

Political systems of partially recognized states: the problem of assessing stability

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Abstract. The article discusses the possibilities and limits of assessing the stability of political systems in partially recognized states. The author explores the features, properties and characteristics of the central phenomena – «political system», «stability», «stability», «partially recognized states». Considerable attention is focused on establishing differences and similarities between the concepts of «stability» and «sustainability». The relevance of the study is determined by the need to establish links between the state of political systems, partially recognized by the state from external and internal political processes and relations.

The methodological basis of the study is: general scientific and systemic methods; structural-functional and comparative political methods; content analysis of historical and legal documents. The chosen methodological base is determined by two factors: the first is modern trends, patterns and processes of progressive development of domestic and foreign political science; the second is the author's position of the researcher.

The results of the study indicate the possible validity of assessing the stability of the political systems of partially recognized states, considering the peculiarities of their political culture. While, as external factors that determine individual, but essential elements of the political system of partially recognized states, they indicate the characteristic instability of the political systems of the studied polities

Keywords: political system, stability, resilience, partially recognized states, stability indices

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Introduction

The issues of steadiness and stability of political systems are very relevant for modern political science. The humanities and social sciences are also profoundly interested in the

increments of new knowledge regarding approaches and mechanisms for determining the factors of steadiness and stability of the political systems of partially recognized states moving in the trajectory of forming state power institutions according to the constitutional and legal patterns of modern developed countries.

The purpose of the study is to establish the limits and possibilities of assessing the stability of the political systems of partially recognized states.

Materials and methods

The methodological basis of the research is represented by the comparative (comparative-political), systemic and general scientific approaches. The chosen methodological base is determined by two factors where the first is the current trends, patterns and processes of the domestic and foreign political science development, the second is the author's research position.

The importance and significance of the interdisciplinary scientific method in achieving this goal. The present research is based on the theoretical and methodological paradigms of scientific knowledge related branches, such as Theory of Politics, Ethnopolitology, Comparative Political Science, Sociology, Philosophy, History and other humanities and social sciences disciplines.

The analysis of the stability of the political systems of partially recognized states requires, if not detailed, then at least formal clarification of the conceptual content of the central categories, namely, "political system", "steadiness" and "stability". Since the "political system" and "stability" categories are the subject of this analysis, the expediency of concretizing their essence is beyond doubt, while the clarification of the "steadiness" concept is required for conceptual demarcation with the characteristic signs of stability. In such a way their undoubted causality is emphasized, but not their identity.

The theory and methodology of political systems is a sufficiently developed direction in political, philosophical, constitutional and legal sciences. The political system as a social and partly political and philosophical category has been developed and formalized in the scientific works of famous both foreign and domestic researchers such as T.Parsons, D.Easton, G.Almond, K.Deutsch and others.

Without paying too much attention to the evolution of socio-political thought about the essence and nature of the political system, we can note that the term "political system" used in a broad sense means a set of all kinds of relations covering state governance and various socio-political processes occurring within the state [8:126]. As noted by S.E.Bilyuga, it was only by the beginning of the XXI century that the political system started being interpreted as an integral and well-organized totality of political institutions, of political relations and processes, the role and purpose of subjects of political relations and processes, the principles of power relations functioning [2:46–56].

Results

It is obvious that the basis of the existence of the political system is the preservation and maintenance of both its steadiness and stability.

The relevance of modern studies of political stability is due to an extraordinary property of political science itself, namely, the lack of a generally accepted interpretation, unity in determining the essence and the specifics of “stability” in the direct political dimension. Dialectics, as well as the interpretation of the individual elements of this phenomenon and the whole scope of the concept for domestic and foreign researchers often differ in empirical, semantic and other respects.

One of the explanations for this circumstance is a process of globalization coming along with geopolitical, economic, social, cultural and other processes related to the political sphere, which significantly adjust the architecture of the modern world order, and it, in turn, retouches the limits and the parameters of the functioning of the political systems of modern states.

Kenneth Waltz, an American political scientist, the founder of the theory of structural realism, defines stability as a state of the system in which it retains its viable functions (so it exists) and does not collapse [16:174]. However, the approach has its own drawback, since it is possible to diagnose the state of stability of the system through the binary nature of this political phenomenon (state), using the antithesis. Thus, the political system can be in a stable or unstable position, preserving the inherent institutional properties of the political organism. At the same time, the preservation or the loss of functions that maintain life support may indicate the persistence or the destruction of the institutional foundations of the political system, which indicates the stability of the system in principle. Some major researchers of institutional and neoinstitutional approaches point to the direct connection of stability with the state itself, which is a universal political institution whose goal is to preserve the ruling power, sovereignty and territorial integrity [13:1–25].

According to A.S.Makarychev,

...stability is a multidimensional concept that includes such characteristics as the preservation of the system of government, civil order, legitimacy and reliability of governance. Stability should be discussed only in comparative categories: the political system can be characterized as more or less stable in comparison either with other systems or with the regime in which it functioned before [9:149–157].

Political stability can characterize the balance of internal and external political relations, reflecting the degree of balance in the correlation of forces and providing options for using political measures to preserve the existing situation, as well as to strengthen the functioning bases of the current government and society [10:1–9]. As A.I.Solovyov rightly noted, the political stability is the most significant goal and value both for the current government and for the society as a whole [10:1–9].

The limits of understanding the essence of the “stability” concept are clearly revealed through establishing the extension of the “instability” antithesis. In a simplified sense,

instability implies the inability of the political system to maintain or cope with the destructive transformations. The forms of instability vary depending on the balance of socio-political forces, the peculiarities of public-management decision-making, etc.

In case of threat the destabilization of a democratic state government depends on the following circumstances: firstly, on the presence or absence of “dissidence” in the society on socio-cultural, ideological, socio-economic grounds; secondly, on the level of support of an incumbent democratic regime by the country’s population [9:149–157].

Disclosing the term “stability”, we should refer to the researches by M.V.Vilisov, K.O.Telin, K.G.Filimonov, who believe that

...sustainability is the condition of the state system that allows it to reproduce and exercise the powers vested in the government apparatus and state institutions as a whole, thereby achieving an equilibrium that ensures its functioning. [4:7–27]

Researchers use the category of “state system” rather than “political”, which, as they believe, is justified by the successful opportunity to fix the central object of research – the state, as well as practical aspects of public administration and the system of power relations. However, it should be noted that this approach is controversial.

Meanwhile, foreign academic and political science discourses related to the solvency of states, periodically updated the conceptual and categorical apparatus of the categories considered in the current article. For example, “failed states” were first replaced by “unstable states”, later by “unstable conditions”, and in the last two decades the “stability” category have been widely used together with other categories related to the meaning and content [1:26–41]. Thus, the concept of “failed states”, as follows from the analysis of the theoretical positions of Western researchers, is understood as a recognized subject of international law, which for various reasons has lost some of the attributes and/or does not perform the basic functions of a sovereign (established) state, and not, as it may seem initially, unrecognized and/or a partially recognized state. However, the Russian researcher A.G.Bolshakov in his work points out that the insolvency of the state is diagnosed by several indicators, one of which is the non-recognition of their subjectivity by the world community, or in other words, by subjects of International Law [3:105–124]. It is difficult to agree with this, since the *de jure* political status of unrecognized and/or partially recognized states indicates the process of formation, the development of political institutions, which did not lead to the apogee of sovereignty itself that is the recognition by the world community, but moving away from the point of bifurcation.

The greatest interest in determining the scope of the concepts under study is the institutional approach interpreted by R. Rothberg, based on a binary matrix of the “ability” and/or «desire» of public authorities to maintain functioning [15:1–25]. This approach reproduces the stability parameters in four configurations, which can be extrapolated to the state of stability of the political system (Table 1).

Table 1. Assessment of the stability state: binary matrix

State	Correlation	
	Ability	Desire / readiness
Stable	+	+
Vulnerable	+	–
Unstable	–	+
Critical	–	–

At the same time, the political system, like any other, is stable when it is in an equilibrium state while fitting the necessary internal parameters in order to support the socio-political system and perform the basic functions assigned to the institutions of state power.

Steadiness has a more pronounced static character, in contrast to stability, which can vary depending on the fluctuations of non-permanent elements of the political system within predetermined limits. Probably, if the assessment of the political system steadiness is the extreme limit of measuring the viability of the political functions of the state, then the assessment of the political system stability can diagnose the future correctable, intermediate or threshold values of deviations in the political process and relations.

It is essential to share the concerns of domestic researchers who pay attention to the fact that threshold values in different political systems may differ depending on both trends and patterns of political processes and relations, and on the peculiarities of the current socio-political conjuncture [5:19–28]. Without any doubt, any political system has special, authentic characteristics, a historically conditioned and formed political consciousness, a system of public-state ideas or views (an ideological element), traditions of political relations, forms of interaction between society and the state.

Thus, the criteria and indicators of political stability cannot be universal and comprehensive, respectively, by default extrapolated and projected on all political systems of states without exception.

The examples of socio-political processes in Venezuela in 2002 and Turkey in 2016 cited by Kh.A.Gajiyev and A.S.Semchenkov, where political “turbulence” provoked political instability, are noteworthy. However, the subsequent “alignment” (normalization of the situation almost immediately after the upheavals passed) demonstrated the high level of political systems stability of these countries [6:161–194].

Having established the structure and content of the categories “political system”, “steadiness”, “stability”, it is necessary to determine the technology and method of assessing the stability of the political system of partially recognized states. M.V.Vilisov, K.O.Telin and K.G.Filimonov reasonably note that domestic and foreign researchers discuss the categories of “solvency” and “effectiveness”, “capacity” and “equilibrium”, “steadiness” and “stability”, while international indices measuring state and political systems use criteria such as “competitiveness”, “fragility”, “transformation”, etc. [4:7–27].

To fix and assess the political system stability there have been developed a wide range of ratings that focus on special components of political systems and political regimes. A significant number of ratings analyze mainly recognized, established subjects of International Law

(states) and do not take into account partially recognized and unrecognized ones, considered more often as separatist territorial structures that threaten the stability of the territories of sovereign states from which they have separated or declared independence.

There are a number of indices and evaluation parameters with a central denominator that is the stability (including steadiness) of the political system. Following Kh.A.Gajiyev and A.S.Semchenkov, we will single out the most analytically sound and relevant among all of them:

1. The index of stability of the political system (PSSI) by D.Handel, G.West, R.Meadow, which is based on social and economic indicators, on the state of political conjuncture and the presence or absence of political conflicts.

2. The Index of political stability and Absence of Violence (PSAV), developed by D.Kaufmann, A.Kraai, M.Mastruzzi, that is based on the ability of the incumbent government to maintain its leading position, on the level of political violence, on the confrontation on the external political circuit and tension in the society on socio-cultural grounds.

3. The Index of Political Instability (PII), developed by The Economist journal, and which is known as the index based on forecasting and analysis of probable prerequisites for destabilization through ongoing social, economic and political processes.

4. Index of Failed and Fragile States (FDSI), developed by the Canadian International Development Agency. The index is based on the measurement of the quality of governance, the state of the economy, security and crime, the level of human potential, demographic situation and ecology.

5. The Fragile States Index (FSI), developed within the framework of the Peace Foundation project, is based on measuring the level of intra-state tension by social indicators: national, religious, confessional, linguistic, class, territorial and other attributes.

6. The Index of State Fragility (SFI), developed within the framework of the project of the Center for Systematic Peace, that is based on measuring the ability to manage internal conflicts, develop and implement public policy, provide public services in the social sphere, maintain a high standard of living, etc.

7. The Index of Weakness of states in the Developing World (ISWDW), developers of which are S. Rice and S.Patrick. It is based on measuring the state of the economy, politics, security, and the social environment.

The purpose of the illustrated indices is to measure political stability in recognized countries, while the specifics of partially recognized states, their initial capabilities and resources are not taken into account. It is important to note that the definition of the term “partially recognized states”, as well as other categories studied in this paper, has an enviable degree of uncertainty both in the political science theory of international relations and in the legal theory of state and law. Along with the term “partially recognized state” the terms as “unrecognized state”, “self-proclaimed state/republic” etc. can often be used in the same sense.

Rather fair comes the remark by N.A.Dobronravin about the fact that the choice of a particular term in relation to a particular phenomenon depends on the preferences of the researcher himself or on the political rhetoric of the state, in whose academic environment

research is reflected [7:5]. Thus, in domestic scientific works until 2008, considering the specifics of the Abkhazian and South Ossetia statehood, the term “unrecognized states” was widely used. Later, after the recognition of the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia, the still-used term “partially recognized states” was introduced in political discourse.

Partially recognized states have a number of important features that characterize their political systems. The key feature is their paradoxical peculiarity when, on the one hand, they are interdependent, and, on the other, are significantly distanced from regional political processes and global political trends. These manifestations have a dispersed character, a special internal and external expression, that extremely accurately illustrate the existing problems of assessing the stability of the political systems of partially recognized states.

The internal features of the political systems of partially recognized states in most cases are confined to the formed or emerging transcendent political culture, but above all on its basic component that is political consciousness. The platform of political consciousness, especially for the partially recognized states, is political myths, symbols, mentality and value orientations. In these conditions, political myths act as a kind of worldview tool based on an existential perception of the surrounding world (mainly political reality) and national and/or state purpose. It is interesting that collective prejudices, stereotypes, historical experience and other driving forces of social life that influenced the format of interaction between government and society have the peculiarity of being identified as “national character”, this concept preceded the introduction of “political culture” into scientific circulation.

The political culture in partially recognized states is characterized by: firstly, the absence or underdevelopment of basic civil society institutions, and as a result, the overestimated expectations of society in solving pressing problems by the current government; secondly, the lack of public support for political institutions, including some disregard for legal norms, in which priority is given, for example, to such institutions of direct and informal democracy as the “people’s assembly”; thirdly, considering that the majority of partially recognized states have passed the stages of autonomization and sovereignization in conditions of armed conflicts, acute “post-conflict reflection” is often diagnosed, that is usually expressed by the absence of stable political traditions and the presence of ethnocratic tendencies; fourth, with rare exceptions, political processes and relations in partially recognized states are formed in a parity balance of legality and legitimacy. The latter is evidenced by the high frequency of political upheavals in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Kosovo.

In this regard, a qualitative assessment of the stability of the political systems of partially recognized states according to the “scale” marked by indicators of the recognized by the International Law subjects’ political systems is impossible. That is explained by the fact that the basic components of the systems of partially recognized states are destabilized initially. But the external facade of political crises and the change of the main political actors in any way (protest, electoral, etc.) in the partially recognized states does not usually hide any complex restructuring of political processes and relations. That is mainly caused by the

¹ Tokarev A.A. What’s with the Abkhazians? (The point of view of the authors, whose comments are published in the section “MGIMO experts say”) [Electronic resource]. Available: <https://mgimo.ru/about/news/experts/chto-tam-u-abkhazov/> (In Russ).

following factors: firstly, the system is often represented by the same Establishment group, where the differentiation can be caused only by the diversity of decision-making methods and approaches to management; secondly, by the internal agenda, where social demands and targets (domestic and foreign policy blocks) do not undergo a clear modification; thirdly, by the low coefficient of concordance (consistency).

Thus, the internal features of the political systems of partially recognized states correlate with the properties of the political systems of recognized states, and taking into account the specifics of the partially recognized states, the condition of their political systems should be assessed.

The external features of the political systems of the partially recognized states are formed on the basis of several factors.

1. The factor of external patronage. External interest in correcting or maintaining the status quo of partially recognized (more often – unrecognized) Polities is an indicator that demonstrates the obvious activity of the patron state.

Almost all the partially recognized states, without exception, come as a subject to the comprehensive influence of the countries that initiated the recognition of their international legal personality. And via that influence, a deep dependence and mobility of the political system is established depending on the political rhetoric of the metropolitan states (patron states).

2. The factor of the international political conjuncture. Lack of recognition of subjectivity, parity, autonomy and self-sufficiency in the international political arena. The inability to build equal contacts with all regional actors.

3. Causality of political systems. Here we mean the conditions in which the political systems of partially recognized Polities are located in the “reach” orbit of the political systems of the patron states, which strengthens their causal connection with various transformations of the political process and relations. It is when political events (change of the political regime, change of power, adjustment of the foreign policy and/or domestic political concept, etc.) in the patron states can cause a radical restructuring of the domestic political agenda of the partially recognized states.

Thus, limited international subjectivity, a high degree of comprehensive dependence, organic integration into political systems of the most extensive and complex order indicate (with a high degree of probability) the characteristic instability of the political systems of the partially recognized states.

Conclusions

If the steadiness is the basis for stability, then in the context of the partially recognized states, the most relevant value is the diagnosis of the status of “progress” to the condition of stability of the political system of the partially recognized states (as Polities that are highly dependent on patron states, external factors and processes).

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