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## Transformation of the political regime in Ukraine in the times of independence: stages and features

### Трансформація політичного режиму в Україні за часів незалежності: етапи та особливості

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#### Abstract

The purpose of the article is to study the peculiarities of the transformation of the political regime in Ukraine at different historical stages of its independence. The subject of the study is the political regime of independent Ukraine. The research methodology includes the following methods: transitological, normative and value, sociological, comparative, systemic, structural and functional, neo-institutional. Results of the research. The approaches to the concept of political regime and its varieties are analyzed. The stages of its transformation in Ukraine are highlighted and it is determined that they are "tied" to the person of the president. The peculiarities of political regime of the times of independence during the passage of each of the cycles are established. Practical meaning. Based on the features of the political regime in independent Ukraine during the periods of rules of different presidents and in various stages, we conclude that the political regime in our country has all the signs of a hybrid one, and Ukraine is a "partially free country". Value/originality. It is proven that the decentralization of management

#### Анотація

Метою статті вивчення особливостей трансформації політичного режиму в Україні на різних історичних етапах її незалежності. Предметом дослідження є політичний режим незалежної України. Методологія дослідження включає наступні методи: транзитологічний, нормативно-ціннісний, соціологічний підхід, порівняльний, системний, структурно-функціональний, неоінституціональний підхід. Результати дослідження. Проаналізовано підходи до поняття «політичний» режим та його різновиди. Виділено етапи трансформації політичного режиму в Україні і визначено, що вони «прив'язані» до особи президента. Встановлено особливості політичного режиму часів незалежності під час проходження кожного із циклів. Практичне значення. На основі розглянутих нами особливостей політичного режиму в незалежній Україні за часів правління різних президентів та в різні періоди, робимо висновок, що політичний режим у нашій державі має всі ознаки гібридного, а Україна є "частково вільною країною". Цінність/оригінальність. Доведено,

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in Ukraine multiplied by the intensification of political competition, the implementation of European values and the improvement of legal awareness and culture of our citizens could become a reliable foundation for the formation of a democratic Ukrainian society.

**Keywords:** historical stages, hybrid regime, independent Ukraine, political regime, President.

## Introduction

Political regime is a form of organization and functioning of the political system, which refers to specific procedures and methods of organization of government institutions, relations between citizens and the State, decision-making process, etc. In essence, this concept means how the government and the one who heads it use power, control and manage social processes. Political regimes are distinguished according to the following criteria: 1) the method of formation of authorities; 2) the relationship between the central and regional authorities; 3) the position and role of political parties, public organizations in public life; 4) legal status of the individual; 5) political culture; 6) nature of implementation of State's power; 7) the way of forming the authorities. There are 3 main types of political regimes: totalitarian, authoritarian and democratic ones.

30 years is too short a period to change the country's civilizational vector, but it is quite enough for the rules of political behavior to be formed and sufficient experience to be accumulated, which can be analyzed in the categories of the existing political regime. In general, the concept of political regime is key to understanding the political processes taking place in the State. After all, it is the content of the political regime that reflects the real relationship between the government and society in the country, the real picture of the principles of organizing the political life of a particular society.

Therefore, given the concerns related to the prospects for the development of democracy in Ukraine and the current problems threatening the lives and health of people, the stable functioning of economic mechanisms, and the existence of society (Kharytonov et al., 2021, p. 158), the aim of the Article is to study the peculiarities of the transformation of the political regime in Ukraine at different historical stages of its independence.

що децентралізація управління в Україні помножена на активізацію політичної конкуренції, імплементацію європейських цінностей та підвищення правової свіжості та культури наших громадян могли б стати надійним фундаментом для формування демократичного українського суспільства.

**Ключові слова:** історичні етапи, гібридний режим, незалежна Україна, політичний режим, Президент.

## Methodology

The study of the general democratic process and its impact on the situation in the "transitional" states within the transitological paradigm made it possible to present the course of political life as a constant change in the social existence of ideas, social groups, institutions, and practices, which are not fixed in the categories of statics, because the political process itself is a dynamic phenomenon with many possibilities and directions.

The transitological approach helped to identify and analyze the factors of political changes, as well as to consider unstable, shaky, but at the same time complexly organized systems in the most difficult period of their development – the search for the optimal form of self-organization based on the rethinking of world experience and actualization of historical and cultural potential.

The regulatory and value approach provided an opportunity to find out the meaning of democratization for society and individual, its assessment from the point of view of the common good, justice, will, respect for human dignity and other values.

The sociological approach was useful for clarifying the dependence of democratization processes on society, social conditioning of political phenomena, including the influence of economic relations, social structure, etc. on the political system.

The comparative approach was used for the comparative analysis of democratic transit processes in Ukraine in different periods in order to identify their regularities and discrepancies.

The structural and functional approach was used when considering democratic political system, which has a complex structure, each institution of which has a specific purpose and performs

specific functions (roles) aimed at meeting the relevant needs of the system.

The neo-institutional approach made it possible, on the one hand, to reveal the dynamics of the evolution of institutions, and on the other hand, to focus attention on the subjective perceptions of political actors regarding the functioning of institutions. This approach made it possible to reveal the dialectical relationship between political figures and the changes in the political system of Ukraine.

### Literature Review

One of the characteristic definitions of the political regime belongs to M. Duverger (2002), who considered it in one case as "a structure of government, a type of human society that distinguishes one social community from another one" and in another as "a combination of a party system, a method of voting, one or several types of decision-making, one or several structures of pressure groups".

Historical experience allows us to state that there can be varieties of democratic, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Moreover, each political regime is unique both in the context of its emergence and in relation to the legitimating methods and technologies that contribute to its formation and ensure its existence. In this case, the relation of the ruling elite to the imperatives of socio-economic development is fundamentally important for distinguishing different types of political stability and. For the purpose of self-preservation and gaining legitimacy, the elite strive to maintain the existing order, protecting society from wars, conflicts and revolutions. However, sooner or later the regime faces a dilemma: whether to act as an initiator of socio-economic changes or resist their onset, risking being removed from the political arena. From this point of view, the government, depending on the socio-economic situation, can contribute to the preservation of stability in society in two ways – either through adherence to tradition, or through effective socio-economic development. It is appropriate to note that any concept of the classification of political regimes has, among other important elements, a pronounced and significant legitimizing component. Legitimacy and political regime are inseparable concepts both in the realm of political theory and in political practice (Kelman & Murashyn, 2005, p. 152).

Among the Ukrainian scientists, who studied the political regime, in particular, the democratic

one, we can highlight Sribna, who in the research "Development trends of the democratic transformation of the political regimes of Ukraine and the Republic of Poland in a comparative analysis" (2012) compares the democratic regimes of Ukraine and Poland, which at the turn of the 21st century solve similar problems of transformation and overcoming the totalitarian legacy.

Vegesh and Kopolovets (2020) consider such a political trend as democratic transitology. Their work focuses on the analysis of the transition of communist authoritarian regimes to democracy.

Kroitor in the study "Models of democratic transitions and the practice of their application in post-Soviet countries" (2018) defines three models of political transit, namely: the model of direct transition; model of two-phase transition; the "reverse development" model. The factors that contributed to the success of the democratic transition in the Baltic countries are also highlighted.

### Results and Discussion

The general analysis indicates that five main periods can be distinguished in the transformation of the political regime of Ukraine: 1) the end of the 1980s – 1996; 2) 1996–2005; 3) 2005–2010; 4) 2010–2014. 5) 2014 – until now. As we can see, with the exception of the first period, the others are "tied" to the president. And this is not accidental. As evidenced by historical experience, the role of a political leader in transitional periods is extremely important. It is he and his political will that can become a generator of changes and reforms in all spheres of social life, determine the future of the State, especially in transitional, transformational societies (Tomakhiv, 2014, p. 336).

Zelenko (2021, p. 143) also agrees with this periodization; she proposes the following cycle of political regimes: 1) transitional state with super-parliamentarism (1991 – 1996); 2) hybrid state with an authoritarian regime (1996 – 2004); 3) hybrid state with an electoral regime (2004 – 2010); 4) hybrid democracy with authoritarian regime (2010 – 2014); 5) hybrid state with an electoral regime (2014 – until now).

During the first period of the transformation of the political regime in Ukraine, the destruction of totalitarianism and the emergence of some democratic elements of the functioning of the political regime took place: the absence of political repression, the emergence of ideological

and political pluralism and the establishment of political parties, freedom of speech, relatively democratic elections at various levels of government on this basis. At the same time there was a legislative enforcement of these changes, which in a holistic general form ended with the adoption of the new Constitution in 1996 (Tomakhiv 2014, p. 337).

According to the Basic Law of Ukraine (Law of Ukraine No. 254k/96-VR, 1996), Ukraine is a sovereign and independent, democratic, social, legal state. Proclamation that Ukraine is a democratic State, means that it is based on the exercise of real people's power, respect for the rights and freedoms of individuals and citizens, on their active participation in the formation of the State apparatus and the exercise of control over its activities through elections and representative institutions. Democracy has its support and functions successfully in the conditions of a developed civil society and its institutions, such as the market economy, political parties, public organizations, independent mass media, etc. In accordance with these requirements, Ukraine must create conditions for the effective functioning of civil society structures. A democratic state is considered to be characterized by the following features: guaranteed basic rights and freedoms of citizens, their equal rights to participate in state management; electability of State representative bodies and individual officials; the legally defined term of office of representative bodies; implementation of the principle of separation of powers; control and responsibility of state bodies, political diversity; majority decision, taking into account minority rights; transparency etc. (however, as it is correctly noted by Rudyi and others (2021, p. 288), the presence of formal features of a democratic regime does not always ensure the functioning of such mechanisms and institutions of democracy as the division of power, freedom of speech and assembly, fair elections and others). The principle of a democratic state is specified and developed in other articles and sections of the Constitution, which are devoted to the issues of legal regulation of ensuring the interests of people, conducting referenda and elections, formation of the highest bodies of state power and control over their activities, establishment of local self-government. Democracy is closely related to the characterization of the state as legal and social one. Democracy promoted through gradual State sovereignty of Ukraine means the supremacy of state power over any other power within the country and its independence from any other

power outside its borders (Tatsii, Petryshyn & Barabash 2011, pp. 7 – 8).

Unfortunately, the adoption of the Constitution did not become an indicator that our country "turned" to the democratic vector of its development. Despite the established norm of a "democratic, social, legal state", people's elected representatives neglect the implementation of laws, which is the exact opposite of the concept of a "democratic regime". In addition, for almost two decades, elements of «political staging» were present in even seemingly transparent and fair elections, because many voices were «bought» by unscrupulous politicians who gave people money or other preferences in exchange for «tick» opposite the required surname in the bulletin.

All this undermined citizens' trust in political institutions and deepened the split between the population, because some resigned themselves to the idea that "nothing depends" on them and their expression of will, or kept the problem silent due to pressure or intimidation; others rebelled against the system, periodically holding mass meetings and demonstrations and presenting their demands and ultimatums to the leadership.

Voting often meant not a choice but an obligation to local elites who could give or take away jobs, contracts or money. While many Ukrainians have rebelled against the system, periodically taking to the streets with mass demonstrations, others have learned to remain silent under pressure to participate in highly manipulated campaigns and voting.

Currently, the issue of the political regime in Ukraine is ambiguous. It would be premature to speak of a point of no return in democratization. During the years of independence, the level of democratization in the state, according to international experts, fluctuated significantly. Such indicators as the rule of law, the development of democratic institutions, the state of development of civil society and the participation of the people in the management of the state were taken as evaluation criteria. In 2003, Ukraine took the 44th position out of 117 surveyed countries. In 2006, our country was ranked 37th out of 120 countries, in 2008 – 35th out of 126 surveyed countries, in 2010 – 37th out of 129 surveyed countries. Indicators fell sharply during the presidency of V. Yanukovich: in 2013, Ukraine's democratization rating was 60th among 129 countries. In the middle of 2014, the level of democratization somewhat increased and our country became the 58th in the rating (Ye pur

2020, p. 22); however, in 2020, it was ranked 29th out of 167 countries.

This situation is a consequence of the fact that in the history of Ukraine last 100 years there was a competition of ideas on its political system. Thus, famous political figures had different points of view on this issue. Hetman Skoropadskyi, for example, was inclined to monarchist views; Symon Petliura is a left-wing politician who is valued primarily for his military achievements. But the intellectual foundations of Ukrainian democracy were laid by Mykhailo Drahomanov, who advocated liberal values and social equality, personal freedom and civil rights. Many of his ideas, which shaped the politicians of subsequent generations, are still relevant for Ukraine, for example, his attention to local communities and giving them maximum rights to solve local problems. Some scientists suggest looking for the roots of Ukrainian democracy in European civilization, to which Ukraine belongs. And the main thing that laid this tradition - the division of power between church and secular. The absence of one center of power later led to the emergence of other independent institutions, and they, not political ideas, created the foundation for democracy. And, finally, closer to modern times, the Ukrainian democratic movement was founded by dissidents who were released from the Gulag by the Soviet authorities shortly before that. These dissidents were based on human rights ideas and legal instruments that had deep European roots. "They believed in competitive politics. They were real national democrats, far from any nationalist extreme right-wing extremist ideas (Shchur, 2021).

Perhaps paradoxically, Soviet institutions contributed to the later democratic structure of Ukraine in a way that was hardly noticeable to researchers. Power in the Ukrainian SSR was characterized by the division of authorities between the party and state apparatus, strong local elites, and weak leadership.

Centralized administration did not exist in Ukraine until 1917, but in Soviet times, despite the fact that the republican model of administration was preserved, the formal leaders of the Ukrainian SSR – the first secretary of the Communist Party and the head of the government – had no actual authority; they were responsible for the implementation of the policy formulated in Moscow. Besides, the republican leadership was deprived of control over material resources on the ground, so it played, at best, the role of a mediator between the Ukrainian regions and Moscow. So when the old Soviet nomenclature

created the office of the president in 1992, it looked at the model of the first secretary of the Central Committee – a politically weak figure. As a result of this system, the new Verkhovna Rada in independent Ukraine was fragmented but institutionally strong, and the presidency was weakened, with the government having greater powers than the president. The legacy of the USSR also left powerful regional elites (Shchur, 2021).

From the day the Declaration on State Sovereignty was announced on July 16, 1990, until the inauguration of the first president on December 05, 1991, the parliament was the only place where all the most important decisions were made, which in a year led the Soviet republic to independence. The very successful work of the Verkhovna Rada created all the grounds for Ukrainians to take a different path even then than most of their neighbors from the "prison of nations" and, unlike them, to build a parliamentary, not a presidential or semi-presidential republic.

But Ukrainian politicians by inertia equaled and competed with Moscow, so they created the institution of the president and endowed it with considerable power. However, in the first years of independence, the Verkhovna Rada had a high degree of independence from the president. The deputies of that convocation were elected in the Soviet Union, before the institution of the president, who in all subsequent election cycles will directly or indirectly affect the receiving deputy's mandate (Zabolotnyi & Ocheretiana, 2021).

The term "kuchmizm" is associated with the second president of Ukraine. It is used to denote the regime of the President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, which arose and lasted in Ukraine during 1994–2004. "Kuchmizm" was formed as a result of fusion of old Soviet officials with regional criminal elites; is a type of post-Soviet regimes. Its features are very high corruption of the state apparatus, decorative democracy, the unity of legislative, executive and judicial power as an integrated mechanism of control over society and guaranteeing the stability of the regime with the help of "power structures" not under the control of society, and the concentration of power in the hands of a single financial multi-party corporation (Churylova, 2018).

During the 10 years of his policy, President Kuchma, unfortunately, despite the existence of the Constitution, led the independent Ukrainian

state to the so-called quasi-democracy, that is, to some extent, the old system of administrative management was reproduced, a clear evidence of which is the Administration of the President with its unconstitutional powers that performs approximately the same functions as the former Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU, when the government, local administrations, courts, prosecutor's office, and everything that is in Ukraine acts according to "telephone instructions".

During the years of Kuchma's rule, it was not possible to achieve the main thing on which the democratic system is based – the creation of powerful ideological parties that fight for the trust of the voter in the elections, and then, having power, show how they fulfill their campaign promises (Zilhalov, 2004).

During the presidency of Viktor Andriyovych Yushchenko, the sprouts of the formation of democracy were quite tangible; it concerns freedom of speech, expression of opinion and views, as well as the right to elections without falsifications. A lot of facts about historical and events that were previously hushed up or hidden (for example, the data about the Holodomor as an act of genocide of the Ukrainian people, organized by the leadership and government of the USSR, became widely publicized). The biggest achievement during his rule is that as a result of the Orange Revolution, democracy became the only system in Ukraine. Our State, one of the post-Soviet countries, received the rating of a free country in the assessment of the human rights organization Freedom House. In many ways, this became possible thanks to the third President of Ukraine.

Yushchenko advocated a strong state power with a democratic distribution of powers, duties and responsibilities between all branches of government, demanded the abolition of parliamentary immunity, as well as a numerical reduction in the number of people's elected officials and an increase in the powers of the regions.

However, Viktor Yushchenko's time in power ended with significant disappointment for Ukrainians. Unlike the authoritarian Kuchma, he could remain in the people's memory as a great democrat. Instead, his presidency was remembered for eternal confrontation with both political opponents and longtime allies, as well as the lack of systemic political and economic reforms. This helped his successor Viktor Yanukovych easily usurp power.

On assuming the post of head of state by Viktor Yanukovych, it became clear that difficult times have come for Ukrainian democracy. Changes to the Constitution of Ukraine, which were adopted during the Orange Revolution in 2004, prevented Yanukovych from becoming a dictator. Therefore, the system of government began to be turned back so that the President could appoint and dismiss ministers, the Prosecutor General and the head of the Security Service of Ukraine. All this was possible in the 1996 version of the Constitution. Therefore, in July 2010, 252 People's Deputies appealed to the Constitutional Court to find out whether the changes to the Constitution in 2004 were adopted according to the correct procedure. The Constitutional Court agreed that the procedure was violated because the Parliament did not have 300 votes in favor of introducing new amendments to the Basic Law, and abolished the corresponding amendments "behind closed doors". On September 30, 2010, the Ukrainian state machine began to work again under the terms of the 1996 version of the Constitution (Zabolotnyi & Ocheretiana, 2021).

Therefore, the power of the 4th President can be called corrupt authoritarianism, because due to the pressure on the Constitutional Court and the violation of all current norms of Ukrainian legislation, he returned the Constitution of 1996, which was actually a usurpation of power, because the entire state machine was once again in the same hands. All this became the reason for the organization of Euromaidan – protest actions of 2013 – 2014, caused by the refusal of the state leadership from the European integration course, corruption and arbitrariness of law enforcement officers.

His goal was to depart from the Soviet, imperial past, which once again «took the upper ground» in the state mechanism, and the movement to Europe, the implementation of European values, to which Ukrainian society has always aspired (this is confirmed by a number of sociological surveys).

The result of Euromaidan was the return of the Basic Law of Ukraine in the version of 2004 with the redistribution of powers to the parliamentary republic, the cancellation of 80 legislative acts that were illegally adopted in 2010 – 2011 and gave the president excessive powers, the escape of Viktor Yanukovych and the appointment of early presidential elections, based on the results of which Petro Poroshenko took power.

In the first month of his presidency, Petro Poroshenko signed the Association Agreement

with the European Union, the work on which has been ongoing since the time of Viktor Yushchenko. The economic part of the Free Trade Area Agreement first became operational, and since September 2017, the agreement has been fully operational. The Association Agreement with the EU is a massive document with seven chapters and more than a thousand pages, which clearly regulates the gradual economic and political rapprochement of Ukraine with the European Union. However, it does not contain a clear guarantee of Ukraine's future accession to the EU (Zanuda & Chervonenko, 2019).

The fight against corruption was both one of the priority tasks during the rule of Petro Poroshenko himself, and the main request of our Western partners, so new anti-corruption bodies were created and their work was launched: the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (deals with countering corruption and other criminal offenses committed by high-ranking officials and pose a threat to national security), the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (an independent structural unit of the Prosecutor General's Office, which supervises the observance of laws during operational and investigative activities by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine), as well as the National Agency for Corruption Prevention (the central body of the executive power with a special status that ensures the formation and implementation of the state anti-corruption policy).

However, there were problems there too. The People's Deputies, despite the Constitution, gave the president extraneous powers regarding the creation of NABU, the formation of competitive commissions for the selection of the director and his appointment to the post. And the Constitutional Court later decided that it is wrong to do so, and the head of NABU should be appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers (Zabolotnyi & Ocheretiana, 2021).

These factors resulted in a significant drop in Petro Poroshenko's rating, a loss of voter confidence, and the re-election of Volodymyr Zelenskyi as president in the regular elections in 2019. However, as Poroshenko himself noted, "I do not consider the elections that took place as a defeat. And this makes me more proud that a new democratic tradition has been established in Ukraine. It was a free and fair election in which my opponent won, and I congratulated him with the victory," said Poroshenko. I can proudly say that I brought my country into a new era of

freedom and democracy in accordance with European standards" (Poroshenko, 2019).

Zelensky won the sympathy of voters not by bribery, but by sincerity, frankness, accessibility, transparency, maintaining constant contact with Ukrainians and, of course, humor. Even at the pre-election stage, he declared his commitment to European values and undertook to implement them in life. In particular, he announced the development of a mechanism by which only the People of Ukraine will form the main tasks for the government through referenda and other forms of direct democracy. It was also announced to reduce the functions of state bodies, as well as to reform the territorial organization of executive power, which provides for the elimination of duplication and the completion of decentralization of the powers of local state administrations and local self-government bodies.

However, during three years of Zelenskyi's rule, systematic violations of the Constitution have become inseparable from his activities. At first, these were various assignments of the government, which the president cannot give according to the Constitution. In 2021, decisions of the National Security and Defense Council were added to them. This body has never been as influential as it was during Volodymyr Zelenskyi's time. Now there are meetings of the National Security Council almost every Friday. And after them, the president signs decrees that often contradict the Constitution and laws, but satisfy the public demand for decisive actions and support the president's rating. So, under the 6th President, they came up with the idea how way to use the NSDC in a new way: to impose sanctions on Ukrainian citizens and their enterprises. In many cases, this helps to remove the influence of clearly hostile characters, but the president cannot replace the court and the entire law enforcement system. Therefore, although the introduction of sanctions has high support among Ukrainians, it contradicts the Constitution (Zabolotnyi & Ocheretiana, 2021).

In February 2022, from the moment of Russia's full-scale invasion of the territory of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky directed the spirit, patriotism and sacrifice of the Ukrainian people in the struggle for the independence of our State, defending its democratic ideals and the right to political independence. In his numerous speeches, he repeatedly emphasized that in this difficult but decisive time, the whole world should unite to protect democracy, because if the

enemy wins, it and its achievements will be forgotten.

For the protection of democratic values in his own country and abroad, President Zelenskyi became one of the five laureates of the private Profile in Courage Award from the Foundation of the Library of the former US President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and for the same reason he became the Person of the Year according to the Times magazine.

The question arises whether Ukraine will adhere to its democratic course even after the end of the war, or will return to the imitation of the popular expression of will, which was bought with money and food packages. This problem will be especially acute against the background of the economic decline of our country and the total impoverishment of the population, which will be ready to "sell" their votes for a promise to repair or build new housing, provide jobs or humanitarian aid, and therefore we will once again return to "political theater" and false democracy.

In conclusion, we note that the majority of Ukrainian scientists characterize the political regime of Ukraine as transitional one. At the same time, a specific feature of such a regime is its periodicity, that is, over time it must change to another, or take shape in a permanent model. In our country, in different periods, a democratic regime alternated with an authoritarian regime with elements of totalitarian and oligarchic ones. The combination of features of different types of political regime in Ukraine allows us to come to the conclusion that since 1996, a hybrid political regime has prevailed on the territory of our country, which combines both authoritarian and democratic methods of exercising power.

According to Western researchers of hybrid political regimes Levitsky and Way (2002), there are three basic factors that guide a regime of this type: 1. leverage, that is, the influence of the closest trade and financial partner, its democratic or authoritarian state; 2. linkage, that is, involvement, when the regime is either open to the other world with a wide range of connections, or is a closed and isolated type; 3. the internal organizational structure, i.e. the efforts of the political regime to build a system of democratic institutions within itself. In this sense, such an effort can be successful or fail.

The essence of the hybrid political system is the coexistence of formally democratic political institutions with specific political practices, a

consequence of which life is not "by law" but "by concept" - unwritten rules, which are so deeply rooted in social and political life that in the most profitable spheres of the economy displaced the formal ones, which, in turn, took the form of a facade, while real political processes take place through the interaction of formal and informal institutions. The specific interweaving of these institutions and the resulting formation of extremely specific political practices constitute the essence of the clan-oligarchic (hybrid, neopatrimonial) political regime (Zelenko, 2021, p. 144).

The biggest problem in the research of intermediate types of political regimes is that a large number of terms are used in the literature, which do not exclude each other at all, but prevent the formation of a general classification and further conceptualization of this phenomenon. One of the attempts to develop a unified theoretical and methodological approach to the analysis of such regimes was made by German researchers Wolfgang and Croissant (2000). To denote the entire set of regimes of this type, they introduced the concept of "defective democracy" – the system of domination, in which the access to power is regulated by means of a significant and effective universal "electoral regime" (free, secret, equal and universal elections), but at the same time, there are no other guarantees of basic political and public rights and freedoms, and horizontal power control and effectiveness of democratically legitimate authorities are seriously limited. The researches drew special attention to the fact that in defective democracies informal rules and patterns (clientelism, personalism, comprehensive corruption or cartels of actors arising outside constitutional boundaries) undermine and limit the order of functioning of formal, democratically legitimized institutions.

Having analyzed a number of scientific works in this area, Zelenko (2021, p. 176) comes to the conclusion that specific interweaving of formal and informal institutions and the resulting formation of extremely specific political practices constitute the essence of the clan-oligarchic (hybrid, neopatrimonial) political regime, which is a rather specific horizontal and vertical division of power according to a formally defined constitutional principle characteristic of full-fledged democracies (separation of legislative, executive and judicial power, a system of checks and balances, general and equal elections, an outwardly legal and social state, political pluralism, fairly effective forms of



political and public participation, people are the source of power, etc.).

Based on the features of the political regime in independent Ukraine during the rule of different presidents and in different periods, we conclude that the political regime in our country has all the signs of a hybrid one, and Ukraine is a "partially free country".

### Conclusion

For more than 30 years of its existence, the political regime in Ukraine "walks in circles", alternating democratic and authoritarian methods of governance and retaining the signs of hybrid. Unfortunately, neither the Orange Revolution nor the Euromaidan could turn Ukrainian society towards a democratic vector of development, however, they contributed to the overthrow of the clearly criminal government and contributed to institutional changes, which, in turn, laid the ground for qualitative changes in the political regime (expansion of the competence of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and return to the parliamentary-presidential republic; the creation of special bodies designed to fight corruption, in particular, at the highest levels; the introduction of electronic declaration of income for officials and monitoring their lifestyle, the development of electronic governance of the country – all services provided by various state bodies are becoming available for citizens online, which helps to create a service-oriented State, etc.).

Unfortunately, with the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the signs of the weakening of our State, caused, first of all, by the low dependence of political parties on voters, the shadow economy, corruption, selectivity and inconsistency during the implementation of reforms, began to manifest themselves even more acutely. Therefore, the legitimate question is whether Ukraine will stick to its democratic course after the end of the war, or return to an autocratic political regime.

The key to preserving the unprecedented participation of Ukrainians in democratic governance processes, in our opinion, may be decentralization, which the Ukrainian government began implementing after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014. These administrative changes, which focus on the transfer of powers to local governments, are designed to stimulate the accumulation of efforts at the primary level, improve the lives of communities, encourage accountability and transparency of the implementation of powers on

the ground, and bypass certain existing networks of patronage. The principles of Ukrainian decentralization, in turn, require a strong national leader who would be able to resist the obvious centrifugal forces. The decentralization of management in Ukraine multiplied by the intensification of political competition, the implementation of European values and the improvement of legal awareness and culture of our citizens could become a reliable foundation for the formation of democratic Ukrainian society.

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