of conceptual insights and richly packed with empirical data. In his treatment of new divisions that have come about after what he called a "long peace," he draws upon the concept of political creativity. The world Minakov is attempting to decipher in his article bears striking resemblance to Hobsbawm's age of extremes. He further develops his conceptual frame of references, enriching it with new terminology to adequately grasp rapidly disintegrating arrangements of pre-February 2022 social order. According to Minakov the four pillars of that arrangement were democratization, marketization, nationalization and Europeanization. He also provides multi-dimensional analysis of the political dynamics of post-Soviet polities.

The article goes against the received wisdom conflating creativity with goodness and thoroughly examines the authoritarian outcomes of post-Soviet creativity. Authoritarian regimes in Russia and Uzbekistan are a case in point. Minakov insightfully notes that ethnic conflicts within and between post-Soviet polities had a negative effect upon the democratic quality of the political creativity. The author also delineates the political geography of the post-Soviet space with Estonia on one hand and Russia and Uzbekistan on the other being its democratic and authoritarian poles respectively. While Ukraine was oscillating in between these poles. In sum, unlike his rather optimistic predecessors—for instance, Hans Joas's vision of creative democracy (Joas 1996)—Minakov suggests a subtle picture of the conflict-ridden political world, struggling to go beyond the clash between democratic and autocratic forms of creativity.

Svitlana Shcherbak addresses the problem of populism as exemplified by Volodymyr Zelenskyy's elevation to Ukraine's presidency in the next article. She examines the Ukrainian case against the backdrop of the global resurgence of populism. The author developed the conceptual frame of reference to grasp the Protean nature of populism including the juxtaposition of the people vs corrupt elites and powerful vs underdogs. The author views populism as a discursive practice and frame that could be employed by both far right and far left. For the author Zelenskyy as a leader catapulted himself into politics using the language of populism and skillfully capitalized on it. Widely acclaimed series "Servant of the People" is a case in point, Shcherbak compartmentalizes populism and nationalism, and she generally considers populism to be rather harmful to fundamental institutions of liberal democracy.

Bahinskyi, Kolomiiets and Iakubin produced a text titled "Liberal Peace, Democratic Peace and Nation-State Building in the Process of Socio-Political Conflict Resolution." For them the key intellectual and policy challenge is building of the state capacity in transition and divided societies. The authors rely heavily on international liberal-democratic theory and practice. They tap into current debates on whether liberal and/or democratic peace is possible. We are witnessing the reevaluation of the role of the state and its capacity in peace building, democratization, and conflict resolution. The authors argue that academic and policy communities are compelled to transform their visions of conflict resolution for old approaches have proved ineffective both globally and nationally, while new techniques are yet to be developed.

Fedorchenko-Kutuev, Pygolenko and Khomiak in the article "Ukrainian State Between the Imperatives of Democracy and Post-War Modernization" are puzzled with an issue confronting every warring nation: how to win the war and then go on winning the peace? This paper opens the section **Case Studies and Polemic** and draws upon its authors' long-term interest in the interplay of the state, modernity/modernization and democracy (see, for example: Kutuev 2016; Kutuev & Choliy 2018). In the heyday of modernization research program the emphasis was on achieving a revolutionary breakthrough and nation-building in mobilizing fashion (Ken Jowitt), often at the expense of democracy. Given Ukraine's proximity to the promoter of democratic transformations which is the EU and existential fight

against Russian autocracy the choice in favor of the former seems to be self-evident. However, the success on the road to democracy coupled with re-inventing the Ukrainian state in a developmental fashion is far from being guaranteed. The authors point out that the following measurements could serve as indicators of the fact that the state capacity for Ukraine is on the rise: its ability to attract refugees to the EU who were displaced by Russian aggression, tame corruption and make significant progress towards decentralization/self-governance. This is the agenda of building a development state which doesn't replicate the East Asian path of iron-fist guided modernization under the guise of a single party/military dictatorship. The article emphasizes that combining democracy and development under the auspices of modernization is a conflict-ridden agenda. Although authors are grappling with prescriptive thinking they can't stay in purely analytical boundaries. Employing the language of 'what ought to be done' they argue in favor of a developmental state invested with infrastructural power and therefore drawing upon creativity of political action (Mikhail Minakov) within the framework of democratic polity. In a nutshell, their argument is a resurgence of the Habermasian idea of modernity as an unfinished project that goes beyond its European proper and has gained universal significance.

Another example of a case study of post-Soviet states is Sergey Grigorishin's article on the ideological foundations of the title *Yelbasy* as a symbolic status of the first president of Kazakhstan. The author demonstrates the influence of the Islamic and local Central Asian cultural traditions and religious concepts on the post-Soviet political practices.

In the next article, Yenin, Korzhov and Vasylets strive to tackle the issue of the evolution of the democratic practices in their interaction with democratic values. The article's research questions are formulated as follows: Does the demand for democracy globally and regionally plummet, and how the reset of democratic institutions—in Ukraine in particular—is possible amidst challenges of autocracy, populism, and radicalization? Authors combine normative democratic theory with phenomenology of political processes and their value underpinnings. Having employed the data from monitoring of social changes conducted by Ukraine's Institute of Sociology at National Academy of Sciences and "World value survey," the authors point out the high demand for democracy as reflected in public opinion polls. However, Ukrainian democratic institutions tend to be imitational, which, in turn, makes them precarious and fragile. This has led to the conflict-ridden arrangement that was a debasement of democratic political order, diminishing the state capacity to instigate reforms as well as ensure national defense and security. Thus, there is a disconnect in Ukrainian society between the view of democracy as a value as well as a valuable/legitimate political regime on one hand and distrust in "really existing" political institutions due to their inefficiency and alienation from the society. According to authors, there is a conflict between ideal and reality, thus making democratic change particularly tragic. The very nature of the interaction between the political regime and the society must be re-molded after the war, when Ukraine to build a viable and functional democracy. The article also stresses

the critical importance of addressing the issue of social inequality as a prerequisite of inculcation of democratic values and principles in Ukraine.

Olena Pavlova and Mariya Rohozha examine the existence of democratic practices under conditions of war. Based on a case study and content analysis of the messages' content and metadata of the chat community of Mariupol (Ukraine, currently occupied by Russia), the authors investigate the functioning of grassroots democracy in a situation of struggle for survival.

Burim Mexhuani's study reveals the peculiarities of the development of political parties and their ideologies in the newly formed state. The author analyzes the development of political parties in Kosovo and clarifies the influence of external (international influence) and internal (historical legacy) factors on the process of party building.

In the next article, Andreas Umland focuses on the ideological preconditions and worldview background of Russia's war against Ukraine. In particular, Umland examines the anti-Western normative drift of the Russian intellectual elite, analyzing conspiracy theories, anti-scientific theories, and ideas that have gained wide popularity among Russian intellectuals.

The volume concludes with an article by Atıl Cem Çiçek and Metehan Karakurt on the nationalist narrative in the Turkish cinematograph. The authors examine how the processes of modernization and nationalization at the beginning of the twentieth century determined the ideological image of Turkish cinema, which coincided with the social imagination vested in the Turkish nation-building process.

In sum, the contributors to the issue are fascinated by the conflicts between today's democracy and its foes. They transform their fascination into analytical rigor to forge relevant concepts and gather data sets to make the world of the democracy in crisis visible and comprehensible with assistance from different social science perspectives.

Bibliography

Democracy Report (2023). *Defiance in the Face of Autocratization. Democracy Report 2023.* University of Gothenburg: of Democracy Institute (V-Dem Institute), https://v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem_democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf (accessed 1 May 2023)

Joas, Hans. (1996). *The Creativity of Action*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kutuev, Pavlo (2016). *Transformacii moderny: institutsii, idei, ideologii* [from Ukr.: Transformations of the Modern: institutions, ideas, ideologies]. Kherson: Helvetyka.

Kutuev, Pavlo, and Choliy Serhiy. (2018) Mobilization in post-socialist spaces: Between imperatives of modernization and threats of demodernization. *Ideology and Politics Jornal* 2: 4–24.