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## THE RISE OF POWERFUL EXECUTIVES: COMPARING THE UKRAINIAN AND RUSSIAN LEGISLATURES

Irina Khmelko, *University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, USA*

Oleksii Bruslyk, *Yaroslav Mudryi National University, Ukraine*

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Although sharing in the pattern of losing power to powerful executives, post-communist legislatures in Russia and Ukraine differ significantly in institutional strengths, specifically in their ability to provide checks on executive power. Russia had a weak—but not powerless—parliament after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Cichock 2002, 85; Remington 2001). Research on modern Russia under Putin frequently refers to Russian society as "Putinism," which rests on a one-man rule (Fish 2017) in which a parliament is a "rubber stamp" to a president. Ukraine, however, is a rather puzzling case. The Ukrainian parliament is a strongly

then methodically appointing "siloviki" (i.e., KGB and military staff) to governmental offices, which resulted in what is called the "neo-KGB state" (*Economist* 2007). His operatives from the ranks of the *siloviki* will follow orders, be loyal, and not hesitate to violate both the law and democratic practice, if necessary (Rivera and Rivera 2017).

This trend of militarization in Russia and its absence in Ukraine can be associated with how presidents in these two countries resolve political conflicts. The first standoff between the Russian president and parliament, in 1993, was resolved by tanks shooting at the parliament building in Moscow. Ukraine had political crises as well, but no Ukrainian president used military force against the parliament. For example, in 1993, Ukrainian President Kravchuk resigned over conflict with Prime Minister Kuchma but did not apply military force to resolve the conflict. Instead, he signed the law "On Early Elections of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the President of Ukraine" and used the electoral process to resolve their partisan and ideological differences.

These two countries also differ in the degree to which election outcomes are manipulated. The lack of free and equal elections in Russia and the weakness of opposition parties are well documented in the literature (Ishiyama and Kennedy 2001; Korgunyuk, Ross, and Shpagin 2018; White 2017). In Ukraine, however, the most recent election brought to parliament a strong pro-presidential faction and many from majoritarian districts, what Ukrainians call "buckwheat" districts. They are named thus because something like a bag of buckwheat donated to an impoverished electorate can secure a vote in those districts. (The population reasons, "At least we can get this buckwheat now, because

*Ukraine's post-Soviet constitutional engineering resulted in a mixed governmental system in which power was distributed among the president, the prime minister, and a parliament. Russia established a strong presidential system in the early years of its post-Soviet history, with all power concentrated in the hands of a president.*

institutionalized legislature capable of performing independent policy roles; however, it struggles with performing basic functions, such as legislative oversight (Khmelko 2015). At the same time, the Ukrainian president, although not as strong as the Russian president, also is gaining strength at the expense of parliament.

What explains the different degrees of power that presidents were able to consolidate at the expense of legislatures in these two countries? First, countries differ in their choices of governmental systems, which allows for varying levels of power concentrated in the hands of a president. Ukraine's post-Soviet constitutional engineering resulted in a mixed governmental system in which power was distributed among the president, the prime minister, and a parliament. Russia established a strong presidential system in the early years of its post-Soviet history, with all power concentrated in the hands of a president.

A second factor is the Russian "militocracy," which is the militarization of Russian elites under Putin (Kryshatanovskaya and White 2003; Rivera and Rivera 2017). This began with Lieutenant Colonel Putin becoming the President of Russia and

when elected, these politicians will not do anything else for us.") In addition, a closed-list proportional system hurts the party system in Ukraine. Parties there are led by a strong leader and the rest are usually faithful followers, known as "button pushers" on behalf of party leaders.

In conclusion, Ukraine has been more successful than Russia in providing sufficient checks on the executive to prevent the country from descending into a full autocracy. The combination of governmental system, election laws, and degree of militarization appears to be important in explaining the differences in outcomes between Russia and Ukraine. Our findings are in line with Linz's (1996a; 1996b) argument about the dangers of the presidential form of government for democratic consolidation. We add that a time lag between the collapse of the old soviet system and the development of a fully functional new system of government provides an opportunity for presidents to quickly deprive parliaments of important powers. The population indeed may obtain relief from the intense growing pains of any democratic transition, but the price in the long run is the failure of the democracy and a reversion to autocracy. The mixed governmental system divides

power among multiple political institutions. This allows a parliament to maintain its institutional strength and prevent a president from assuming full power in a country. At the same time, a mixed governmental system coupled with a mixed election system allows a president to take on more power at the expense of a parliament. As a result, the parliament is weakened—but more slowly and to a lesser degree than in a presidential system. ■

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## A NEW PARLIAMENT IN THE ECONOMIC CRISIS: SLOVENIA'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, 2008–2016

Drago Zajc, *University of Ljubljana, Slovenia*

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In contemporary parliamentary research, the impact of external economic factors was linked primarily to electoral outcomes or even to the change of power relations within national political systems, whereas attempts to link them to the duration or early

economic system—which has remained particularly sensitive and vulnerable to external economic shocks (Mansfeldova 2011, 127).

This article is based on the hypothesis that economic crises have had a particular effect on the social conditions of large groups of population and, consequently, on the political stability manifested by great shifts of support to political parties. The impact of economic shocks is further linked to the stability of parliaments and coalition governments, whereby stability is understood as a parliament's or a government's capacity to complete its mandate. Political instability frequently reduces the possibility of regularly scheduled elections and increases the probability of conflictual cabinet termination and early elections.

To evaluate the impact of the economic crisis in Slovenia from 2008 to 2016, we used statistical data from the World Bank (2016) showing time trends in main economic indicators—namely, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate and changes in the unemployment rate during this period. We compared these data with those from seven other Central European countries: Italy, Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Spain, and Croatia. Until 2008, positive trends were evident in GDP growth in all seven countries. The negative effects of the economic crisis in Slovenia first became clearly evident in 2009, when the Slovenian GDP declined by 7.8%. Within the comparison countries, a similar decline was observed only in Hungary (–6.6%) and Croatia (–7.4%). The second indicator that had the most significant direct effect on social conditions of Slovenian citizens was the unemployment rate. It showed a drastic change, dramatically increasing after 2009 from 4.4%, to 8.8% in 2012, and to 10.1% in 2013. Similar changes were observed during the same period in Hungary, Czech Republic, and Croatia.

These basic time trends in the main economic indicators are strongly connected to rates of the Slovene National Assemblies' and governments' terminations. In 2008–2016, there were two early elections and one change of government by a constructive no-confidence vote. The Slovene experience illustrates that the effects of an economic crisis on the stability of the National Assembly and the governments were not direct and immediate. The worsening of social conditions for many citizens had a significant impact on their support for traditional political parties, which were unable to find efficient measures to exit the crisis. These shifts in the support for political parties were demonstrated by high electoral volatility in comparison with previous elections and with other states of the region. Whereas the electoral volatility in Slovenia from 1992 to 2000 was 22% (Bielasiak 2005, 331), it increased to 40% from 2004 to 2014. As a consequence,

*Our research confirmed the results of previous investigations indicating that prolonged weak economic conditions have a strong impact on political stability, survival of governments, and early termination of parliaments in Western Europe (Warwick 1992, 885).*

termination of the mandates of parliaments and governments were rare. The impact of economic downturns on the survival of national parliaments and governments, as witnessed in recent years, warrants more attention. It is even more intriguing to attempt to relate economic conditions to the survival of parliaments, especially in new democratic countries such as Slovenia, where the process of democratization implied the transformation of the entire

several new and insufficiently consolidated parties entered the National Assembly. New coalitions were formed among old and new political parties, and governments formed on the basis of ad hoc anti-crisis programs. Subject to pressure from the EU, these governments used constitutional provisions to exert influence on the legislative process. They did so by prioritizing specific matters on the agenda and using fast-track procedures. This