

FORMATION OF POLITICAL LEADERS IN COUNTRIES OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION: EXPERIENCE FOR UKRAINE

FORMAÇÃO DE LÍDERES POLÍTICOS EM PAÍSES DE TRANSIÇÃO DEMOCRÁTICA: A EXPERIÊNCIA DA UCRÂNIA

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Abstract: The transition of Ukraine to democracy requires studying the experience of forming political leaders in developing countries. In particular, political leadership, in particular, the values, ideology, and policies of the leader, determine the level of democracy in a country. The results of the research provide evidence of the impact of political leadership on democratization and economic growth. It has been established that leadership determines the values and priorities for the development of political and economic systems as well as democratization has a positive effect on economic growth under the condition of an open economy, unity, and solidarity of the principles of leaders within the party and the opposition. The growth of opposition protests and the conservatism of political leaders leads to a decrease in the level of political culture, civil liberties, and the effectiveness of the government's actions. As a result, the level of economic development declines.

Keywords: Political leadership, democratization, economic liberalization, political liberalization, transitional economic.

Resumo: A transição da Ucrânia para a democracia requer estudar a experiência de formação de líderes políticos em países em desenvolvimento. Em particular, a liderança política, em particular os valores, a ideologia e as políticas do líder, determinam o nível de democracia em um país. Os resultados da pesquisa fornecem evidências do impacto da liderança política na democratização e no crescimento econômico. Foi estabelecido que a liderança determina os valores e prioridades para o desenvolvimento dos sistemas políticos e econômicos, bem como a democratização tem um efeito positivo no crescimento econômico sob a condição de uma economia aberta, unidade e solidariedade dos princípios dos líderes dentro do partido e a oposição. O crescimento dos protestos da oposição e o conservadorismo das lideranças políticas levam à diminuição do nível de cultura política, das liberdades civis e da efetividade das ações do governo. Como resultado, o nível de desenvolvimento econômico diminui.

Palavras-chave: Liderança política, democratização, liberalização econômica, liberalização política, transição econômica.

1. Introduction

The transition to democracy can take place through the use of various tools for the development of market economic relations: for example, nationalism in Serbia or the gradual successful market reforms in Slovenia after the end of the communist era (STANOJEVI, 2003). The level of success towards formation of political leaders in countries with democratic transit can be determined by analyzing the social-economic development of the country. Political processes generate political decisions in the social-economic sphere (FILATOTCHEV et al., 2003), define the concept, ideology and approaches to public governance and economic reforms (YIFU LIN, CAI & LI, 1996).

In Ukraine, the processes of the formation of democracy are actively taking place, in particular, in connection with the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU, the processes of liberalization of internal markets, standardization of regulations in the field of product quality assurance, development of small and medium-sized businesses, decentralization and privatization, introduction of government accountability through integration of ICT in the field of public administration. Furthermore, according to a study conducted by The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, democracy in the last few years, especially in a pandemic, has been under pressure, and the average global Democracy Index in 2019 has fallen from 5,44 to 5,37 (THE ECONOMIST INTELLIGENCE UNIT LIMITED, 2021). The above-mentioned actualizes the issue of studying the experience of the countries of democratic transition and the formation of political leadership in these countries.

2. Literature Review

Since the mid-1970s, numerous communist or socialist countries have begun to move to a market economy (KOVACIC, 2001), in particular, due to institutional development, which is significantly differentiated in various countries due to historical, religious, cultural factors (BECK & LAEVEN, 2006). The experience of Eastern and Central Europe (Serbia, Slovenia, Poland, the

Baltic States) (STANOJEVI, 2003; BECK & LAEVEN, 2006; SKVORTSOVA, 2010), Central Asia has been studied in the scientific literature (YIFU LIN, CAI & LI, 1996; BECK & LAEVEN, 2006). The lack of transformation of political leadership is holding back economic reforms (SHLEIFER, 1997). By the way, corruption is an additional deterrent to institutional development and democratic transition (ABED & DAVOODI, 2000; OGBEIDI, 2012). The formation of democracy is accompanied by political liberalization, and as a consequence, economic liberalization (GIAVAZZI & TABELLINI, 2005). Economic growth depends significantly on the national leader, values proclaimed by him, ideology and policy support in the society (JONES & OLKEN, 2005). The following empirically tested determinants of successful democratic transitions and democratic consolidation are distinguished, namely: social-economic development, the level of development of the civil society, institutional choice and favorable external factors (PRZEWORSKI et al. 1996). As a result of economic crises within the European Union (the EU), Eurosceptic and / or populist tendencies among parties and political leaders are growing in the member states (CSEHI & ZGUT, 2021). “This is discernible across Europe at the level of public opinion, among political parties and civil society groups” (BRACK & STARTIN, 2015), which is manifested in the national populism of the political leaders of Eastern and Central Europe (BRUBAKER, 2017). These trends determine economic development and the level of democracy in countries. For instance, the level of Euroscepticism of parties in Poland has been growing since 2001 (MARKOWSKI & TUCKER, 2010), which determines the overall level of populism of leaders as well as domestic and foreign policy of the country. The transformation of leadership in Slovenia is another example: “Recently, however, Slovenian democracy has been challenged” (KRAŠOVEC & JOHANNSEN, 2016).

For instance, Krašovec & Lajh, 2020 analyze the development and characteristics of public and party Euroscepticism in Slovenia in various elections, in particular, in the 2019 European Parliament elections. Previously, Slovenia was characterized by manifestations of “soft” Euroscepticism, mainly on the part of extra-parliamentary and/or small parties. The eurozone crisis and the EU’s “recommendations” led to an increase in Euroscepticism during the 2014 European Parliament elections among the parties concerned, mainly concerning the EU economic policy. However, in the 2019 European elections, “soft” Euroscepticism was evident in the election campaigns of some major parties, while “hard” Euroscepticism was largely concentrated among marginal parties (KRAŠOVEC & LAJH, 2020). The study of Cabada & Tomšič (2016) focuses on

individual political leaders and their impact on the development of democracy, which has a positive impact on the mobilization of citizens. Analysis of scientific literature for the period of 1996-2021 indicates the absence of research on the problems of forming political leaders in countries of democratic transition. Certain aspects of the democratic development of countries, the connection between the formation of democracy and economic development are studied in the scientific works. The purpose of the present research lies in examining the importance of political leaders in the development of democratic processes in developing countries. In order to achieve the purpose outlined, the following tasks have been defined, namely:

1. Studying the experience of the former socialist countries in terms of the formation of political leadership in order to effectively conduct democratic transition and the formation of a market economy.
2. Analysis of the level of countries' democratization that have undergone democratic transit, issues of transition to democracy and its impact on economic development.

The basic hypothesis of the present research lies in the fact that the absence of a political leader hinders democratic transit.

3. Methodology

In order to conduct a statistical analysis of the formation of political leaders, the experience of such socialist countries, as Slovenia and Poland have been used, forasmuch as these countries have undergone a successful democratic transition. Along with this, these countries are post-socialist and have begun the transition to democracy since the early 1990s. In addition, an analysis of the importance of Georgia's political leaders has been conducted in terms of the development of democratic processes. It should be noted that this country is an example of a socialist republic characterized by a process of democratic transit similar to Ukraine as well as the level of social-economic development, especially in the period of 1990-2000. Besides, while in Poland and Slovenia the transition to democracy has taken place through economic liberalization and European integration, then the transition processes in Ukraine and Georgia to a greater extent revolve around

slow democratic liberalization and a return to authoritarian regimes, depending on the current political leader.

The choice of countries for statistical analysis is based on two basic criteria:

- 1) socialist countries that have been democratized;
- 2) a similar level of social-economic development (Table 1).

Table 1. Indicators of social-economic development of countries of democratic transit

Indicator	Georgia		Poland		Slovenia		Ukraine	
	2000	2019	2000	2019	2000	2019	2000	2019
Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)	10,8 2	11,5 7	16,3 1	3,28	6,92	4,45	11,7 1	8,19
Population growth (annual %)	-1,94	-0,17	-1,04	-0,01	0,30	0,68	-1,01	-0,53
Trade (% of GDP)	62,6 6	118, 65	60,8 7	106,36	103, 95	159,03	119, 86	90,1 7
GDP growth (annual %)	1,84	4,98	4,56	4,54	3,67	3,18	5,90	3,23
Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP)	4,30	7,67	5,42	2,42	0,67	3,16	1,90	3,79
Inflation, consumer prices (annual %)	4,06	4,85	9,90	2,23	8,91	1,63	28,2 0	7,89
Foreign direct investment, net outflows (% of GDP)	0,11	1,78	0,00	0,80	0,32	1,60	0,00	0,40

Source: World Bank (2021).

At the first stage of the research, indicators of the relationship between political leadership and the development of democracy have been selected. The data from the World Values Survey (WVS Wave 6) for the period of 2010-2014 were used in order to statistically assess the relationship between political leadership and democratic development of selected countries. They were as follows:

1. In Poland, a random survey of citizens on values was conducted in January – February 2012 by the Center for Public Opinion Research. The method of data collection: Interview a face-to-face (CAPI). The sample included 2400 citizens, of which 966 respondents fully answered the question (response rate was 40,3%).
2. In Slovenia, a random survey of citizens on values was conducted in March – June 2011. The sample included 1069 randomly surveyed citizens over the age of 18.
3. In Georgia, a survey of 1202 citizens was conducted in December 2014 by step-bystep proportional random selection of the general public.
4. In Ukraine, the survey was conducted by the Institute for Economy and Forecasting of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine in December 2011. The sample included 1500 people over the age of 18.

The above mentioned surveys contained a block of questions on the democratic development of the country and the assessment of the political system / political leader, which were included as the basic indicators towards achieving the purpose and testing the hypothesis. The following indicators have been selected for further statistical analysis, namely:

1. Confidence: The Political Parties: 1-4, where 1 – I completely trust, 2 – I trust to some extent, 3 – I do not trust very much, 4 – I do not trust at all.
2. Type of the Political system: Having a strong leader: 1 – very good, 2 – rather good, 3 – rather bad, 4 – very bad.
3. Type of the Political system: Having experts who make decisions: 1 – very good, 2 – rather good, 3 – rather bad, 4 – very bad.
4. Type of the Political system: Having the army rule: 1 – very good, 2 – rather good, 3 – rather bad, 4 – very bad.

5. Type of the Political system: Having a democratic political system: 1 – very good, 2 – rather good, 3 – rather bad, 4 – very bad.
6. Democracy: People choose their leaders in free elections: a rating scale of 1 – 10, where a scale of “1” means “not important for democracy” and “10” – “very important for democracy”.
7. Importance of democracy: where “1” means “not important at all”, and “10” – “very important”.
8. How democratically is this country being governed today: where “1” means “not important at all” and “10” means “very important”.

Statistical analysis was performed in the software environment SPSS Statistica 22.0 using the mean, minimum and maximum, deviation from the mean in order to assess the influence of a political leader on the formation of democracy and his support by the population in different countries. Correlation analysis of selected indicators was used to assess the relationship between political leadership and democratic development. At the second stage of the research, a quantitative analysis of indicators of democracy development and economic growth in countries for the periods of 1991-2000, 2000-2010 and 2010-2019 was conducted, when active processes of changing national political leaders were taking place. The analysis was performed on the basis of the following data:

1. The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, (2021), Overall score of Index of democracy, 2020; Index of democracy in Georgia, Poland, Slovenia and Ukraine, 2006-2019.
2. World Bank (2021^a), GDP growth (annual %) in Georgia, Poland, Slovenia and Ukraine, 1991-2019.

4.Results

In Poland, the transformation of the political regime began in 1989 through the transition to a market economy and integration into the EU, the transition to democracy. The first factor was the processes of political transformation in the country in the late 1980s. The political leaders of the party “Solidarity”, having concentrated the government in their hands, began to dismantle the former authoritarian political system, while simultaneously creating the constitutional and legal foundations of political democracy. The leadership of the republic, as it had been announced, had a

chance to “return to Europe”, to enter Western European institutions. The second factor influencing the strengthening of the pro-European vector in Polish politics was social-economic changes. In 1989, an economic program developed by a group of economists led by Finance Minister L. Baltserovich was published (1989-1991). The document has declared that the country’s goal is to transition from a socialist to a market economy.

Poland’s political leaders established the global democratization of the country in 1989-1994 and ensured the formation of the country as a constitutional democracy with a multi-party political system. Herewith, global crises have affected the processes of democratization, causing deviations during periods of economic downturn, respectively, changing the processes of European integration. The current stage of Poland’s political leadership is characterized by a high level of populism, a reduction in the level of political influence and development of the country due to the coming to power of right-wing radicals. Populist leaders seek to reduce the level of the EU influence on the functioning of the government, increase the level of their own control over the political system in order to strengthen authoritarian political control.

The political system of modern Poland is extremely conflictual in nature, which is manifested in the sharp confrontation between the government and the opposition, both parliamentary and protest one. Citizens have a positive influence on the political process in Poland in the form of joint collective actions. This feature has not only determined the nature of the transition from socialism, but it also significantly affects modern conflicts. Social movements have become new political players, forasmuch as they come out against the initiatives of the ruling party “Law and Justice”, led by the conservative Ya. Kachynskiy. In Poland on the whole, higher average level of trust in political parties is observed with a deviation of 0,609 (Table 2).

Table 2. Poland’s survey results

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average value	Standard deviation
Confidence: The Political Parties*	903	1	4	3,30	0,609
Political system: Having a strong leader	893	1	4	3,10	0,799

Political system: Having experts who make decisions	863	1	4	2,01	0,658
Political system: Having the army rule	845	1	4	3,12	0,763
Political system: Having a democratic political system	858	1	4	1,99	0,671
Democracy: People choose their leaders in free elections.	909	1	10	8,73	2,139
Importance of democracy	931	1	10	8,70	1,911
How democratically is this country being governed today	907	1	10	5,89	2,204

Source: Elaborated by the authors on the basis of WVS Wave 6 (2010-2014).

For comparison, in Slovenia the level of trust to parties is higher; it is 3,47 (Table 3) with a deviation within the country of 0,575. Insufficiently strong leaders are considered to be the weaknesses of Poland's political system: according to the population's estimates, the strength of the leader's influence does not determine the type of political system (the average value of the indicator is 3,10 with a deviation of 0,799). Herewith, the opinion on the strength of the leader's influence on the type of political system varies within the country. Polish citizens believe that the military regime is not effective for Poland (the average value of the assessment of citizens is 3,12 with a deviation of 0,763). In contrast, respondents are more inclined to believe that it is not the government but experts who make the decisions they consider to be the best for the country (the average value of the indicator is 2,01 with a deviation of 0,658). Poland also has a well-developed democratic political system: according to citizens' estimates, the average value is 1,99 with a deviation of 0,671. Free elections by the community of political leaders are important for the development of democracy (average value 8,73), and life in a democratic country is considered by Polish citizens to be extremely important (average value is 8,7). At the same time, respondents consider Poland to be not a sufficiently democratic country: the level of democratic governance is estimated at 5,89 points out of 10 with a deviation of 2,204.

For comparison, similar trends in the type of political system are observed in Slovenia. According to the respondents' viewpoints, the country's political leaders are not strong enough (average value is 3,06); not the government, but the experts make decisions that they consider to be the best for the country (the average value is 2,00 with a deviation of 0,699). Slovenia also has a well-developed democratic political system: according to citizens' estimates, the average value is 1,93 with a deviation of 0,760. Respondents consider free elections by the community of political leaders to be important for the development of democracy (average value is 8,57), and life in a democratic country is considered by Slovenian citizens to be extremely important (average value is 8,11). At the same time, Slovenian respondents estimate the level of democracy in the country at 4,65 with a deviation of 2,296, which is much less than in Poland.

Table 3. Slovenia's survey results

	N	Minimu m	Maximu m	Average value	Standard deviatio n
Confidence: The Political Parties	1038	1	4	3,47	0,575
Political system: Having a strong leader	967	1	4	3,06	0,935
Political system: Having experts who make decisions	974	1	4	2,00	0,699
Political system: Having the army rule	980	1	4	3,68	0,572
Political system: Having a democratic political system	965	1	4	1,93	0,760
Democracy: People choose their leaders in free elections.	1012	1	10	8,57	2,134
Importance of democracy	1048	1	10	8,11	2,171
How democratically is this country being governed today	1035	1	10	4,65	2,296

Source: Elaborated by the authors on the basis of WVS Wave 6 (2010-2014).

In Georgia, the results of the survey differ significantly. Citizens have little faith in political leaders and parties (average value is 3,06) (Table 4). However, the level of influence of political leaders and their strength is considered by citizens as significant (average value is 2,31 with a deviation of 1,058). Respondents are more inclined to believe that both the government and experts make important decisions for the country (the average value is 2,77 with a deviation of 0,919). Herewith, citizens note the extremely negative impact of the military regime on the political system (average value is 3,45 with a deviation of 0,762); they consider a democratic political system effective for the development of the country.

Table 4. Georgia's survey results

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average value	Standard deviation
Confidence: The Political Parties	1144	1	4	3,06	0,737
Political system: Having a strong leader	1066	1	4	2,31	1,058
Political system: Having experts who make decisions	1018	1	4	2,77	0,919
Political system: Having the army rule	1063	1	4	3,45	0,762
Political system: Having a democratic political system	1070	1	4	1,61	0,741
Democracy: People choose their leaders in free elections	1107	1	8	8,44	2,196
Importance of democracy	1162	1	10	8,69	1,984
How democratically is this country being governed today	1145	1	10	4,83	1,972

Source: Elaborated by the authors on the basis of WVS Wave 6 (2010-2014).

The results of the survey of Ukrainian citizens (Table 5) are similar to the results of Poland, Slovenia, Georgia in the level of trust in political parties (the average value is 3,12 with a deviation of 0,784). At the same time, the Ukrainian respondents have noted that a strong leader, independent of the parliament and elections, has a positive impact on the development of the political system. Citizens also believe that both the government and experts make management decisions (average value is 2,3); the military regime has a negative impact on the development of democracy (average value is 3,31); a democratic political system is effective for the development of Ukraine (average value is 1,85).

Table 5. Ukraine's survey results

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average value	Standard deviation
Confidence: The Political Parties	1500	1	4	3,12	0,784
Political system: Having a strong leader	1500	1	4	2,08	0,905
Political system: Having experts who make decisions	1500	1	4	2,30	0,842
Political system: Having the army rule	1500	1	4	3,31	0,767
Political system: Having a democratic political system	1500	1	4	1,85	0,762
Democracy: People choose their leaders in free elections	1500	1	10	8,43	2,152
Importance of democracy	1500	1	10	7,83	2,355
How democratically is this country being governed today	1500	1	10	4,49	2,413

Source: Elaborated by the authors on the basis of WVS Wave 6 (2010-2014).

The results of the survey generally have revealed differences in the types of political systems in Poland and Slovenia, compared to Georgia and Ukraine. In all countries, the level of trust and confidence in political parties is low. While, in Poland and Slovenia, political leadership is not recognized as a factor in ensuring the development of democracy (3,10 and 3,06, respectively), then in Georgia (2,31) and Ukraine (2,08) citizens are more inclined to think about the significant impact of political leadership on democracy and development of the country. Significant differences have been also found in the level of perception of the countries' democratic nature: in Poland and Slovenia, citizens estimate the level of democracy in the political system at 1,99 and 1,93; while in Georgia and Ukraine -at the level of 1,61 and 1,85, respectively.

The conducted analysis of the perception and formation of political leadership as a factor towards developing the democracy shows that in Poland and Slovenia this factor has not had a significant impact on democratic transit. However, European integration and economic liberalization have been the determining factors. Thus, during the period of 1991-2000, Poland's GDP grew at a stable rapid pace with an average annual growth of 3,81% (Figure 1), and GDP per capita increased from 2235,5 US dollars in 1991 to 4501,5 US dollars in 2000 (Table 1). For comparison, Georgia, where active reforms began in all spheres of the political and economic system after the 2003 Rose Revolution, achieved an annual GDP growth rate of 5,96% in 2000-2010, while in 1991-2000, Georgia's GDP growth rate amounted to -7,36%. Along with this, Georgian respondents noted the importance of a strong political leader in democratic development. This can be attributed to protests across the country against the current political regime. Georgia's peaceful protests in support of M. Saakashvili's opposition mark the beginning of tough economic and political reforms. M. Saakashvili's democratic ideals became the basis for tax reforms, law enforcement reforms, overcoming corruption, infrastructure development. It should be noted that Poland and Slovenia are characterized by a more stable level of economic growth, while Georgia and Ukraine are suffering from constant economic downturns, in particular, due to the change of political leaders.

For instance, M. Saakashvili's rise to power was accompanied by rapid economic growth in Georgia, and after 2013, economic growth slowed to 4,87% annually during 2010-2019. Saakashvili proclaimed Western European democratic values, which found support among the population. The example of Georgia demonstrates how political democratic values and leader ideals determine the pace of economic reform and economic growth.

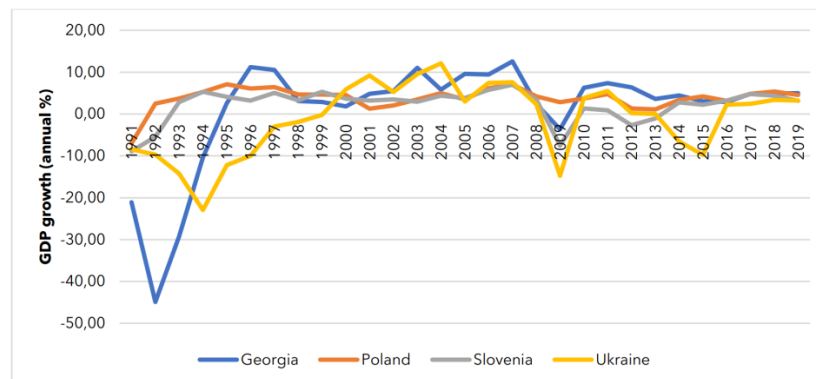


Figure 1. GDP growth (annual %) in Georgia, Poland, Slovenia and Ukraine, 1991-2019.

Source: World Bank (2021a).

According to estimates of some prominent international institutions, Slovenia's transition to democracy, which began in the early 1990s, was relatively rapid and extremely successful. Slovenia became the leader among the newly formed democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE): the country was considered to be "free" until the mid-1990s, according to the Freedom House Nations in Transit Annual Survey (NIT) (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2021). Thus, the Slovenian state was both democratic and able to respond to the challenges of the transition period. Slovenia's economy returned to its course, and its political and economic integration into the European Union (the EU), including the adoption of a common currency, was successful. It seemed that Slovenia had every chance of strengthening democracy, and stable indicators of economic development during 1991-2019 could strengthen these political processes. Slovenia demonstrated a high level of economic and human development, a tradition of attracting social subjects in addition to the proliferation of new subjects during the transition period, the adoption of a parliamentary system and benevolent support from the EU. Furthermore, with the exception of the period of transformational depression in 1991–1993, Slovenia experienced a rather favorable social-economic development in the 1990s and stable growth without significant macroeconomic imbalances. However, in recent years, democratic development has slowed down and the country's rating in democratic development has deteriorated. Corruption in the country and reduced political participation in the elections are the basic reasons. In political life, voters' turnout in the parliamentary elections fell from 83% in the first multi-party and free elections in 1990 to a minimum of 51% in 2014. As a consequence, satisfaction with

democracy and trust in institutions have been steadily declining since the middle of the first decade of democracy in Slovenia. By 2014, less than one in ten Slovenes were satisfied with the state of democracy in the country. Slovenian democracy has a number of weaknesses that are exacerbated during economic crises.

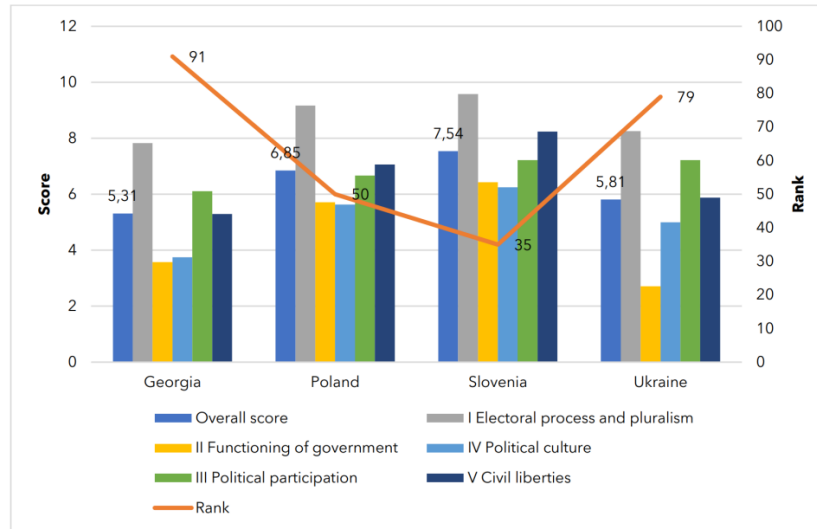


Figure 2. Overall score of Index of democracy, 2020

Source: *The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, (2021).*

The government's policy and the values of the political leaders of these countries do not significantly affect the development of democracy. In the countries of democratic transit, the formation of political leaders has not had a significant impact on social-economic development, with the exception of Georgia. European integration has been a crucial factor in ensuring a democratic transition. Thus, the data of the study conducted by The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited (2021) indicate a significant level of democratic development of Slovenia and Poland due to another factors. Slovenia belongs to the countries with Flawed democracies (score 7,54); Poland - to the countries with Full democracies (score 6,85); Ukraine and Georgia - to the countries with Hybrid regimes with scores on the Democracy Index of 5,81 and 5,31, respectively (THE ECONOMIST INTELLIGENCE UNIT LIMITED, 2021).

The level of political culture is among the weaknesses of democracy in all countries. For instance, the assessment of the political culture of Georgia is 3,75, Poland – 5,63, Slovenia – 6,25 and Ukraine – 5,00. Along with this, the functioning of the government is an additional negative factor in the development of democracy: in Georgia the indicator is 3,57, in Poland – 5,71, in Slovenia – 6,43 and in Ukraine – 2,71. It is this factor that confirms the absence of a strong leader who would ensure stable support for democracy in the countries. The example of Georgia proves that tough economic reforms conducted by a political leader with support in the form of popular protests have ensured both democratic development and economic growth. Electoral processes and pluralism are estimated by The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, (2021) at a high level in all countries. Georgia has a low level of civil liberties, which affects economic development. Similar trends exist in Ukraine, where the level of civil liberties is 5,88. The level of political participation in all countries is also average: in Georgia the indicator is 6,11, Poland – 6,67, Slovenia – 7,22 and Ukraine – 7,22. Therefore, the formation of political leadership affects the development of democracy through such key factors, as: political culture, government efficiency, transparency of electoral processes and pluralism, the level of civil liberties and political participation. In general, in terms of the level of democracy, Slovenia and Poland are at the highest level in comparison with Ukraine and Georgia (Figure 3).

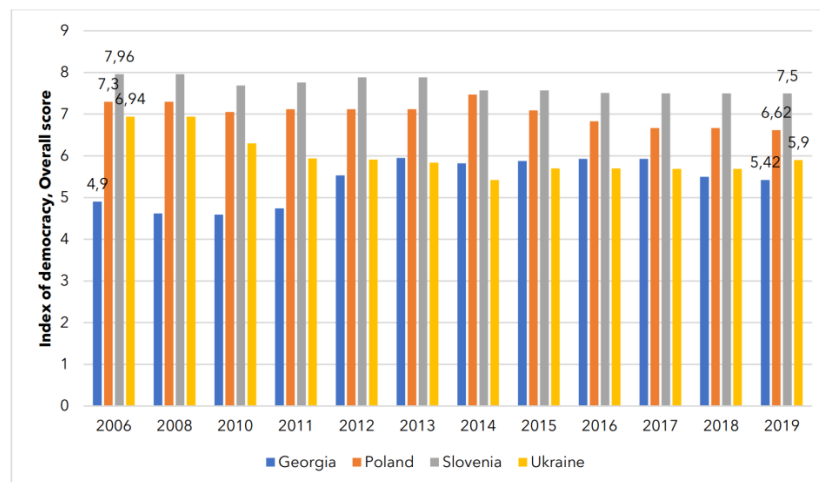


Figure 3. Index of democracy in Georgia, Poland, Slovenia and Ukraine, 2006-2019

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, (2021).

Under the conditions of crisis and pandemic, the democracy of transit countries is particularly “fragile” and “weak” due to the weakening of civil liberties and the need for governments to make unpopular political decisions, which are not supported by the population. The pandemic has exacerbated the weakness of political culture, especially in Georgia and Ukraine. Poland was an exception, forasmuch as the country’s Democracy Index improved in 2020 due to increased support for democracy and willingness to participate in legitimate demonstrations; it is evidenced by the wave of anti-government protests in the second half of 2020, while support by strong leaders has declined. However, Poland still lags far behind Slovenia. Electoral processes in Ukraine have had a positive impact on democratic processes, primarily the political support of the population of V. Zelensky in the 2019 elections (73% of votes in the second round) due to improved electoral standards and a greater level of fairness, transparency of elections. However, these positive developments have been offset by violations of civil liberties as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and, in some cases, a decline in political culture level. Electoral processes in 2019 in Ukraine and the civilized revolution, which has been manifested in the support of V. Zelensky by the population of the country, serves as an example of citizens’ participation in the development of democracy. Herewith, it should be noted that the population of Ukraine does not unanimously support any of the political leaders. Consequently, inquiries of the sociological group “Rating” as of December 16-20, 2020 have revealed the following results: the presidential rating is headed by V. Zelensky with 26,5% of support, P. Poroshenko has received 14,3% of support, Yu. Boyko – 10,1%, Yu. Tymoshenko - 9, 8%, V. Medvedchuk – 7,7%, V. Groisman – 6,4%, I. Smeshko – 6,0%, D. Razumkov – 4,1%, O. Liashko - 3,6%. Such data prove that there is lack of the experience of strong political leadership in Ukraine, in particular, due to the ineffective functioning of the government. As a result, the process of democratic transition has been delayed for 30 years since the beginning of independence.

5. Discussion

The conducted investigation in the triangle: political leadership - democratic transit - economic development, proves the main hypothesis of the present research - the absence of a political leader hinders democratic transit. Eastern European countries, including Poland and

Slovenia, which were the prototypes of radical liberalizers, grew rapidly until the mid-1990s. While in 1990-2000, in Poland and Slovenia, the course of political leaders was aimed at European integration, then since the early 2000s conflicts between political forces, parties and the struggle for power of leaders have caused both problems of economic development and “democratic stagnation”. Along with this, the citizens of the analyzed countries claim that strong leaders do not have an influence on democratic processes. Countries that have postponed reforms or have moved slowly, Ukraine and Georgia, in particular, have grown less rapidly because of the lack of a strong leader (BRACK & STARTIN, 2015). This means that the values and ideology of the ruling party, led by the leader who defends them, determine the speed of the transition to democracy. For instance, relatively more radical liberalizers, such as the Baltics, Russia and Kyrgyzstan, have maintained higher living standards and experienced economic downturns more easily than Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus (BRACK & STARTIN, 2015).

Poland and Slovenia have ensured a faster democratic transition thanks to a faster restructuring of political institutions and liberalization transformations in politics and economies. Herewith, the processes of authoritarian transformation are currently taking place in Poland due to conflicts within the ruling parties and opposition protests. Due to democratization in 1990- 2000, Poland’s and Slovenia’s GDP per capita grew rapidly after the democratic transition. The annual GDP growth rates for the analyzed periods of 1991-2000, 2000-2010 and 2010-2019 confirm these conclusions. Political liberalization and democratic transit have ensured economic growth in Poland. Herewith, Slovenia is the country with the least growing economy for the analyzed periods, however, with stable GDP growth every year. In countries that have developed market-compatible institutions at a faster pace, there has been an acceleration of post-transition growth compared to the pre-transition period, whereas in countries that have lagged behind in institutional development (Georgia, Ukraine, especially in 1991-2000), there has been a reverse process in economic growth compared to the pre-transition period (BECK & LAEVEN, 2006).

Countries that first have liberalized the economy and then have made the transition to democracy are more economically efficient in terms of growth, investment, trade and macropolitics than countries that implement these reforms in reverse order. These reforms are determined in some aspect by political leadership, however, the experience of Poland and Slovenia proves that strong leaders have had little impact on the democratic transition, but their course towards European

integration has ensured economic changes. Meanwhile, Ukraine and Georgia are still trying to transform the political system, and leadership is defined as important only in Georgia. According to the viewpoint of Wheatley (2017), Georgia is one of the countries with “delayed” transit. While Georgia partially managed to achieve economic growth in 2005-2010 thanks to protests in 2003, then the Orange Revolution did not provide significant economic changes for Ukraine as well as changes in the structure of the economy. This is due to the fact that economic liberalization is more effective: economic liberalization is initially connected with a sharp increase in trade both during economic liberalization and the democracy development of the country. Along with this, economic liberalization, preceded by the transition to democracy, has a much smaller impact on trade (GIAVAZZI & TABELLINI, 2005). Therefore, the type of economic liberalization defined by a country varies depending on the processes of democratic transit. Democracies are characterized by a trend towards economic liberalization, however, trade does not expand, which means formal economic openness with the simultaneous introduction of new non-tariff barriers. Within the conditions of an open economic environment, democratization ensures the formation of more effective political leadership. This can be tracked on the example of Ukraine, where the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU has contributed to economic liberalization, and, as a result, led to the development of democracy, accountability and e-government. Liberalization accelerates economic growth and creates a more competitive environment. On the other hand, a poorly developed democratic country in a closed economic environment is likely to deepen into redistributive conflicts of power, which lead to a populist and ineffective policy. The experience of Poland is such an example, which, as a “young” democratic country since the beginning of 2010, has been characterized by populist politics and power conflicts within the ruling parties. The sequence of economic liberalization followed by political liberalization promotes controlled and pre-planned liberalization by a far-sighted leader (GLAESER et al., 2004; JONES & OLKEN, 2005). However, when democratization precedes economic transformation, it is likely to be unexpected; consequently, it will be the result of a brutal struggle or the collapse of state power (GIAVAZZI & TABELLINI, 2005).

6. Conclusion

The impact of the formation of political leaders on the processes of democratization and economic growth on the example of Poland, Slovenia, Ukraine and Georgia has been highlighted in the research. It has been established that leadership determines the values and priorities of political and economic systems; democratization has a positive effect on economic growth provided that the economy is open, the unity and solidarity of the principles of leaders within the party and the opposition. The growth of opposition protests and the conservatism of political leaders leads to a decrease in the level of political culture, civil liberties and the effectiveness of the government's actions. In the context of Ukraine's democratic transit, Poland's experience can be useful in terms of the course of political leaders towards European integration in the 1990s and in terms of the lack of political solidarity since the early 2000s. In particular, the country's policy over the past few years has only led to mass protests among the population against politics and non-recognition of leadership as a guarantee of democratic development. Similar processes of economic liberalization have been observed in Ukraine since the beginning of 2014, which is manifested in decentralization of power, privatization, development of electronic government accountability, standardization of the legal framework, etc. Therefore, an increase in the level of democracy, political culture, government efficiency and civil liberties can be expected in Ukraine during the next ten years.

The practical results of the research lie in the possibility of using the experience of Poland, Slovenia and Georgia for Ukraine in the conditions of democratic transit. Further investigations should focus on the factors of democratic transit, forasmuch as the political leadership of Poland and Slovenia is not the only source of democratization, but in some cases it is the basis for political protests.

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