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# Passing Narratives? Concept of Imperialism and the Debate on Non-Democratic (but not only) Regimes

Przemijające narracje? Koncepcja imperializmu i debata na temat reżimów niedemokratycznych (i nie tylko)

**Abstract:** The text aims to answer whether (if at all) the concept of imperialism plays any role in the study of non-democratic regimes. The method for finding an answer is an analysis of the literature on the subject, both from the pre-1989 period and the post-1989 era, with a particular focus on the changes in the study of non-democratic regimes that have taken place in the last twenty years. During this period, the legitimacy of different regimes was again more strongly emphasised. This has several implications for the terminological base since it is precisely the aspect of a regime's capability for expansion that plays a vital role in classifying non-democratic regimes. This issue will be analysed on the basis of the political practice of the Russian state.

**Abstrakt:** Celem tekstu jest odpowiedź na pytanie, czy (jeśli w ogóle) pojęcie imperializmu odgrywa jakąkolwiek rolę w badaniu reżimów niedemokratycznych. Metodą na znalezienie odpowiedzi jest analiza literatury przedmiotu, zarówno z okresu przed roku 1989, jak i po nim, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem zmian w badaniu reżimów niedemokratycznych, które miały miejsce w ciągu ostatnich dwudziestu lat. W tym okresie legitymizacja różnych reżimów została ponownie silniej podkreślona. Ma to wiele implikacji dla bazy terminologicznej, ponieważ to właśnie aspekt zdolności reżimu do ekspansji odgrywa kluczową rolę w klasyfikacji reżimów niedemokratycznych. Kwestia ta zostanie przeanalizowana na podstawie praktyki politycznej państwa rosyjskiego.

**Keywords:** imperialism, narratives, Russia

**Słowa kluczowe:** imperializm, narracje, Rosja

## Introduction

Dramatic war events in Ukraine in the last two years (or, as is well known, actually in a much longer timeframe) represent a fundamental challenge not only for Russian and Eastern studies, to which this post-conference publication

is primarily dedicated. They also represent a fundamental challenge for contemporary comparative political science and the social sciences in general. Several basic starting points, assumptions, categories, and concepts that the political science community has produced and shared in recent decades and that have been reflected in general trends in the field of so-called democratisation studies appear to be, in the face of the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict, ripe at least for re-discussion, if not revision.

And so, in the opinion of the author of this text, the discussion of contemporary Russian politics and its current changes should also mean rethinking and perhaps even re-evaluating such a classical political topic as the question of defining categories within general typologies of political regimes. The best way to do this is to return to classical non-democratic types, i.e. using the concepts of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, of course, in the context and using data relevant to the political development in the 21st century. By the way, yes, the reader is reading correctly: including the concept of totalitarianism, which, for several reasons, both understandable and, on the contrary, problematic and purely ideologically loaded, disappeared from the vocabulary of contemporary political theory after 1989, in the period when the discourse of hybrid regimes dominated the debates,<sup>1</sup> and ceased to play essentially any role. The genesis of Vladimir V. Putin's regime brings remarkable data both in domestic and foreign political terms. Data that offer researchers a very diverse index of possible paradigmatic approaches, concepts, and corresponding methods.

The current tumultuous social scientific, or rather historiographical debate about Russian imperialism, about its past and present, about its sources, ideological background, tools and methods, which is intensively and reliably fed by the data that the Russian invasion of Ukraine produced and unfortunately continues to grow, nevertheless represents rather an impulse, not a strict thematic framework for this text. The assumption is that the motivation for Russian activities in Ukraine has a strong imperial background, that it is an expression of a deliberate historical policy of the Kremlin, which connected contemporary artificial ideological constructs (Leninism, Trotskyism, Stalinism, etc.) with the subconscious mentality of the prevailing part of the

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<sup>1</sup> See L. Diamond, *Thinking about Hybrid Regimes*, „Journal of Democracy”, 2002, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 21–35; M. Bogaards, *How to classify hybrid regimes? Defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism*, „Democratization”, 2009, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 399–423; J. Brownlee, *Portents of Pluralism: How Hybrid Regimes Affect Democratic Transition*, „American Journal of Political Science”, 2009, vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 515–532; L. Gilbert, P. Mohseni, *Beyond Authoritarianism: The Conceptualization of Hybrid Regimes*, „Studies in Comparative International Development”, 2011, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 270–297; and several other authors.

Russian political community, understandably generates very lively debate. The concept of imperialism thus appears to be analytically useful both regarding analysis of the current situation and from the point of view of more generally defined topics; in the first place, the identification of key mobilisation schemes and sources of modern Russian politics in its various non-democratic modifications.

Within the framework outlined in this way, the concept of imperialism and theories of non-democratic regimes naturally meet in Russian studies. The Russian state has always been a privileged subject for research on non-democracies. Without a description of the regimes that have produced Russian elites and masses not only in the modern era but also throughout history, the debate on the general types of non-democratic regimes would be significantly poorer. It would lack some distinctive historical phenomena (starting with the model of *samoderzhaviye* and ending with various ideologically defined models of the 20th century). However, it would also lose the possibility of comparative reasoning, which is so important for discussions about the concept of totalitarianism.<sup>2</sup> In other words, with the incorporation of Russia, the general theory of non-democratic regimes, primarily based on the realities of the Western cultural circle, acquired a more universal character. By the way, whether it has it, whether it has explanatory potential for any non-democratic regime in any area, what role cultural-civilisational aspects play in the study of the practice of non-democratic regimes, these would be questions for another text...

In accordance with the previous remarks, the text aims to formulate several observations regarding the relationship between the general theory and typology of non-democratic regimes and the concept of imperialism, including brief updates in relation to Russian studies. The research question posed by this text, which appears not only as a real and interesting gap in the given field of research but whose answer could hopefully be helpful for the general theme of this study, is: What role, if any, does the concept of imperialism play in the debate on non-democratic regimes? A research sub-question that makes sense to formulate, as it develops the indicated basic topic, then has the following form: What are the sources of imperialist action, what are the sources of its legitimacy, and does it play any role in the classification of non-democratic regimes?

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<sup>2</sup> Among others, see S. Fitzpatrick, M. Geyer (eds), *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, Cambridge 2008.

## Imperialism as a Classical Concept in Social Sciences

Imperialism is an established concept in the social sciences. One definition (it must be added – classic, often quoted), for example, says that it is a “term used to denote an effort to extend the influence of one state over others with the aim of creating a great power or gaining dominant influence over the territory to which that state lays claim on historical, ethnic, religious, economic or political grounds”.<sup>3</sup>

The choice that this very definition opens in the following passage is, however, at the same time, a consciously random, purely illustrative step. Instead, its purpose is to open up the subject of an extensive and complicated history as well as the presence of debates and polemics that have been, are being, and hopefully will be led on the subject of imperialism in the social sciences. It is enough to recall Marxist interpretations on the one hand and decolonisation studies on the other, and it is evident that this is an almost confusing field of approaches, concepts, and theories.

At the same time, the question (criterion) of the justification of imperialism is offered as a helpful tool for navigating these debates. On the one hand, *the positive impact of imperialism* in terms of the spread of civilisation, culture or economic prosperity was and still is (in specific areas, see below) highlighted. In recent decades, the key area in which the export of values has been seen as a positive trend has been the sphere of human rights and democracy. In political science, or in the so-called democratisation studies, a clear and still ‘young’ proof of this approach (albeit no longer having the universal validity it previously claimed) is the debate on the so-called democracy promotion paradigm. This was initiated by the contribution of Laurence Whitehead already in the second half of the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, especially in the first decade of the 21st century, this democratisation paradigm completely dominated research on the most appropriate forms of democratisation practice.<sup>5</sup> The essence of this approach was the belief that the era of the

<sup>3</sup> J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism. A Study*, New York 1902, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> L. Whitehead, *International Aspects of Democratization*, in: *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, ed. G. Donnell, Ph.C. Schmitter, L. Whitehead, Baltimore 1986, pp. 64–84.

<sup>5</sup> See Ph.C. Schmitter, I. Brouwer, *Conceptualizing, Researching and Evaluating Democracy Promotion and Protection*, „EUI Working Paper SPS”, 1999, no. 9; Th. Carothers, *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion*, Washington 2004; M.R. Beissinger, *Promotion Democracy: Is Exporting Revolution a Constructive Strategy?*, „Dissent”, 2006, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 18–24; V. Bunce, S. Wolchik, *International diffusion and post-communist electoral revolutions*, „Communist and Post-Communist Studies”, 2006, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 283–304;

global democratic political village was dawning, a goal that authorised Western political actors to identify the remaining states with non-democratic regimes and subject these regimes to democratisation pressure.

At the same time, however, it is necessary to consider the existence of a second stream within the social science community (without the need to assess and measure the capacities of these two streams against each other). This wing emphasises *the negative impact of imperialism* in terms of conquest, expansionism, and violence. Above all, the broad decolonisation tradition in modern social sciences understandably takes this position. As basic evidence for this statement, we can recall the debate on the famous concept of *Orientalism*, which Edward Said formulated.<sup>6</sup> There are, naturally, other examples, such as the concept of *cultural imperialism* by John Tomlinson<sup>7</sup> or the concept of *new imperialism* by David Harvey.<sup>8</sup> These approaches accentuate the negative consequences of imperial trends, often with an emphasis on specific areas, culture, economy, etc. – just see the typical title of the first chapter of Harvey’s monograph: ‘All About Oil’.

From these notes, we can deduce an apparent concentration on the imperialism of Western countries, or the West as a civilisational, respectively cultural entity and its activities abroad. And, of course, in parallel, there is an apparent concentration on the imperialism of Western countries inside social and political science communities formed by generations of Western authors. There is no need to doubt and further demonstrate the depth and importance of thinking about imperialism as a practical political doctrine, its advantages and disadvantages, its actors, bearers, and victims.

## Imperialism and the Classical Debate on Non-Democratic Regimes

In remarkable contrast to the fundamental position, which the doctrine of imperialism enjoys in the social sciences, there appear to be really rare references on imperialism in the debate on regime types in the field of comparative political science. That is, in the discussion about one of the most frequent topics that comparative political science deals with. The absence

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H. Yilmaz, *The International Context*, in: *Democratization*, ed. Ch.W. Haerpfer, P. Bernhagen, R.F. Inglehart, Ch. Welzel, Oxford 2009, pp. 92–106; and many others.

<sup>6</sup> E. Said, *Orientalism*, London 1978.

<sup>7</sup> J. Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction*, Baltimore 1991.

<sup>8</sup> D. Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford 2003.

of the concept of *imperialism* in classical analyses of political regimes, especially non-democratic ones, is really obvious. And simply surprising.

Classic comparative-analytical (we will leave aside philosophically tuned works, i.e. the tradition started by Hannah Arendt) texts on non-democratic regimes, which in the second half of the 20th century built the conceptual and methodological background of this discipline,<sup>9</sup> do not work with the concept of imperialism. The same is true for the influential and widely cited works in this field published in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.<sup>10</sup> Does this mean that they did not see this concept as analytically useful for the study of non-democracies?

Let us remind two important exceptions. The first one was the founding analysis of non-democratic regimes by Zbigniew Brzezinski and Carl Joachim Friedrich. They included in their work a chapter dedicated to what they called *totalitarian expansionism*,<sup>11</sup> which, according to their judgment, represented an inseparable element of totalitarian dictatorship. It is for a reason that the chapter opens with a reference to the classic slogan of the Marxist movement, 'Proletarians of all countries, unite!', rightly interpreted as an ideological call for world revolution. Then follows a warning about the desire for unanimity, which is supposed to be typical for totalitarianism, and the fulfilment of which forces the totalitarian elites to external expansionism, driven precisely by the vision of achieving a universal model. Due to their mobilisation needs, totalitarian regimes produce visions of both an internal and an external enemy. The very existence of an external enemy, whether imaginary or real, then legitimises a foreign expansionist policy. In this sense, as described by Brzezinski and Friedrich, the Soviet foreign policy practice in the 20th century, starting with the negotiations in Brest Litovsk in 1918, can be characterised as a turning point. It completely overturned the previous standards of diplomacy as a method of communication between states in the international arena.<sup>12</sup>

In other passages of the chapter, Brzezinski and Friedrich draw attention to the significant external difference between fascism and communism: on one hand, there is the fascist fascination with war and aggression, on the other hand, the Soviet slogans about a world peace order, accusing

<sup>9</sup> See J.J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Boulder 2000; *idem*, A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore 1996.

<sup>10</sup> See P. Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes. Theory, Government and Politics*, Basingstoke 2000; M. Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, Cambridge 2012.

<sup>11</sup> See Z.K. Brzezinski, C.J. Friedrich, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, New York-Washington-London 1956.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 442.

Western capitalist countries of what? Of course, of imperialism. For a superficial observer, a contradiction, or even a reason to defend Soviet practice. In reality, however, both ideologies aim at identical goals.

The most systematic remarks regarding the relationship between imperialism and totalitarianism in the described chapter relate to the differences that the foreign practice of totalitarian regimes brings in comparison with the classic imperialist policy of the great powers in the eras before the First World War. The passage begins with a quote from Benito Mussolini that “imperialism is an eternal, immutable right of life”;<sup>13</sup> however, according to the Italian fascist leader, it does not have to have a classic aristocratic and militaristic character, but can be “democratic, pacifist, economic, spiritual”.<sup>14</sup> With an apparent disbelief in these rhetorical games of Mussolini and with reference to Hannah Arendt, Brzezinski and Friedrich subsequently emphasise that classical imperialism was primarily an economic doctrine guided by practical needs. On the contrary, the totalitarian practice aims at something bigger – to control the whole world. For the Russian line of our topic, the reference of both authors to the pan-Slavic ideas of Nikolay Danilevsky, which constitute a significant inspiration of contemporary Stalinist political practice, is certainly not negligible.<sup>15</sup> Compared to Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism, according to Brzezinski and Friedrich, has remarkable emotional depth and the ability to refer to history.

The chapter in the classic book by Friedrich and Brzezinski culminates in the designation of totalitarian actors as “ideological imperialists”. Thus, it represents a very valuable and instructive insight into the issue of the practical functioning of totalitarian regimes precisely in the area to which this text is devoted, i.e. from the point of view of the aggressive foreign policy of this type of non-democratic regimes.

However, as we try to indicate, the considerations of Brzezinski and Friedrich did not have much influence on the subsequent debate about non-democracies, including the already mentioned classic Linz’s methodological contribution on how to distinguish authoritarian regimes from totalitarian ones. His famous four axes (mentality contra ideology, monism contra limited pluralism, mobilisation contra depoliticisation, and type of leadership) do not apparently involve imperial or expansive needs as an analytical opportunity/categories in this research field.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 448.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 448.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 453.

<sup>16</sup> See J.J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes...*

There is, however, a second exception, the existence of which has already been indicated above. This is, above all, key evidence that the concept of imperialism was not completely ignored by comparative political scientists when researching non-democratic regimes, but on the contrary was used to formulate fundamental findings from the point of view of the classification of these regimes. I am referring to the texts of the American political scientist Jean Kirkpatrick. They were published in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Her contribution to the theory of nondemocracies lies in the formulation of other additional characteristic features of authoritarian regimes than those presented by Linz. Concretely, she talked about the ability to re-establishing democracy and, what plays a key role from our point of view, the *lack of effort to expand*, unlike totalitarian regimes that *need to export* their ideology due to its universal nature.<sup>17</sup> The quite practical framework in which Kirkpatrick moved in this reflection was the debate about the desirable strategies of contemporary US foreign policy towards countries of various non-democratic types. This debate focused primarily on the Latin American region, but Kirkpatrick formulated her thesis not only in a real sense but with universal validity. In any case, an important finding emerges from her remarks: the aspect of the ability and interest to export one's sources of legitimacy is a key classification element from the point of view of research on non-democratic regimes.

## **Metamorphosis (Sometimes Paradoxical) of the Debate on Non-Democratic Regimes after 1989**

The sensitivity to the importance of the imperial aspect in the study of non-democratic regimes, which Kirkpatrick's texts brought, was unfortunately gradually put aside in comparative political science after 1989 as an unnecessary relic from the old days. The disintegration of the Soviet bloc, the fall of communist regimes and the end of the Cold War led to a focus on different aspects and phenomena in the research of non-democracies. At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, the debates on how to recategorise non-democratic regimes were dominated by the concept of hybrid regimes built on the study of post-transitive regime models. For those, a combination

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<sup>17</sup> See J.K. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards. The Classic Essay That Shaped Reagan's Foreign Policy*, „Commentary”, 1979, no. 11 (November), <https://www.commentary.org/articles/jeane-kirkpatrick/dictatorships-double-standards/> (accessed: 28 Apr. 2024); *eadem*, *U.S. Security and Latin America*, „Commentary”, 1981, no. 1 (January), pp. 29–40.

of democratic institutional designs with illiberal outputs from political procedures should have been typical (see the typical concept of *illiberal democracy* for debate<sup>18</sup>). In other words, the whole idea focused on entirely different problems than the question of external self-presentation. Attention was mainly paid to the internal 'Janusian' identity of these regimes and the specific patterns of behaviour of their elites.

In summary, at the turn of the 21st century, there was scepticism about the possible expansionist practices of contemporary non-democratic regimes. On the contrary, there was strong optimism that this type of behaviour is a thing of the past, that the capacities enabling the non-democratic elites to behave in this way have been completely exhausted, and that they have no choice but to hide their nondemocratic behaviour behind a democratic facade. Taken from the opposite side, if something is exported in the international environment, then, within the framework of the democracy promotion paradigm, it will be experienced with good governance of the liberal type produced by countries with democratic institutions. The concepts of *global political economy* and *global governance* represented contemporary frameworks both for this type of theoretical thinking and for concrete democratising practices of state and non-state actors in this field.

The debate about the so-called *new* or *modern authoritarianisms* brought about a particular transformation and shift in this direction. This debate started in the late 2010th and early 2020th, and the entire comparative political science community soon became involved.<sup>19</sup> These discussions did not produce (and probably will not produce, the author ventures to guess) any generally accepted definition of what modern authoritarianism actually is. However, it did bring some remarkable innovative elements. In the first place, it is necessary to name the willingness to work with the concept of legitimacy even outside the field of democratic governance and the understanding that this category needs to be incorporated again in the effort to explain where the stability of the current autocracies comes from.

Certainly, this discussion has been characterised by a focus on the internal characteristics of these regimes. However, the selection of typical examples of new, contemporary authoritarianisms was already important. In addition

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<sup>18</sup> F. Zakaria, *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*, „Foreign Affairs”, 1997, vol. 76, no. 6, pp. 22–43.

<sup>19</sup> See I. Krastev, *The Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism*, „Journal of Democracy”, 2011, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 5–16; J. Gerschewski, *The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes*, „Democratization”, 2013, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 13–38; T. Roylance, *The Twilight of 'Modern Authoritarianism'*, Washington 2014, <https://freedomhouse.org/blog/twilight-modern-authoritarianism>; and many others.

to Hugo Chavez's Venezuela, Iran was also among them, and especially Russia and China. In other words, countries whose processes of self-identification in recent years are not only bound by the boundaries of internal politics but are also very active externally, in relation to their immediate and more distant surroundings. Certainly, the Russian and Chinese elites take the position that these are primarily defensive reactions to the democracy promotion strategy of Western actors (state, non-state and transnational). Namely, that it is a reaction to specific political events caused by the West, especially to a series of so-called colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space and to the so-called Arab Spring. The allegedly defensive nature of these reactions was, however, soon replaced by active policies. As part of this discourse, terms such as authoritarian promotion, etc. were discussed, having an alleged role in the current phenomenon of crisis of liberal democracies (erosion of democracy, democracy backsliding, etc.).

For the Russian case, Moscow's well-known interest in the so-called *near abroad* has become the most typical feature, presented as a territory variably defined either within the boundaries of the Soviet Union state, but often perceived rather within the boundaries of the former Warsaw Pact. This interest has been expressed on one hand by methods of diplomatic, economic or cultural pressure and on the other hand by methods of active support of specific parties in local conflicts. But in the end it took the form of direct military aggression, starting with the war with Georgia in 2008. Current Ukrainian realities understandably confirm this interpretation. How has the social science community responded to this?

In general, post-1989 Russian studies research on imperialism has logically been dominated by interest in the eras of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. It also corresponded to the data and the defensive situation in which the Russian state found itself in the 1990s. So, for example, imperialism was missing as a research category in the study of trends in current Russian political mentality,<sup>20</sup> or Russian imperialism was labelled as a "closed story".<sup>21</sup> It was primarily the so-called security studies that renewed interest in Russia's imperial potential, in connection with the foreign policy of Vladimir Putin's regime. It gradually revitalised imperial dreams and, at the same time, creatively thought about the possibilities of their justification, framed not only historically but also, for example, by the concept of modernisation.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *New Trends in Russian Political Mentality: Putin 3.0*, ed. E. Shestopal, Lanham 2016.

<sup>21</sup> D. Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story*, Washington–Moscow–Beijing–Beirut–Brussels 2011.

<sup>22</sup> С.И. Каспэ, *Империя и модернизация: Общая модель и российская специфика*, Москва 2001.

A somewhat different approach is chosen by the second key representative of the concept of modern authoritarianism – China. In the Chinese case, there has been a whole range of policies, from *Belt and Road initiative* to an extremely numerous (and successful, it must be added) amount of projects and investments in various regions of the world, especially in the African continent. At the same time, this is not necessarily a situation observable only in recent years. See the note of German historian and political scientist Uwe Backes in his interesting (unfortunately published only in German language) book *Die Autokratien (Autocracies)*:

Always concerned about ethnic inclusivity were the efforts of the Chinese leadership to legitimize power after the death of Mao, which, in view of the contradictory blend of ideological concepts (Marxism-Leninism and market science), increasingly relied on traditional cultural resources (Confucianism) and national-identitarian narratives such as the urge for self-assertion facing the threat of foreign influences (Western colonialism, Japanese and American imperialism).<sup>23</sup>

However, the fact that the current debate about modern authoritarianisms has gradually produced a thesis about the ideological competition between liberal democracies and modern authoritarianisms is important, moreover as it logically includes the dimension of international action, and competition for influence abroad. The term ‘imperialism’ does not (yet) appear frequently in these debates. However, the fact that it is supposed to be a competition in terms of the ideological attractiveness of liberal and illiberal regime models necessarily entails the condition of the ability of these regimes to demonstrate their (factual or fictitious) advantages externally, in the international environment, as civilisational entities.<sup>24</sup> Which can also mean exporting their own ideological identity.

In this sense, it is a paradox that the terminological framework for this debate is constituted by the concept of modern authoritarianism. Indeed, the authoritarian regime was traditionally perceived as a non-expansive, non-democratic type, lacking both the need and the ability to export. Which should have flowed directly from its autochthonous nature, focusing on its own problems, relying on internal rituals, traditions, customs. All this was adequately represented by Linz’s famous concept of *mentality*.

Therefore, if there are currently discussions about the ideological competition between liberal democracies and modern authoritarianisms, in the

<sup>23</sup> U. Backes, *Autokratien*, Baden-Baden 2022, p. 80.

<sup>24</sup> M. Laruelle, *Russia as an Anti-Liberal European Civilization*, in: *The New Russian Nationalism: Between Imperial and Ethnic*, ed. P. Kolstø, H. Blakkisrud, Edinburgh 2016, pp. 275–297.

context of considerations about the sources of their legitimacy, then this is a terminological shift. A shift which, however, is fundamentally logical (this does not mean that it is correct) given the changes brought about by the hybrid regimes paradigm in the methods of researching non-democratic regimes. If there can be *competitive authoritarianisms*,<sup>25</sup> which completely contradicts Linz's classic point that authoritarianisms are non-competitive, then there can also be modern authoritarianisms with expansionist tendencies and practices. Once upon a time, such regime types would fall under the category of totalitarianism. But where does it end today? In summary, whether the indicated shifts are positive for comparative political science or not, I leave that to the judgment of the reader.

## Conclusion

So, in the context of the findings of this text, what are the answers to the research questions that were formulated in its introduction? The first was: What role, if any, does the concept of imperialism play in the debate on non-democratic regimes? Here you can answer as follows: not significant. Unfortunately. The contemporary political science community still prefers to see imperialism primarily as a Western legacy. And in this sense, it focuses on the description and analysis of its (alleged or real) wrongdoings. Although the world of non-democratic regimes does not remain completely aside from such an interest, it is undoubtedly not a key category in their research. What is gone, however, is the former strict (fully understandable) separation of non-expansive types (authoritarianism) and expansive types (totalitarianism).

The current debate about non-democracies is framed by the term "modern authoritarianism". And one of its distinguishing features is supposed to be its rivalry with liberal democracies, with which it competes in the field of legitimacy. This competition, at the same time, does not only take the form of clarifying the legitimacy of ruling the respective elites inwards, towards their own political community. The legitimacy of modern authoritarianisms, at least some of them, including undoubtedly the two most important ones, namely China and Russia, should be anchored in the international environment as well. It should have the ability to export. An old-timer would say – it should have an imperial character. This is actually already a reflection of the supplementary research question, which was formulated as follows:

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<sup>25</sup> S. Levitsky, L.A. Way, *The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism*, „Journal of Democracy”, 2002, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 51–65.

What are sources of imperialist action, what are sources of its legitimacy and plays it any role in the classification of non-democratic regimes?

The really key, main question and uncertainty regarding the application of the concept of imperialism to Russia, carefully framing the considerations of this entire text, however, remains: is imperial policy for Russia an ideology or a mentality? If it does really matter...

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