

**Post-Soviet Authoritarianism:
The Influence of Russia in its 'Near Abroad'**

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Abstract: After the demise of the Soviet Union and the Communist-dominated regimes of central and eastern Europe, democratic polities were created and consolidated in a number of post-Communist countries. But in others – most notably, the non-Baltic post-Soviet states – the process of democratization never started or, if it did, stalled at some point and the countries evolved into hybrid regimes that combined, in varying mixes, elements of democratic and authoritarian politics. Building on Levitsky and Way (2010a), this article considers the extent to which and means by which Russia, by far the largest and most powerful of the post-Soviet states, influenced the consolidation of authoritarian politics and erosion of democratic politics in the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states. After noting the substantial erosion in rights, liberties and democratic politics that has occurred in Russia over the past two decades, the article suggests the asymmetries in size and power that favor Russia, coupled with its extensive cultural, economic, and security linkages with the other states, not only provide it with leverage vis-à-vis those states in the pursuit of its interests but also legitimize and reinforce the authoritarian elements in their polities, reduce the incentives for their leaders to strengthen the democratic elements, and in some instances have contributed to rollbacks of rights, liberties and democratic politics.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, most of the countries of central, eastern, and southeastern Europe that were formerly ruled by Communist parties have established and consolidated democratic polities. Motivated in part by geographic proximity, historic ties, cultural identities, trade linkages, and the prospect of membership in the European Union, many have created polities that are, in every respect, as democratic as those in Western Europe.² But in Russia and

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² See Cameron (2007).

most of the other non-Baltic states formed out of the Soviet Union after its demise in 1991, despite the existence of recurring contested elections, multiple parties and even occasional alternation of control of government, the polities retain elements of authoritarian politics – most notably, in the propensity to tilt the playing field on which elections are contested steeply in favor of the incumbents, the existence of a powerful and unchecked executive and absence of a strong and independent parliament, limits on political rights and civil liberties, and the harassment and occasionally use of violence against opponents of the incumbents.³ Not all of the states are unambiguously authoritarian. But neither are they, despite their periodic elections and competing parties, democratic. They are, as Levitsky and Way (2002, 2010a), Diamond (2002) and others have argued, hybrid regimes – regimes that combine elements of competitive and authoritarian politics.

While a good deal of scholarly attention has been devoted to the role of transnational and international actors – most notably, the European Union – in the democratization of post-Communist Europe, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to analysis of the transnational and international actors that contributed to the failed or incomplete democratization and establishment of hybrid, competitive authoritarian regimes in most of the non-Baltic post-Soviet countries.⁴ In particular, few have examined the impact of Russia – the successor state of the former Soviet Union and largest and most influential international actor in the post-Soviet space – on the process of political change in those states.⁵ There are numerous anecdotal accounts of Russian efforts to influence the outcomes of elections or use its control over oil and gas supplies to influence decisions of governments in those states. But there has been little effort to assess the extent to which Russia's extensive economic, geopolitical and military linkages with its post-

³ See Cameron (2007), Fish (2005, 2006), Levitsky and Way (2002, 2010a, 2010b), Shevtsova (2007), Stoner-Weiss (2010), and Way (2010).

⁴ On the role of the EU in the democratization of post-Communist Europe, see, among many, Cameron (2007), Hughes, Sasse, and Gordon (2004), Jacoby (2004, 2006), Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005), and Vachudova (2005, 2010).

⁵ For notable exceptions, see Ambrosio (2009), Colton (2011), Hedenskog and Larsson (2007), Kramer (2008), Tolstrup (2009), Wallander (2007), and Way (2011).

Soviet neighbors have enabled it to influence the forms of political authority and processes of political change in those states.⁶

Whether the leverage afforded by Russia's extensive ties with the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states has in fact been exercised and has influenced the forms of political authority is of interest for at least three reasons. First, although some may disagree, we believe – and will present data demonstrating – that the Russian polity has changed over time. While Russia remains a hybrid regime that includes both authoritarian and democratic attributes, the balance between its democratic and authoritarian elements has shifted over the past decade or more. There are, of course, still recurring elections that are contested by multiple parties, including parties that, in varying degrees, challenge incumbent parties and elites. But other elements that are generally regarded as core attributes of a democratic polity – for example, the existence of widespread and securely-guaranteed political rights and civil liberties and the rule of law – have eroded. At the risk of oversimplifying, over the two decades since it became a state, the Russian hybrid has become more authoritarian and less competitive.⁷

Second, the balance of competitive and authoritarian elements has changed over the past decade not only in Russia but in most of the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states as well. Most of the latter remain either fully authoritarian or hybrid regimes. But as in Russia, the balance of competitive and authoritarian elements has shifted; the democratic elements, to the extent they exist at all, have eroded and the authoritarian elements have become more prevalent. The simultaneity in the erosion of their democratic elements and gravitation toward a greater degree of authoritarianism in Russia and the other states raises the obvious question of whether the changes are coincidental – the result of forces operating simultaneously but independently in the states – or, on the other hand, reflect the influence of Russia.

Third, while the balance of democratic and authoritarian elements has changed in Russia and in most of the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states over the past decade, the international

⁶ For discussions of the impact of international linkages on democratization, see Levitsky and Way (2005, 2010a).

⁷ See, among others, Fish (2005), Hale (2006), Jack (2006), McFaul, Petrov, and Ryabov (2004), Shevtsova (2007), and Stoner-Weiss (2010).

context within which the states are located has also changed.⁸ Over the past decade, Russia has created new economic and collective security organizations – most notably, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). CSTO, a mutual defense organization formed in 2002, includes seven of the non-Baltic post-Soviet states – Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. EurAsEC, which was formed in 2000 and aims to create a single free trade area, includes five of those seven – all but Uzbekistan, which joined belatedly and suspended its membership in 2008, and Armenia. Meanwhile, in 2001, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Uzbekistan (which later withdrew) created the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development. Meanwhile, in 2004 the EU elaborated its European Neighborhood Policy as a framework for relations with 16 countries, including six non-Baltic post-Soviet states – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. And in 2009, the EU created its Eastern Partnership in order to continue building relations with those six by negotiating Association Agreements that would lead to deeper economic integration with the EU and perhaps even eventual membership.⁹

What makes the development of these international economic and collective security organizations especially interesting – and possibly consequential for the processes of political change within the non-Baltic post-Soviet states – is the differentiation that has occurred between those associated with Russia in CSTO and EurAsEC and those which are not members of CSTO and participate in GUAM and the EU's Eastern Partnership. That differentiation raises the question of whether, and if so to what extent, the creation of CSTO and EurAsEC provides additional modes of potential leverage for Russia vis-à-vis the other post-Soviet states – leverage which, in the case of its partners in CSTO and EurAsEC, may dampen any enthusiasm they might otherwise have for strengthening democratic elements in their polities and, in the case of

⁸ For discussions of the international context within which the post-Soviet states are located, see Darden (2009), Mankoff (2009), and McFaul (2010).

⁹ On the question of eventual membership, the EU says, “the ENP remains distinct from the process of enlargement although it does not prejudice, for European neighbours, how their relationship with the EU may develop in the future.” Quoted from “The Policy: What is the European Neighborhood Policy?” at http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/policy_en.htm.

It should be noted that, although Belarus participates in the ENP and was represented at the Prague summit in 2009 that initiated the Eastern Partnership, it participates only in certain multilateral activities of the ENP and is not, as are the other five Eastern Partners, negotiating an Association Agreement with the EU.

the states participating in GUAM and the Eastern Partnership, may subject them to pressure when policy preferences consistent with their stated objectives of strengthening democracy and deepening their ties with the EU clash with those of Russia.

Such questions can only be answered by extensive and intensive research on the ways in which, extent to which, and reasons why the forms of political authority in the non-Baltic post-Soviet states have changed over the past two decades and the extent to which, if at all, those changes have been influenced by the economic and geopolitical relations between Russia and the other post-Soviet states. In this article, we limit ourselves to considering the extent to which and direction in which the democratic and authoritarian elements of the Russian and other post-Soviet polities have changed in recent years, some of the linkages through which Russia may exercise leverage vis-à-vis the other post-Soviet states and, in a very tentative way, the extent to which the exercise of that leverage may have influenced the forms of political authority – specifically, the extent of democratization – in the other non-Baltic, post-Soviet states.

In the first section of the paper, we consider the extent to which the nearly thirty countries of central, eastern, and southeastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have instituted a democratic polity. That discussion highlights the fact that nine of the 15 successor states of the former Soviet republics cluster near the non-democratic pole of our measures, in marked contrast not only to the Baltic states but also to three other post-Soviet states – Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. The discussion leads us to consider some of the geographic, historical, and political factors that appear to have impeded the development of democracy in the post-Soviet states and caused most to remain, if not authoritarian, at best hybrids that combine authoritarian with democratic elements.

In the second section of the paper, we consider the extent to which, and direction in which, the form of political authority in the formerly Communist states has changed over the last decade or longer. That discussion highlights the fact that, at a time when some post-Communist states – most notably, most of the survivor states of the former Yugoslavia – have become more democratic, Russia and most of the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states have become *less* democratic. Indeed, over the period considered, Russia experienced the *largest* erosion in political rights, civil liberties and democracy of any of the 29 post-Communist countries. That discussion leads us to consider why, despite the presence of recurring elections and multiple

political parties, the extent to which rights and liberties are extensive and securely guaranteed, and with them the extent of democracy, has receded in Russia over the past two decades. We then consider the patterns of change over time in rights and liberties in the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states and compare them with the pattern of change in Russia.

In the third section of the paper, we consider some sources of Russian leverage vis-à-vis the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states. There are, of course, any number of modes and mechanisms of influence available to a large and powerful state that wishes to influence a smaller and less powerful neighbor. However, three types of linkage seem most consequential, in terms of providing Russia with leverage vis-à-vis the other states. They are cultural linkages – specifically, the presence of significant numbers of persons of Russian heritage in several states; economic linkages – specifically, the linkages created by high levels of trade openness, interdependence, and energy dependence; and international institutional linkages – specifically, the linkages created by shared membership in international security and economic organizations. With respect to the latter, the discussion highlights the development over the past decade of new security and economic organizations that link some but not all of the post-Soviet states with Russia and the simultaneous development among other post-Soviet states of linkages with international organizations in which Russia is not a member. That discussion suggests a growing differentiation within the post-Soviet space between Russia and the states aligned with it in the new security and economic organizations and the states that are aligned with each other in alternative international institutions. The discussion suggests it is the latter group that is most likely to be subjected to Russian influence that, intentionally or otherwise, contributes to an erosion of rights, liberties and democracy.

DEMOCRACY AND AUTHORITARIANISM IN THE POST-COMMUNIST ERA

Two decades after the historic events of 1989-91, the countries of central, eastern, and southeastern Europe and the former Soviet Union vary widely in the extent to which they have established democratic polities. Some – most notably, those which joined the EU in 2004 – are no less democratic than the long-standing democracies of western Europe, and others – most notably, those which joined in 2007 or are on track to do so in the near future – are in the process of consolidating a democratic polity. But others – most notably, most of the non-Baltic post-

Soviet states – have not established a democratic polity and, indeed, most have made little effort to do so over the past two decades.

Figure 1 illustrates the wide variation in the extent of democracy that exists among the countries formerly governed by Communist parties. The array consists of two measures reported by Freedom House for 2010, the latest year for which the data are available, for 29 countries. One measure is a composite based on Freedom House (2011a) measures of the extent to which political rights and civil liberties are widely distributed and securely guaranteed.¹⁰ The other is a composite measure of democracy reported by Freedom House (2011b) in its annual *Nations in Transit* publication. That measure is the average of values on a seven-point scale for each of the following categories:¹¹

- *Electoral Process*: free and fair elections of the national executive and legislature; the development of multiparty systems; popular participation, alternation in office; etc.
- *Civil Society*: growth of nongovernmental organizations, their capacity and financial sustainability, and the environment in which they function; development of free trade unions; role of interest groups in policymaking; freedom of the education system, etc.
- *Independent Media*: legal protection for press freedom and the current state of press freedom; protection for investigative journalism; libel laws; harassment of journalists, editorial independence, internet access for citizens, etc.
- *National Governance*: stability of the governmental system; transparency; ability of legislative bodies to carry out investigative and law-making functions; civil service reform and freedom of civil service from political interference.
- *Local Governance*: decentralization of power; responsibilities, election, management of local government bodies.¹²

¹⁰ Freedom House reports values on two seven-point scales (1 being the highest score, 7 the lowest score), one pertaining to political rights and the other pertaining to civil liberties. In order to simplify the measure, we have combined the values on the two measures for each country and subtracted the sum from 14. Thus, the measure of rights and liberties ranges from a maximum of 12 to a minimum of 0.

¹¹ For purposes of presentation, we have inverted the NIT measure of democracy, which ranges from a high of 1 to a low of 7, by subtracting the score from 7. Thus, the maximum value is 6 and the minimum is 0.

¹² Prior to 2005, Freedom House reported a single measure of governance, encompassing both national and local governance.

- *Constitutional, Legislative, and Judicial Framework*: constitutional framework for protecting human rights; independence and impartiality in interpretation of the constitution; equality before the law; criminal code reform; appointment, training, and independence of judges, etc.
- *Corruption*: implementation of anti-corruption initiatives; absence of excessive bureaucratic regulatory controls that create opportunities for corruption; laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest; audit and investigative rules; protection for whistleblowers, anti-corruption activists, etc.

Figure 1 identifies three quite distinctive groupings of countries. The first, located at the upper right-hand corner of the array and comprised of the eight countries that joined the EU in 2004, consists of countries that are unambiguously democratic. The second, consisting of Bulgaria, Romania, and most of the countries of the Western Balkans, includes countries that have achieved some degree of democracy although not the same degree that has been achieved by the 2004 EU entrants. Three of the non-Baltic, post-Soviet states – Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova – are in this group. The third grouping consists of the remaining nine post-Soviet countries.

Why does the extent to which a democratic polity exists – one in which, among other things, citizens enjoy expansive and securely-guaranteed political rights and civil liberties – vary as much as it does across the 29 post-Communist and post-Soviet countries? As Cameron (2007) noted, there are many attributes – historical, political, cultural, economic - that vary across the countries in a manner that resembles the variation among them in the measures arrayed in Figure 1 and that may have contributed to that variation. But certainly one of the most important involves the extent to which the formerly Communist-ruled countries had linkages with the democratic states of western Europe. Some had extensive linkages – the result of geographic proximity, shared histories, cultural ties and identities – with those states that gave rise to additional linkages in the post-Communist era, while others that, partly because of geography, lacked those shared histories, cultural ties and identities, did not develop such linkages to the same degree in the post-Communist era.¹³

Table 1 presents measures of the extent of statistical association across the 29 countries formerly governed by Communist parties between the measures of political rights and civil liberties

¹³ On the “neighborhood effects” of spatial location, see Kopstein and Reilly (2000).

and democracy presented in Figure 1 and several measures of the extent to which they were and are linked to the states of western Europe.¹⁴ Two are simply measures of geographic proximity, which, crude as they are, may nevertheless reflect the extent to which the countries shared similar histories, cultures, and identities.¹⁵ Three measures of the share of a country's exports that went to EU markets reflect the extent to which the economies of the post-Communist countries became linked during the 1990s with those of the member states of the EU.¹⁶ And three measures reflect the extent to which the post-Communist countries have formal membership-oriented relations with the EU and the longevity of those formal relations. Those measures consist of the number of years that have elapsed since the country signed a Europe Agreement or, in the case of the Western Balkans, a Stabilization and Association Agreement, the number of years since it applied for membership, and its current membership status.¹⁷

The data in Table 1 suggest that the extent to which a former Communist country established a democratic polity in the years after 1989-91 depended, at least in part, on its geographic location and the extent to which it had linkages with the democratic states of western Europe and the EU. Those which are located close to western Europe and developed extensive trade ties as well as formal membership-oriented relations with the EU in the early post-Communist

¹⁴ The measures of statistical association are Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, which range from 0 (no relation) to a maximum of +/- 1.

¹⁵ The measures are the distance of the country's capital from Brussels, measured in miles, and a four-point scale of proximity to the West. In order to measure proximity to Brussels, rather than distance from Brussels, we have reversed the signs of the coefficients for that measure.

¹⁶ The measures are reported in European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1999) and calculated from data in International Monetary Fund (2000).

¹⁷ The first Europe agreements, which held out the prospect of eventual membership in the European Community, were signed by the EC and Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1991. Subsequent agreements were concluded with Romania, Bulgaria, the three Baltic states and Slovenia in 1993-96. All ten (Czechoslovakia by then having separated into the Czech and Slovak Republics) applied for membership in 1994-96 and joined the EU in 2004 or 2007. The EU initiated its Stabilization and Association Process for the Western Balkans in 2000. The SAP supports development of the region and is designed to prepare the countries for eventual membership in the EU. The first step in the process involves negotiation of a Stabilization and Association Agreement, after which the country applies for membership, is declared to be a candidate, and opens and concludes accession negotiations. By the end of 2011, all six countries in the SAP – Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Albania – had negotiated an SAA. All but Bosnia have applied for membership. Croatia completed accession negotiations in 2011 and, assuming the accession treaty is ratified by all members, will enter the EU on July 1, 2013. Macedonia is currently negotiating accession. At its December 2011 meeting, the European Council decided that accession negotiations with Montenegro would begin in June 2012 and that Serbia would become a candidate in March 2012.

years were much more likely than those which are distant from Europe and did not develop extensive trade ties or formal membership-oriented relations with the EU to establish fully democratic polities. Conversely, the propensity to retain authoritarian or, at best, hybrid polities in the post-Communist era appears to have depended, at least in part, on the greater distance of a country from the West and, in part because of that distance, the absence of extensive trade ties and formal membership-oriented relations with the EU.

While the data in Table 1 suggest that linkages with the West and the EU played an important role in the development of democratic polities in some of the countries that, prior to 1989-91, were governed by Communist parties, there are of course many other attributes that may have facilitated or impeded the development of democratic polities. Table 2 presents measures of statistical association across the 29 countries between the two measures of democracy and measures of a number of such attributes. Included are several measures of specific historical antecedents of the regimes – when the Communist regime was installed, the extent of literacy prior to the advent of Communism, the extent of experience (if any) with democratic politics in the pre-Communist era;¹⁸ the transitional politics that occurred as the Communist regimes came to an abrupt (or protracted) termination – the extent to which there was a national mobilization of protest against the regime in the late 1980s, the extent to which the Communist elite was divided or unified, whether reformers won the first transitional election, what proportion of seats were won by non-Communists in that first election;¹⁹ and the contemporary political institutions of the post-Communist era – whether there is a parliamentary or presidential system, whether the parliament is strong or weak, whether the presidency is strong or weak, and whether the political executive is strong or weak.²⁰ These are,

¹⁸ The timing of Communist rule is simply the year in which the Communist regime was installed. The extent of literacy, a necessary prerequisite for the formation of national identities, is reported by Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006). The measure of pre-Communist experience with democracy is four-point scale that assigns a value of 3 to countries that were democratic for a brief period after World War II, 2 to those that were democratic after World War I until the mid-to-late 1920s or early-to-mid 1930s, 1 to those that briefly were democratic after World War I, and 0 to the rest.

¹⁹ The measure of national mobilization is a five-point scale based on contemporary accounts of events in 1989-91. The measure of elite fragmentation/consolidation is reported in Easter (1997). The measure of the quality and outcome of the first transitional election is reported in Fish (1998). The measure of the non-Communist vote is reported in European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1999).

²⁰ The measure of a parliamentary as opposed to presidential system is reported in Easter (1997). The strength of the parliament is reported in Fish (2006). The strength of the presidency is reported in Frye (1997). The strength of the

of course, only some of the many attributes that might have facilitated or impeded the development of a democratic polity in the post-Communist era.

The strength of the cross-national co-variation between the measures of democracy and those of virtually all of the historical, transitional and contemporary political attributes in Table 2 makes it impossible to provide a parsimonious explanation of that variation; the extent of democracy – and, conversely, authoritarianism – is, in statistical terms, overdetermined. However, it is possible to obtain some insight into causal processes, even in the face of statistical overdetermination, by considering the temporal sequence among the attributes. That enables one to suggest, even if only in a conjectural manner, how the various attributes may have influenced each other and contributed to the wide variation that we now observe among the 29 countries in the extent to which they have established fully democratic polities or, on the other hand, remain authoritarian polities or, at best, hybrid polities that combine some democratic elements with authoritarian elements. Figure 2 presents one such conjecture.

Figure 2 suggests that the process that, after 1991, resulted in the creation of democratic polities in some of the countries previously governed by Communist parties and, whether fully authoritarian or hybrids, non-democratic polities in others may have been shaped in the first instance by the proximity or distance of the country from the West and timing of the installation of a Communist regime. Those located close to the West and in which the Communist regime was established relatively late were, perhaps because of shared histories, collective memories, and common identities as “Europeans,” more likely to develop extensive trade ties and formal membership-oriented relations with the EC and EU early in the post-Communist era and in time – and no doubt, in part because of the influence of the EU (see Vachudova, 2005 and Cameron, 2007) – develop democratic polities than those located far from the West and in which a Communist regime was installed relatively early.

The combination of distance from the West and early installation of a Communist regime may have reduced the likelihood of any pre-Communist experience with democracy in the states that came into being after World War I. And that absence of a democratic past, coupled with low

political executive is reported in European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1999). These measures report the initial institutional features of the regimes, not subsequent changes such as the weakening of presidential power and strengthening of legislative power in Croatia after President Tudjman’s death and Ukraine after the Orange Revolution.

levels of literacy in the pre-Communist era when, as Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006) argue, national sentiments were being formed, may have contributed to a relatively low level of popular mobilization against the Communist regime in the late 1980s and, for that reason, a greater tendency for the Communist elite to remain united as the mobilization unfolded. That, in turn, may have enabled the Communists to withstand the challenge of reformers and retain power in the early transitional period and that, in turn, may have contributed, as Fish (1998, 2006) suggests, to retention of a strong political executive, creation of a weak parliament, and a limited degree of democratization. That is only a conjecture, of course. But that or some alternative combination of the attributes included in Tables 1 and 2 may explain why some of the countries formerly governed by Communist parties established democratic polities in the post-Communist era while others remained authoritarian or at best hybrids that combined elements of democratic and authoritarian politics.

THE EROSION OF DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES IN RUSSIA AND OTHER NON-BALTIC POST-SOVIET STATES

As interesting as the array in Figure 1 of the values for the 29 post-Communist countries on the measures of rights, liberties and democracy is, those data represent only a single snapshot in time. While they provide the most up-to-date information about the variation across the countries in rights, liberties and democracy, they provide no information about the extent of change in recent years. Nor do they provide any information, in the event change did occur, about the direction and magnitude of that change and, in particular, whether it was in a direction consistent with a hypothesis that Russia influenced the change.

Figure 3 addresses that shortcoming by presenting, for each country, a measure of the extent and direction of change in the two measures between 1999 and 2010. It does that by indicating, with a dash, the position of each country on the two measures in 1999 and linking it to the country's position in 2010, indicated with a diamond. The direction and extent of change between 1999 and 2010 is indicated by the direction and length of the line connecting the dashes and diamonds. The data in Figure 3 suggest three patterns of change. First, the eight states that joined the EU in 2004 experienced very little change over the eleven years between 1999 and 2010. That, of course, is not surprising since they experienced large increases in rights, liberties

and democracy in the early-to-mid 1990s (Cameron, 2007, pp. 199-201). A second group of states, consisting of Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Albania, and to a lesser extent Bulgaria, experienced significant increases in rights, liberties and democracy over the past decade. In two of the countries – Croatia and Serbia – the increases were large enough to bring them very close to the two countries – Bulgaria and Romania – that joined the EU in 2007.²¹

If the process of post-Communist democratization over the past decade has involved, more than anything else, the democratization of the Western Balkans after the wars of the 1990s, Figure 3 suggests that most of the non-Baltic post-Soviet countries have experienced an erosion of rights, liberties and democracy over the past decade. Notwithstanding the optimism about possible democratization generated by the “Color Revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in 2003-05, since the late 1990s most of the non-Baltic post-Soviet states have become less democratic and their citizens have suffered a diminution of their already-limited rights and liberties.²² Indeed, nine of the 12 states experienced a decrease on both measures and only two – Ukraine and Tajikistan – experienced an increase on one of the measures. Clearly, the differences among the 29 post-Communist states in the extent of rights, liberties and democracy have increased over the past decade, with a new fault line appearing between the states that are either members of the EU or, in the case of the Western Balkans, moving toward eventual membership – and greater democracy – and most of the non-Baltic post-Soviet states. With the exception of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, all of the non-Baltic post-Soviet states have moved toward, rather than away from, the authoritarian pole occupied by Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Most of them may remain hybrid regimes. But their democratic elements have weakened and the authoritarian elements strengthened over the past decade.

The erosion of democratic rights and liberties in Russia. The Preamble of the Russian constitution speaks of “reviving the sovereign statehood of Russia and asserting the firmness of

²¹ As noted earlier, Croatia has completed its accession negotiations with the EU and expects to enter on July 1, 2013. With Serbia’s arrest and delivery to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in May and July 2011 of the last two indictees – Ratko Mladić, the former Bosnian Serb military commander, and Goran Hadžić, the former Croatian Serb general and leader of the Serbian enclave of Krajina – Serbia is expected to be accepted as a candidate for membership in the near future.

²² On the “Color Revolutions,” see Beissinger (2007), Bunce and Wolchik (2010), Hale (2005), Kalandadze and Orenstein (2009), and Way (2008).

its democratic basis” and Article 1 declares it to be “a democratic federative law-governed state with a republican form of government.”²³ That formal declaration appears to be confirmed by measures reported by the Polity IV Project (Center for Systemic Peace, 2010) pertaining to the extent of institutionalized democracy and autocracy in the USSR and Russia. Those measures, presented in Figure 4, suggest that the extent of democracy in Russia was greater in every year after 1991 than in the last year of the Soviet Union, that the extent of autocracy dropped precipitously after 1991, that there has been no downward trend and, if anything, a very slight upward trend in the extent of democracy after 1991, and that Russia under President Boris Yeltsin (1991-99), and especially in the first seven years of the 2000-08 presidency of Vladimir Putin, was a democratic polity.²⁴

While the Polity IV measures are widely used and valuable for some purposes, they are, we believe, imperfect measures of democracy for the post-Soviet and post-Communist states. While they do take into account guarantees of civil liberties, they give considerable weight to institutional features of the executive branch – for example, the competitiveness and openness of executive recruitment and the extent of political constraints on the chief executive. As a result, they tend to emphasize the institutional attributes of executive authority and understate attributes pertaining to the extent to which elections are free and fair, rule of law is established, and political rights and civil liberties are widely distributed and well-protected. If, as Dahl (1971), O’Donnell (2001) and others argue, rights and liberties are foundational prerequisites for a democratic polity, the Russian polity is hardly democratic. Its recurring presidential and parliamentary elections, multiple parties, and zone of tolerated political contestation and opposition clearly differentiate it from unambiguously authoritarian regimes. But those electoral elements alone do not make it a democratic polity.²⁵

The erosion of rights, liberties and democracy that has occurred in Russia over the past decade is most frequently associated with the presidency of Vladimir Putin. But there is good

²³ <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/articles/ConstIntro01.shtml>.

²⁴ The Polity IV Project regards a country having a “polity” (i.e., democracy – autocracy) score of 6 as a democracy. By that definition, Russia was a democracy in 2000-06.

²⁵ For an important critique of “democracy with adjectives” – e.g., electoral democracy, managed democracy, etc. – see Collier and Levitsky (1997).

reason to believe that the causes of that erosion lie deeper, in the institutional structures of the state, and that the erosion of rights, liberties and democracy that occurred during Putin's presidency only continued a process that began during the presidency of his predecessor. Indeed, the data presented in Figure 5 suggest the erosion of rights and liberties, and we presume democracy, began almost a decade earlier, soon after the termination of the USSR, and continued, after a hiatus of several years, in the last years of the presidency of Boris Yeltsin.

Because Freedom House began reporting the *Nations in Transit* measure of democracy only in the late 1990s, we have used the measure of rights and liberties, the components of which have been reported by Freedom House annually since the 1970s, to estimate the extent of democracy in the USSR and Russia in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁶ Figure 5 presents the values on the composite measure of rights and liberties for the USSR in 1985-91 and for Russia since 1991. The array depicts a dramatic increase in rights and liberties in the USSR after 1986.²⁷ And it also depicts a pattern of change since 1991 that differs markedly from that conveyed by the Polity IV measures in Figure 4. The data in Figure 5 indicate that the extent to which rights and liberties were expansive and securely guaranteed in Russia reached a maximum in 1991 – the last year of the Soviet Union! After 1991, the measure of rights and liberties moves downward in a series of steps, first in 1992, then in 1998-2000, then in 2004. Over the past 20 years, there has not been a single year in which the composite measure of rights and liberties in Russia increased.

What accounts for the long downward trend in rights and liberties over the past two decades in Russia? The answer lies, at least in part, in the outcome of the prolonged battle in 1992-93 between the Russian parliament – a parliament inherited from the Soviet era – and President Yeltsin, the power vested in the presidency by the 1993 constitution, and the use of that power by Yeltsin and Putin to maintain themselves in power and increase their already-considerable powers. There was some reason to believe, immediately after the termination of the Soviet Union, that with the foundation prepared by Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s Russia

²⁶ The exceptionally high correlation between the measures of rights and liberties and of democracy presented in Figure 1 ($r = .96$) suggests not only the extent to which democracy may depend on the existence of widespread and securely guaranteed rights and liberties but that the measure of rights and liberties can be used with some degree of confidence as a surrogate for an unavailable measure of democracy.

²⁷ On the reforms in the USSR in 1985-91, see, among many, Brown (1996).

would evolve in time into a democratic polity.²⁸ But within two years of the termination of the USSR, those hopes had been dashed and, as Figure 5 suggests, Russia began a long slide toward a new post-Soviet form of executive authority – one that allowed a limited degree of electoral competition among regime-approved parties while greatly expanding the power of the political executive and rolling back the rights of citizens to assemble, speak, organize, contest elections and oppose incumbents.²⁹

The backsliding began largely as the by-product of a conflict between Yeltsin, elected president of the Russian Republic in June 1991, and the Russian Congress and Supreme Soviet, both elected in 1990, over the program of economic “shock therapy” introduced by Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar in January 1992. With the economy contracting and unemployment rising, opposition to the program increased to such a point that in December 1992 the Congress refused to confirm Gaidar’s reappointment and extend the decree powers Yeltsin had been granted in 1991. In March 1993, Yeltsin barely survived a vote of impeachment, after which he and the Parliament agreed to hold a referendum in which voters would be asked for their views about Yeltsin’s presidency, the government’s socio-economic policies, and whether they wanted early elections for the presidency and Congress. Pending the outcome of the referendum, the Parliament allowed Yeltsin to retain his emergency powers.

The April 1993 referendum produced a Yeltsin victory.³⁰ Soon thereafter, he used his decree powers to convene a constitutional conference which, in July, approved a draft constitution that greatly expanded the powers of the president and replaced the Congress and

²⁸ See Cohen (2009).

²⁹ The most blatant violations with respect to speech and assembly have involved the harassment and intimidation of Memorial and other human rights organizations, as well as Article 31 protestors (those protesting violations of Article 31 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of assembly). With respect to electoral contestation, very high barriers must be surmounted by parties wishing to contest elections for the Duma and candidates wishing to run for the presidency. (In 2004, Putin terminated direct election of the 83 regional governors, who were thereafter appointed by the president.) Parties wishing to run for the Duma or nominate a candidate for the presidency must be registered. In order to be registered, in 2011 parties had to have 45,000 members, branches having more than 450 members in more than half of the 83 regions and more than 200 members in the remaining regions. Parties with seats in the Duma may nominate a candidate, as may parties holding seats in more than one-third of the legislative assemblies of the regions. Other parties and independents must obtain 2 million valid signatures, no more than 50,000 of which can come from any region. See Centre for the Study of Public Policy (2011).

³⁰ In the referendum, 59 percent expressed confidence in Yeltsin, 53 percent approved of the government’s policies, 49.5 percent supported early presidential elections, and 67 percent supported early elections for the Congress.

Supreme Soviet with a new bicameral legislature. Not surprisingly, the Congress and Supreme Soviet rejected the draft constitution. After Yeltsin suspended Alexander Rutskoi, the vice president of the Federation and leader of the Congress, the Supreme Soviet appealed the suspension to the Constitutional Court. After it rejected his nomination of Gaidar as acting prime minister, Yeltsin dissolved the Supreme Soviet, something that was prohibited by the 1978 constitution. After the court ruled that Yeltsin had violated the constitution and could be impeached, the Congress declared his actions null and void and replaced him with Rutskoi. After the court ruled the Congress had the right to remove him from office, Yeltsin declared a state of emergency and ordered tanks and troops to surround and seal off the White House. On Oct. 3-4, the tanks fired on the parliament building and the troops stormed in and arrested Rutskoi and other leaders. Subsequently, Yeltsin issued decrees expanding the powers of the president, banning the parties that had supported the parliament, sacking the head of the Constitutional Court, and calling a referendum on the new constitution and election of the Duma, the new lower house of the parliament. The referendum and election were held on Dec. 12, 1993. Despite widespread suspicion that turnout had been falsified in order to ensure approval and the fact that, at most, only 31 percent of the registered electorate had voted in favor, the new constitution was declared to have been approved, thereby establishing the basis for what would become an increasingly executive-centered – and increasingly authoritarian – polity.³¹

Although many in the West lauded Yeltsin as a democrat for resisting the attempted coup of August 1991, it is hard to regard much of his later conduct in office as being that of a committed democrat.³² After obtaining approval of the constitution, limits were placed on the ability of candidates and parties to freely contest elections. Facing a serious challenge for reelection in 1996 from the leader of the Russian Communist Party, Yeltsin was reelected thanks to the ample financial and media support provided by the “oligarchs” – the new tycoons of post-Soviet Russia – in exchange for substantial shares of state assets. As Figure 5 suggests, a substantial roll-back in political rights and civil liberties occurred in his last two years in office.

³¹ In the referendum, 58.4 percent voted in favor of the new constitution. Turnout was reported to have been 54.8 percent although that figure was widely disputed and some estimated it to have been less than 50 percent, the minimum level required for the result to be official.

³² For a contrasting view, see Colton (2008), pp. 8-9.

His appointment of Vladimir Putin as prime minister in August 1999 placed Putin in a position to succeed him as president – and continue the roll-back in rights, liberties and democracy.³³

The erosion of rights and liberties in other post-Soviet states. Figures 6-8 present the annual composite measures of political rights and civil liberties over the period 1991-2010 for the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states. The figures, which group the eleven countries by region, indicate considerable variability among the countries both in the timing and direction of change in rights and liberties. One cannot, of course, assume that the absence of change over time in a country reflects the absence of Russian influence just as one cannot assume that a diminution of rights and liberties in a country reflects the presence of Russian influence or that an increase in rights and liberties prompted the exercise of Russian influence designed to roll back the increase. Indeed, the most prudent assumption is that the patterns of both stability and change over time are the result of decisions taken by the governing elites of the countries in response to domestically-generated pressures rather than Russian influence. Nevertheless, some of the patterns, such as a synchronized or lagged erosion of rights and liberties or a convergence toward the Russian level, may suggest the presence of Russian influence that either reinforced or strengthened the authoritarian tendencies of a country's governing elite or led to overt efforts to limit rights and liberties. Likewise, a pattern of marked divergence from the Russian pattern that is later reversed may suggest the presence of Russian influence that had the effect, either intentionally or otherwise, of impeding the country's movement toward a more democratic polity.

Figure 6 presents the measures of rights and liberties for Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova for 1991-2010. The figure also includes, for comparison, the Russian measure. The figure suggests that the extent of rights and liberties in Belarus was close to that in Russia and Ukraine – in fact, identical in 1992 – but receded dramatically in 1995 and 1996, no doubt as a result of the election in 1994 of Alexander Lukashenko as president.³⁴ After the erosion of rights and

³³ Yeltsin resigned the presidency on New Year's Eve 1999. Putin, as prime minister, automatically became acting president. In March 2000, he was elected president in the first round with 53 percent of the vote. He was reelected in March 2004 with 71 percent of the vote.

³⁴ On Belarus, see Silitski (2010) and Wilson (2011). On Russia's supportive role in Lukashenko's efforts to reduce the power of parliament and consolidate his authoritarian regime, see Way (2011).

liberties that occurred in Russia in 1998-2000, the measures for Russia and Belarus move across time in tandem, with both experiencing a further erosion of rights and liberties in 2004.

In contrast to the situation in Belarus and Russia, the citizens of Ukraine and Moldova have enjoyed more extensive and more secure rights and liberties over the past decade although the extent of rights and liberties has fluctuated in both. For a period of six years in the late 1990s and early 2000s while Ukraine was controlled by President Leonid Kuchma, the situation with respect to rights and liberties was better in Moldova than in Ukraine. But after the 2004 Orange Revolution and the disputed but eventual election of Viktor Yushchenko, Ukraine experienced a significant improvement in rights and liberties.³⁵ However, perhaps because of the highly fractious political situation and the loss of popular support for Yushchenko, no further increase occurred in Ukraine after 2005 and in 2010, after Viktor Yanukovych was elected president, there was some erosion in the extent and security of rights and liberties. In contrast, the extent of rights and liberties in Moldova decreased over the eight years in which Vladimir Voronin, the leader of the Communist Party, held the presidency. But after that party lost the parliamentary elections of July 2009 and a new, pro-European government was formed by the opposition parties, the downward trend was reversed and rights and liberties increased in 2009 and 2010.³⁶ Looking to the future, it seems likely that the direction of change that occurred in Ukraine in 2010 and Moldova in 2009-10 will continue – meaning continued erosion in Ukraine and continued improvement in Moldova.

Figure 7 presents the measures of rights and liberties for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, along with the measure for Russia. Among the three countries, only Georgia appears to

³⁵ No candidate obtained 50 percent of the vote in the first round of the 2004 election. After the second round, the Central Electoral Commission announced that Viktor Yanukovych had obtained 49.5 percent to Yushchenko's 46.6 percent. Three days later, the Supreme Court banned publication of final election results because of complaints of electoral irregularities and two days after that the Parliament declared the second-round results invalid. On Dec. 3, the Supreme Court annulled the results and ordered a new second round on Dec. 26. Yushchenko obtained 52 percent of the vote and Yanukovych 44 percent. On the Orange Revolution, see Åslund and McFaul (2006) and Wilson (2005).

³⁶ The Moldovan constitution requires that the president be elected by a majority of at least 61 of the 100 members of the parliament. In the April 2009 parliamentary election, the Communist Party won a majority of 60 seats but was unable to elect a president to succeed Voronin. Voronin dissolved the parliament and called new elections that took place in July 2009. The Communists suffered a loss of seats and the opposition parties won a majority, although less than 61. In August 2009, four opposition parties, calling themselves the Alliance for European Integration, formed a coalition government. In November 2010, another election was held and the coalition won a larger majority, although still two seats short of the number needed to elect a president.

have diverged from the Russian pattern, with a significant increase in rights and liberties in 2004 and 2005 immediately after the Rose Revolution of 2003 and then, after a sharp decrease, a slight increase in 2010. But lest one assume the sharp decrease was the result of Russian influence in the aftermath of the war of August 2008, it should be noted that the decrease occurred in 2007, not 2008, and resulted from diminutions of rights and liberties introduced by President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have values on the measure of rights and liberties that are very close to that of Russia. Indeed, the measure for Azerbaijan has not changed at all since 2000 and has been identical to that of Russia since 2004. Armenia, meanwhile, has moved, in several steps – first in 1995-96, then in 2004 and again in 2008 – toward the Russian pattern. The increasing convergence of Armenia and Azerbaijan with Russia could reflect Russian influence or a desire on the part of the national leaderships to emulate the Russian mode of political authority, which combines some degree of electoral contestation with a powerful executive and limited rights and liberties. On the other hand, it could simply reflect the desires of the national leaderships to limit rights and liberties irrespective of what Russia wanted or preferred. Given its pattern in the early and mid-1990s, before Russia experienced the erosion that occurred in 1998-2000, the latter would seem to apply to Azerbaijan, whereas the former may account for the erosion of rights and liberties over the last decade in Armenia.

Figure 8 presents the measures of rights and liberties for the five Central Asian countries, along with that for Russia, between 1991 and 2010. With the possible exception of Kyrgyzstan in the late 1990s and again in 2005-08, after its 2005 Tulip Revolution, it is hard to find anything in the data that would suggest that Russia contributed to the erosion of rights and liberties in any of the countries – largely because most of the countries greatly limited rights and liberties from the outset. After the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, rights and liberties, to the extent they existed at all, were rapidly and substantially curtailed in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and, to a lesser degree, Kazakhstan. And they remained at low levels, especially in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, over the next two decades. In terms of democratic rights and liberties, those two as well as Kazakhstan and, more recently Tajikistan, are, to use an appropriate medical analogy, flat-lining.

It is not obvious that Russia needed to exert any leverage to thwart democratic ambitions in most of those states; the national leaders did that themselves – and, indeed, in most instances did so before the Russian leaders did. But even if Russia had felt the need to exert leverage in those states, it's not obvious that it could have done so. Powerful dictators such as Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus and Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan are to some extent free agents who have demonstrated that they do not always feel obliged to cooperate with Russian policy.³⁷ As a result, Russia may, paradoxically, be more successful in influencing other competitive authoritarian hybrid regimes than in influencing the most thoroughly authoritarian regimes.

It is hard to decipher simultaneous or lagged patterns of movement in the trends arrayed in Figures 6-8 that might indicate the exercise of Russian influence, and even in the cases for which such patterns can be detected they do not necessarily constitute evidence of a causal relationship between the exercise of Russian influence and the erosion of rights, liberties and democracy in the other country. One cannot conclude on the basis of these patterns that Russia caused or contributed to the erosion of rights, liberties and democracy in the other countries; the most that can be said is that all of them experienced, as Russia did, some degree of erosion at various times after 1991. Nevertheless, the fact that Russia experienced a substantial reduction in rights, liberties and democracy over the past two decades, and the largest reduction over the past decade, coupled with the fact that rights and liberties have been substantially eroded in most of the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states, suggests it may have influenced that erosion, if not through direct intervention, as in Belarus in 1994-96, through its legitimation, by its own practice, of authoritarian politics and the leverage afforded by the favorable asymmetry of power and its many linkages with the other states.

In some states – most notably, Azerbaijan and all of the Central Asian states except Kyrgyzstan – the erosion of rights and liberties occurred relatively early, in the early-to-mid 1990s, and there's no reason to think the erosion reflected anything other than the preferences of

³⁷ For example, in 2009 and 2010 Belarus threatened to stop the transmission of Russian oil and gas to central and western European markets in response to an increase in the price of oil and gas it received from Russia. It opposed the formation of a customs union with Russia and Kazakhstan, which Russia supports; provided refuge for former Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who Russia had worked to remove from power; and refused to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia and provided support for President Saakashvili of Georgia. Russia at one point reciprocated by televising a critical documentary about Lukashenko entitled "Godfather." See "In information war, documentary is latest salvo," *New York Times*, August 1, 2010.

the presidents and other members of the national elite in those countries. On the other hand, in Armenia during the presidency of Robert Kocharyan (1998-2008), Kyrgyzstan both in the 1990s and again in 2009, Moldova during the Voronin presidency (2001-09) and, perhaps most worrisome, Ukraine after the election of Yanukovich in 2010, the erosion of rights and liberties that occurred may have been influenced by Russia. On the other hand, as the Moldovan experience in 2009-10 suggests, there are limits to Russian influence; even a very small state, one that is highly dependent upon Russia and enmeshed in a “frozen conflict” with it, can, with the right leadership, create a more democratic polity.

LINKAGES AND RUSSIAN LEVERAGE IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE

Russia and the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states share a common history as members of the Soviet Union and, indeed for most of them, the Russian Empire. That shared history generated extensive linkages among the former republics, many of which endure two decades after the demise of the USSR. Persons of Russian heritage have resided for generations in the other post-Soviet states and Russian continues to be the mother tongue of substantial portions of the populations of those states. Two decades later, their economies, which were highly integrated when they were republics of the USSR, remain linked and highly interdependent. And in the years since 1991, new international institutions and partnerships have come into being in the post-Soviet space that add to the linkages among them. The states formerly governed by Communist parties in central and eastern Europe had linkages through geographic proximity, shared histories and cultural identities, and trade ties with the West and the EU. But those linkages pale in comparison with the ones that exist between Russia and the other post-Soviet states. And if the linkages between the EU and its post-Communist neighbors enabled it to influence the process of democratization in those countries, surely the even deeper linkages between Russia and the other post-Soviet states should have enabled it to influence the forms of political authority – in particular, the balance of democratic and authoritarian elements – in those states.

Ethnic linkages. One especially important aspect of the shared historical experience as members of the Soviet Union is the presence of substantial numbers of persons of Russian

heritage in most of Russia's post-Soviet neighbors.³⁸ While the numbers have declined dramatically since 1991 in some of the states that once were republics of the U.S.S.R. – most notably, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – in several others a large proportion of the persons of Russian heritage decided to remain where they resided. Hedenskog and Larsson (2007) estimate that 95 per cent remained in Belarus, about 85 per cent in Estonia and Latvia, and 73 per cent in Ukraine. As a result, in some of the post-Soviet states, persons of Russian heritage continue to constitute a substantial portion of the population – about 30 per cent in Kazakhstan, 25 to 28 per cent in Estonia and Latvia, 17 per cent in Ukraine, 13 per cent in Kyrgyzstan and 11 per cent in Belarus.³⁹ That presence has inevitably given rise to issues pertaining to the naturalization of persons of Russian heritage, especially when, as in Estonia and Latvia in the early 1990s, legislation was enacted that was designed to exclude most if not all of the residents of Russian heritage from citizenship. Not surprisingly, when such issues have arisen, Russia has sought to influence the policy process in support of the persons who share its heritage.

The presence of substantial numbers of persons of Russian heritage in some of the other post-Soviet states also provides a means through which Russia can enter the domestic political arena in those states on matters unrelated to the treatment of those persons. In the states in which persons of Russian heritage constitute a significant portion of the population, those persons are usually concentrated in border regions – for example, in the eastern portion of Estonia around Narva or the eastern region of Ukraine around Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk and in the Crimea. The regional concentration of persons of Russian heritage may, as in Ukraine, give rise to political parties that regard Russia as a friend and ally and that afford Russia a means of entering the domestic political and electoral arena of the country, not in order to defend those of Russian heritage but, rather, to support candidates and parties whose positions it supports. Thus, for example, Russia supported Viktor Yanukovich, a former governor of the Donetsk oblast and leader of the Regions Party that draws much of its support in eastern Ukraine, when he ran for president, unsuccessfully, in 2004 and, successfully, in 2010. Perhaps the most visible manifestation of that support occurred in 2004 when Putin visited Ukraine twice during the

³⁸ See Laitin (1998) and Hale (2008).

³⁹ The CIA World Factbook at www.cia.gov/library. In Lithuania, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, the proportion ranges between 4 and 6 per cent. In the remaining four, it is less than 2 per cent.

presidential election and campaigned for Yanukovych against his opponent, and the eventual winner, Viktor Yushchenko.⁴⁰ But in 2010 no less than in 2004, Russia supported Yanukovych not in order to defend those of Russian heritage but because he supported its positions regarding Ukrainian membership in NATO, the future of the Russian naval base in Sevastopol in the Crimea, and other such issues.⁴¹

Economic linkages. In addition to their geographic proximity and contiguity – eight of the post-Soviet states share a common border with Russia – their shared history and cultural ties, the presence of large numbers of Russian speakers and persons of Russian heritage, and the presence of the successor institutions of Soviet Communist party, security services, and military, Russia and the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states are closely linked through economic and trade ties. Table 3 presents some data pertaining to those ties. The table includes data on population and Gross Domestic Product per capita, obviously not measures of trade but useful to illustrate the exceptional asymmetry in both size and affluence that exists between Russia and most of the other post-Soviet states. With the obvious exceptions of Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and to a lesser degree Kazakhstan, the post-Soviet space consists of one very large, relatively affluent state and a number of very small states, most of which are less affluent – an asymmetry that presumably enhances Russia’s ability to influence politics in the other states through its economic and other linkages.

The data in Table 3 demonstrate that the economies of the post-Soviet states are, to a surprising degree, open – that is, dependent on consumers in other countries purchasing a large portion of the goods and services they produce and on producers in other countries for a large portion of the goods and services they consume. The trade-to-GDP ratios for all of the countries are surprisingly high. While it is not surprising that trade constitutes a large portion of the economy in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, it is surprising that the same can be said of countries

⁴⁰ No less visible than Putin’s support was the disfiguration suffered by Yushchenko, as a result of having been poisoned with TCDD, the most toxic form of dioxin, apparently at a late-evening dinner with leaders of the Ukraine Security Service (SBU) on Sept. 5, 2004. See Wilson (2005).

⁴¹ In February 2010, Yanukovych narrowly defeated Yulia Timoshenko in the second round of the presidential election. In April 2010, Ukraine and Russia negotiated a treaty which extended Russia’s lease for the Sevastopol naval base for 25 years beyond 2017. In exchange, Russia agreed to a long-term discount of 30 per cent in the price of natural gas. In June 2010, the Ukrainian parliament approved legislation that prohibited membership in any military alliance, thereby ruling out the option of joining NATO.

such as Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and most of the others. Rather than reverting to autarchy in the post-Soviet era, the post-Soviet space consists for the most part of small open economies – economies that, notwithstanding the termination of the common economic space that existed in the USSR, remain highly dependent on other states to buy the goods they produce and supply the goods they consume.

The data in Table 3 also demonstrate that, while the exports of the post-Soviet economies are distributed widely beyond the borders of the 15 former republics of the USSR, the Russian market is, with three notable exceptions – Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, both of which export large amounts of oil and gas to the world, and Georgia – one of the most important, if not the most important. Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova send 25 to 35 per cent of their exports to the Russian market and Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, and Uzbekistan sell 15 to 20 per cent of their exports to Russian consumers. Russia is the most important export market for Armenia, Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, and Ukraine, and it ranks second or third for all of the others except Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkmenistan.

If one were to judge by the frequency of mentions in the international media, the single most important economic linkage between Russia and the other post-Soviet states, and the one which enables it to intervene in its neighbors' affairs with immediate and drastic consequence whenever it wishes, involves the production and supply of oil and gas. Table 4 presents data on the amount of production of oil and gas in the post-Soviet states and, more importantly, the proportion of each country's consumption of oil and gas that consists of imports. Six of the states – Russia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan – produce virtually all of the oil and gas produced in the former Soviet Union. But among those six, Russia is by far the largest producer; indeed, it produces about four times as much oil and gas as the other producing states combined. Most important, in terms of the potential leverage that production affords Russia, except for Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and, to a lesser degree, Azerbaijan, all of the other states depend on imports for virtually all of the gas they consume. And several – Armenia, Estonia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Moldova and Tajikistan – depend on imports for virtually all of the oil they consume as well.

Russia's use of oil and gas supplies as an instrument of foreign policy influence is well known and documented and the fact that Gazprom is partially owned and controlled by the state

only ensures its availability as an instrument of foreign policy.⁴² Indeed, Putin once acknowledged as much when he said, “Gazprom is a powerful political and economic lever of influence over the rest of the world.”⁴³ Hedenskog and Larsson (2007) have identified at least 55 incidents since 1991 in which Russia used gas cutoffs, threats of supply disruptions and price increases, and even attacks on pipelines as a means of influencing neighboring countries. Threats and actual cut-offs of gas supplies to Ukraine are the examples best known in the West, but other countries – for example, Lithuania, which depends on oil from Russia for its sole refinery, and Georgia – have been affected as well. While Russia insists that its energy policies have been driven solely by commercial considerations, Hedenskog and Larsson (2007) count thirty-six instances in which it used its control over energy resources to achieve political objectives.

Ukraine’s confrontations with Russia over gas are well known. Its supplies were cut off and reduced in the early 1990s after it failed to pay for gas deliveries during a prolonged economic crisis. It accumulated a substantial debt to Russia for gas payments that subsequently became the subject of protracted negotiations. On several occasions, tensions were exacerbated when it was discovered that it had diverted gas intended for western markets for domestic use. Russia’s approach to Ukraine hardened after the 2004 presidential election and gas cutoffs and tough negotiations on price and debt repayments became an almost-yearly mid-winter ritual. Because of Ukraine’s location, cutoffs of supplies also cut off supplies to other nations to the west as occurred in January 2009, when Bulgaria, Moldova, and Slovakia, which rely exclusively on gas imports from Russia, suffered cutoffs and were forced to ration their remaining supplies.

Russia has also used its control of oil and gas supplies as leverage when it sought to gain control of pipelines and refineries in the states once controlled by Communist parties. For example, it cut off oil supplies to Lithuania when it refused to sell its Mazeikiu refinery – the only one in the country – to Russian companies. Georgia suffered cutoffs and sabotage of

⁴² See Goldman (2008). The state owns 50.002 per cent of the shares. We might note that, prior to his election as president in March 2008, Dmitry Medvedev served not only as first deputy prime minister but as chairman of Gazprom.

⁴³ Comments at the tenth anniversary celebration of the formation of Gazprom, Feb. 14, 2003, quoted by Prime-Tass and the St. Petersburg Times, Feb. 18, 2003.

pipelines when it refused to sell its pipeline network to Russian companies. And Russia used its control over Ukraine's supply of gas to try to persuade it to sell its gas companies to Russia. President Yushchenko, elected in 2004 despite Russia's overt support for his opponent, resisted. But soon after Yanukovich was elected president in 2010, he opened negotiations to sell Ukraine's pipelines to a consortium that included Gazprom.

While Russia has frequently made use of its important position as a trade partner and source of energy supplies in its relations with the other post-Soviet states, and while those efforts have often had a significant adverse impact on the states, those efforts may not have had an effect on the extent of rights, liberties and democracy in the countries. Knowledge about Russia's exercise of economic leverage is limited and largely anecdotal. But from what little is known, it would appear that, while Russia's deployment of that leverage has often had the desired effect – one would hardly expect otherwise given the asymmetries described in Tables 3 and 4 – it may not have had much direct impact on the extent of rights, liberties, and democracy in the non-Baltic post-Soviet states. On the other hand, the considerable dependence of those states on Russia as a trading partner and source of energy supplies, coupled with Russia's evident willingness to deploy the leverage afforded by its economic linkages, may cause the other states to accept and even emulate, rather than challenge, the Russian “model” of how to organize the polity in the post-Soviet era – a model which doesn't have much use for political rights, liberties and democracy.

International linkages. In addition to the plethora of linkages that existed between the former republics of the Soviet Union, new linkages developed between Russia and the other post-Soviet states in the period after 1991. Perhaps most consequential – and least noticed – are the linkages that have developed among the states within the framework of several international institutions that came into being in the post-Soviet era. The institutions have various objectives. Some – most notably, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – are mutual security organizations. Others – most notably, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) – are intended to promote greater economic integration. All of them, however, provide a new layer of linkage among the post-Soviet states. What is most interesting about the linkages created by membership in the new international institutions, and perhaps most consequential in terms of their effect on rights, liberties and democracy, is the fact that in every case they include some but

not all of the non-Baltic post-Soviet states. Some of the states are linked through the new institutions with Russia. But others are not and participate instead in international institutions in which Russia does not participate.

In 1992, six post-Soviet states belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States – Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan – signed the Collective Security Treaty. Three other post-Soviet states – Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia – signed the next year and the treaty took effect in 1994. Five years later, six of the nine – all but Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan – agreed to renew the treaty for five more years, and in 2002 those six formally agreed to create the Collective Security Treaty Organization as a military alliance. Uzbekistan, which left the CST in 1999, allowed the U.S. to open an airbase at Karshi-Khanabad in late 2001 to support its war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. But it ordered the base closed in 2005 and rejoined CST – by then CSTO – the next year.⁴⁴ As a result, its members now consist of Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. CSTO is certainly not a Central Asian-focused version of the Warsaw Pact; it has few institutions and even fewer dedicated military resources and capabilities. Nevertheless, it is an organization that links seven of the post-Soviet states in an institution designed to ensure their collective security.⁴⁵

Russia and several of the other CSTO members are also members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In 1996, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan formed a mutual security organization with China. Initially designed to deepen trust and reduce military forces on their common borders, in 2001 the “Shanghai Five” group agreed to include Uzbekistan, negotiate a treaty of cooperation, and issue a declaration creating the SCO. In 2002, the six leaders signed the SCO charter, which commits them to cooperation in security matters in

⁴⁴ The U.S. also opened a base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan to support the war in Afghanistan. In 2009, the Kyrgyz parliament voted to close the base but subsequent negotiations resulted in an agreement that, in exchange for a three-fold increase in rent and renaming it a “transit center,” the U.S. would keep the base.

⁴⁵ After conflict broke out in 2010 between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan, leaders of that country requested CSTO to provide troops and police to stabilize the situation. CSTO declined to do so on the grounds it was an internal matter. In January 2011, however, the CSTO leaders agreed on a legal framework for deployment of a Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CRDF) of up to 20,000 troops. In the meantime, Russia has five battalions of troops stationed in Tajikistan as part of a CSTO rapid reaction force and an airbase at Kant in Kyrgyzstan, and it has announced plans to open a second base in the Farghana Valley of Kyrgyzstan, a move which is opposed by Uzbekistan. In addition, its Caspian fleet is attached to CSTO.

Central Asia, including such matters as terrorism, drug trafficking, and political extremism.⁴⁶ In 2007, SCO signed an agreement with CSTO to cooperate in some of these matters, including militarily through intelligence sharing and joint exercises.

New linkages have developed among some of the post-Soviet states in the economic realm as well. In 1996, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan agreed to create a customs union and four years later those three plus Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed a treaty establishing the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) that would move toward the creation of a customs union and, in time, a common economic space among all of the members.⁴⁷ In 2009, three of the members – Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan – agreed (again) to institute a customs union beginning in 2010 and begin the creation of a common economic space – a single market for goods, services, investment, and labor – in 2012. (The customs union was formed in 2011.) Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan subsequently indicated they would join the customs union at some point.

In November 2011, the leaders of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan signed a declaration of Eurasian Economic Integration that committed the countries to creating a common economic space, and, eventually, a Eurasian Economic Union. Mimicking the EU, they signed a treaty establishing an administrative body, the Eurasian Economic Commission, to manage the integration process, agreed it would come into being on Jan. 1, 2012, and would have a council consisting of deputy prime ministers of the three countries and a lower tier consisting of decision-making bodies concerned with customs, immigration, industrial and agricultural subsidies and other matters. Just as the European Community's 1957 Treaty of Rome was designed to remove the barriers to the free movement of trade, services, investment, and labor, the agreement seeks to create a single internal market. But whereas Rome anticipated the removal of all internal tariffs and quotas in stages over a dozen years, the EurAsEC agreement envisions the members establishing the common economic space and then the EEU as early as 2015.

⁴⁶ A number of countries have observer status in SCO and a few, one of which is Belarus, are “dialogue partners.”

⁴⁷ Uzbekistan joined in 2005 but suspended its membership three years later.

What is especially noteworthy about CSTO, SCO and EurAsEC is the overlap in membership in the three organizations. Russia, Belarus (albeit as a “dialogue partner” in SCO), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan belong to all three. Those five constitute the core of an emerging geopolitical and economic alignment among the post-Soviet states. The other two, Armenia and Uzbekistan, are less firmly aligned, Armenia participating in only CSTO and Uzbekistan having a more unstable and often contentious relationship with all three.⁴⁸

Five of the non-Baltic post-Soviet states – Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan – do not belong to any of those organizations. Their absence from SCO is understandable given their location. But their absence from CSTO and EurAsEC is indicative of an important division among the non-Baltic post-Soviet states between those which are allied with Russia in CSTO, SCO and EurAsEC and those which are not.

In 1997, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova formed a consultative forum that, two years later, renamed itself, with Uzbekistan joining, GUUAM. In 2001, the leaders signed a charter committing them to promoting economic development and democracy, regional security and integration, and eventual integration with the European Union. Uzbekistan subsequently decided to withdraw and did so in 2005, after which the name reverted to GUAM. In 2006, GUAM was renamed the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development and a headquarters was established in Kyiv. In addition to the objectives set out in its 2001 charter, the members identified a number of issues of concern such as restrictions on their exports and the “frozen conflicts” in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. A new charter, issued in 2006, reiterated the objectives set out earlier – promoting democratic values, ensuring stable government, enhancing international and regional security, and promoting European integration.⁴⁹

In 2004, the European Union established its European Neighborhood Policy as a framework for its relations with 16 neighboring states in eastern Europe and around the

⁴⁸ Thus, Uzbekistan was a member of the predecessor organization of CSTO in 1992-99, then withdrew, then rejoined in 2006. It joined SCO in 2001, five years after its formation. And it joined EurAsEC in 2005, five years after its formation, only to withdraw three years later.

⁴⁹ Azerbaijan’s membership is obviously somewhat anomalous, given its values in Figures 1 and 3 for political rights and civil liberties. Its participation in GUAM is, however, perhaps less surprising in light of the long-standing frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia’s alignment with Russia and participation in CSTO.

Mediterranean. The four GUAM members plus Belarus and Armenia were included in the ENP, which provided a modest amount of financial assistance and a forum for the development of action plans designed to further relations with the EU. In 2009, recognizing that the development of relations with the post-Soviet states was being held back by their inclusion with all the other states in the ENP, the EU initiated its Eastern Partnership, designed to deepen political and economic relations between the EU and the six post-Soviet states and lead in time to the negotiation of Association Agreements, a “Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement,” visa-free travel, and a host of other agreements. Negotiation of an Association Agreement began first with Ukraine in 2007, then with Moldova in early 2010, and then with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in mid-2010. Negotiations of a DCFTA began with Ukraine in 2008 and Moldova in 2011.

The negotiations have not been without difficulty. The continued exercise of unrestrained authoritarian rule by President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, his harassment and imprisonment of political opponents, failure to grant even the most elementary rights and liberties, and continued violations of human rights have prompted responses by the EU, including its decision to meet with representatives of opposition groups and its refusal to invite Lukashenko to the September 2011 summit of the EU and the Eastern Partnership participants, that led Belarus to withdraw from the Partnership. No less important, the imposition in October 2011 of a seven-year prison term on former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko of Ukraine for abuse of office in a 2009 gas deal imperiled the completion of the country’s Association Agreement at an EU-Ukraine summit scheduled for December 2011. After the EU cancelled a visit by President Yanukovich in October, the president’s office let it be known that, even if the agreement were concluded and the summit did take place, he might be elsewhere – at a meeting of the EurAsEC interstate council scheduled for the same day.⁵⁰

Notwithstanding the Belarus withdrawal and the controversy surrounding Tymoshenko’s conviction, the Eastern Partnership has generated a proliferation of contacts and negotiations

⁵⁰ Ukraine, along with Moldova and Armenia, has observer status in EurAsEC. While Ukraine remains committed to negotiating the Association Agreement and the DCFTA with the EU, it has discussed with Russia the possibility of joining the EurAsEC customs union. As it turned out, Yanukovich hosted the EU-Ukraine summit in Kyiv on Dec. 19, 2011. The EU and Ukraine announced that negotiations on the Association Agreement had been concluded. But because of the Tymoshenko trial and other issues, the EU did not sign the Agreement.

between the EU and the five states that, however piecemeal and mundane, may establish the basis for a greater degree of political association and economic integration with the EU. It is, of course, much too soon to know whether most if not all of the Eastern Partners will eventually negotiate Association Agreements and DCFTAs and, if so, whether the process will strengthen their commitment to instituting a fully democratic polity and assist them in doing so. Nevertheless, given the experience of the post-Communist states that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 and, more recently, the countries of the Western Balkans that are participating in the EU's SAP, there is some reason to think it may have that effect.

Table 5 summarizes the membership status of the post-Soviet states in the new international institutions that have come into existence in recent years. The array conveys the extent to which the states are differentiated between those which are closely linked to Russia not only through ethnic ties, trade ties, and energy dependence but also through membership in CSTO, SCO and EurAsEC and those which, although closely linked to Russia through ethnicity, trade, and energy, are not linked to it through the new collective security and economic institutions. Obviously, one must not read too much into this emerging differentiation within the post-Soviet space. Nevertheless, it does suggest that the states participating in GUAM and the EU's Eastern Partnership, which include the three non-Baltic post-Soviet states in which political rights, civil liberties, and democracy are most developed, may be subjected to Russian influence that undermines rights, liberties and democracy – not necessarily because Russia wishes to undermine the rights and liberties that exist in those countries but, rather, because it wishes to limit their drift away from the emerging Russia-dominated security and economic zone. Doing that may mean, as it did in Ukraine in 2004 and 2010, supporting the election of a presidential candidate who is not committed to strengthening the democratic elements in the polity. The countries that are members of CSTO and EurAsEC are unlikely to be subjected to such influence in part because it is not needed; they are already aligned with Russia and by and large accept its position as a regional hegemon. But the countries that are GUAM members and Eastern Partners of the EU and, despite their cultural and economic ties to Russia, are not allied with it in the new security and economic institutions, may be more likely to be subjected to influence that, either intentionally or otherwise, results in a diminution of democracy.

Military linkages. A final type of linkage between Russia and the other post-Soviet states – the presence of Russian military – is illustrated in Table 6. The table identifies the countries in which, as of 2009, Russia had bases and troops and the nature of those forces. As one might expect, it had troops in most of its CSTO allies – indeed, in all but Uzbekistan. But it also had a military presence in all of the GUAM members, notwithstanding their non-membership in CSTO.⁵¹ While one must be cautious about drawing inferences from these patterns, it is conceivable that the presence of Russian military forces may have an adverse impact on democratization in the post-Soviet states, either by diminishing what little impulse for democracy might otherwise exist in the CSTO countries or inhibiting its further development in the GUAM countries. For the countries that belong to CSTO, the presence of Russian troops may be unproblematic and have little impact on politics. But in the countries that do not belong to CSTO, the presence of Russian military bases and troops may have a chilling effect on the further development of rights, liberties and democracy and might even contribute to the destabilization of democracy-promoting governments if those governments were to espouse and implement policies that Russia regarded as threatening its national interest.

CONCLUSION

Over the past two decades, most of the post-Communist countries of central, eastern and southeastern Europe created polities that are either fully democratic or moving in that direction. But in Russia and most of the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states, the polity combines, in varying mixes, democratic and authoritarian elements. Most of them have elements of competitive politics – recurring presidential and parliamentary elections, multiple parties that contest those elections, even occasional alternation of government. But they also have electoral laws that shield incumbents from competition, limitations on the ability of parties outside a zone of tolerated opposition to contest elections, strong executives who are inconvenienced by few restrictions on their powers, parliaments that are endowed with little legislative autonomy, and limitations on the rule of law and the rights and liberties of their citizens.

⁵¹ Georgia and Moldova lost control of portions of their territory to Russian-designed and protected “statelets”- Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and Trans-Dniester in Moldova. Russia retains a large naval base in Sevastopol and has supported a movement in Ukraine that supports the return of the Crimea, which was transferred from the Russian to the Ukrainian Republic by Nikita Khrushchev, a Ukrainian, in 1954.

Studies of the processes by which the post-Communist countries of central, eastern and southeastern Europe developed democratic polities have noted the important role played by international actors – in particular, the European Union – and the ways in which linkages between those countries and the EU – their geographic proximity, shared histories, cultural ties, regional identities, economic ties, and ambitions for the future – induced the national elites to create and consolidate democratic polities and enabled the EU to influence that process. But surprisingly little is known about the extent to which Russia, by far the largest and most powerful actor in the post-Soviet space, has influenced the form of political authority – in particular, the balance of democratic and authoritarian elements – in the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states over the past two decades. Nor is much known, other than on an anecdotal level, about the extent to which the various linkages between Russia and those states deriving from their proximity and in some cases contiguity, shared histories, and cultural, economic, and security ties have enabled Russia to influence those states and, in so doing, impede, either intentionally or otherwise, their efforts to institute, maintain, or strengthen political rights, civil liberties and democratic politics.

Whether Russia has in fact influenced the form of the polity in the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states is an intriguing question for several reasons. First, there is good reason to think the balance of competitive and authoritarian elements in the Russian polity has shifted in favor of the latter over the two decades since the demise of the USSR. Second, there is good reason to think the same shift has occurred in a number of other post-Soviet states, raising the possibility that the processes of change in Russia and the other states were related in some way. Third, over the past decade, new international security and economic institutions – most notably, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Community – have been created that have provided additional linkages between Russia and some but not all of the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states. Those linkages may have provided Russia with additional leverage with which to reinforce the authoritarian elements and weaken whatever democratic elements existed in the states that participated with Russia in those institutions. No less important, the fact that some states were not members of those institutions and participated, instead, in alternative institutions may have exposed them to Russian influence that, intentionally or otherwise, weakened the democratic elements and strengthened whatever authoritarian elements existed in their polities.

In the first section of the article, we compared the extent to which the more than two dozen post-Communist states had, by 2010, created democratic polities. That cross-sectional comparison suggested that virtually all of the central, eastern and southeastern European states that once were ruled by Communist parties have either created fully democratic polities or are well on their way to doing so, whereas most of the non-Baltic post-Soviet states, with the notable exceptions of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, have polities that are less democratic and, if not unambiguously authoritarian, hybrids that combine democratic and authoritarian elements. We discussed, in a conjectural manner, the historical sequencing of the many forces and factors that account for the variation across the post-Communist states in the extent of democracy and the reasons why all of the non-Baltic post-Soviet states established and consolidated polities that, if not unambiguously authoritarian, are hybrids rather than fully democratic.

In the second section of the article, we considered the extent and direction of change in democracy in the post-Communist states over the past decade. That analysis suggested that, whereas most of the countries in the Western Balkans moved rapidly toward greater democracy – no doubt induced in part by the prospect of membership held out by the EU in its Stabilization and Association Process – most of the post-Soviet states experienced an erosion of rights, liberties and democracy. And it suggested the largest erosion occurred in Russia. That discussion led us to consider why that happened. Rather than attributing the erosion to a single leader, we concluded the source was institutional, that 1991 constituted a dramatic turning point, not only from the Soviet state to the fifteen post-Soviet states but also in the direction of change in the rights and liberties that are foundational for a democratic polity. In particular, we concluded that the 1992-93 battle between President Yeltsin and the parliament, both elected in the last years of the Soviet Union, that culminated in the approval in 1993 of a hyper-presidential constitution set the stage for the later erosion of rights, liberties and democracy in the late years of the Yeltsin presidency and in the Putin presidency.

In the third section of the article, we considered several of the most important linkages that exist among the post-Soviet states and that may have afforded Russia the means to exert leverage over the other states in ways that, either intentionally or coincidentally, contributed to the erosion of rights, liberties and democracy. We noted that the ethnic ties created by the states' former membership as republics in the Soviet Union not only provided the rationale for Russian

intervention with respect to matters involving naturalization and citizenship but also, as in Ukraine, afforded Russia a means of intervening in national debates about issues unrelated to ethnicity that affected its interests. We also noted the very extensive economic linkages between Russia and the other post-Soviet states, not only with respect to oil and gas but, more generally, with all aspects of trade. Finally, we noted the creation over the past decade of several new international institutions – most notably, CSTO, SCO, and EurAsEC – that link Russia and some of the post-Soviet states. Because those new institutions do not include all of the non-Baltic states, there is an emerging differentiation within the post-Soviet space between Russia and its allies, on one hand, and the other states – most notably, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – that are not members of those institutions and participate in alternative international institutions and partnerships.

What makes that emerging differentiation especially interesting – and possibly consequential for the processes of political change within the non-Baltic post-Soviet space – is the possibility that the creation of CSTO and EurAsEC provides additional modes of potential leverage for Russia vis-à-vis the other post-Soviet states – leverage which, in the case of its partners in CSTO and EurAsEC, may dampen any enthusiasm they might otherwise have for strengthening democratic elements in their polities and, in the case of the states participating in GUAM and the EU's Eastern Partnership, may subject them to pressure when policy preferences consistent with their stated objectives of strengthening democracy and deepening their ties with the EU clash with those of Russia.

Whether the leverage afforded Russia by the asymmetries in size and power between it and the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states, its long-standing cultural, ethnic, and economic linkages with those states, and its new international economic and security linkages with some of them has in fact been exercised in ways that, intentionally or coincidentally, have legitimized, reinforced and strengthened authoritarian elements and weakened or reversed democratic elements in those states is, of course, something that can only be determined by intensive analysis of the political, economic, and security relations between it and the other states. In this article, we have taken only a small first step in describing some of the most important linkages among the states and the potential leverage they may afford Russia. But the analysis does, we believe, point in an important direction: It suggests that, given the changed balance of

democratic and authoritarian elements in the Russian polity over the past two decades, the asymmetries in size and power that exist between it and the other non-Baltic post-Soviet states, the extensive historical, cultural, and economic linkages that exist between it and those states, and the new international economic and security linkages that have come into being over the past decade, if one is to understand the persistence of authoritarian or hybrid polities in the non-Baltic post-Soviet space, the reluctance of most leaders in those states to strengthen the democratic elements in their polities, and the great difficulty experienced by the few who did try to strengthen those elements, one must examine the exercise and impact of Russian leverage in its near abroad.

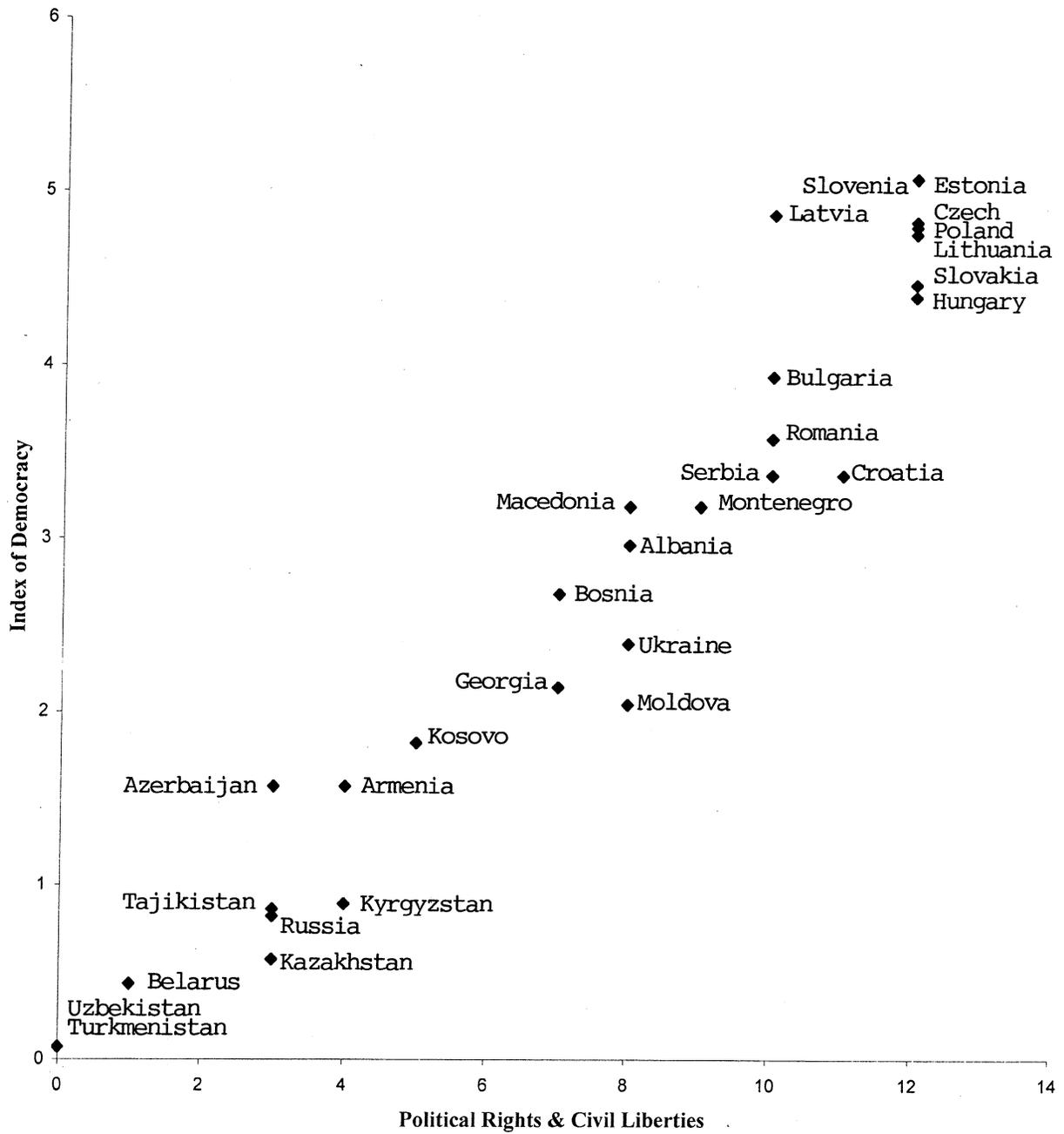


Figure 1. Democracy in 29 Post-Communist Countries, 2010

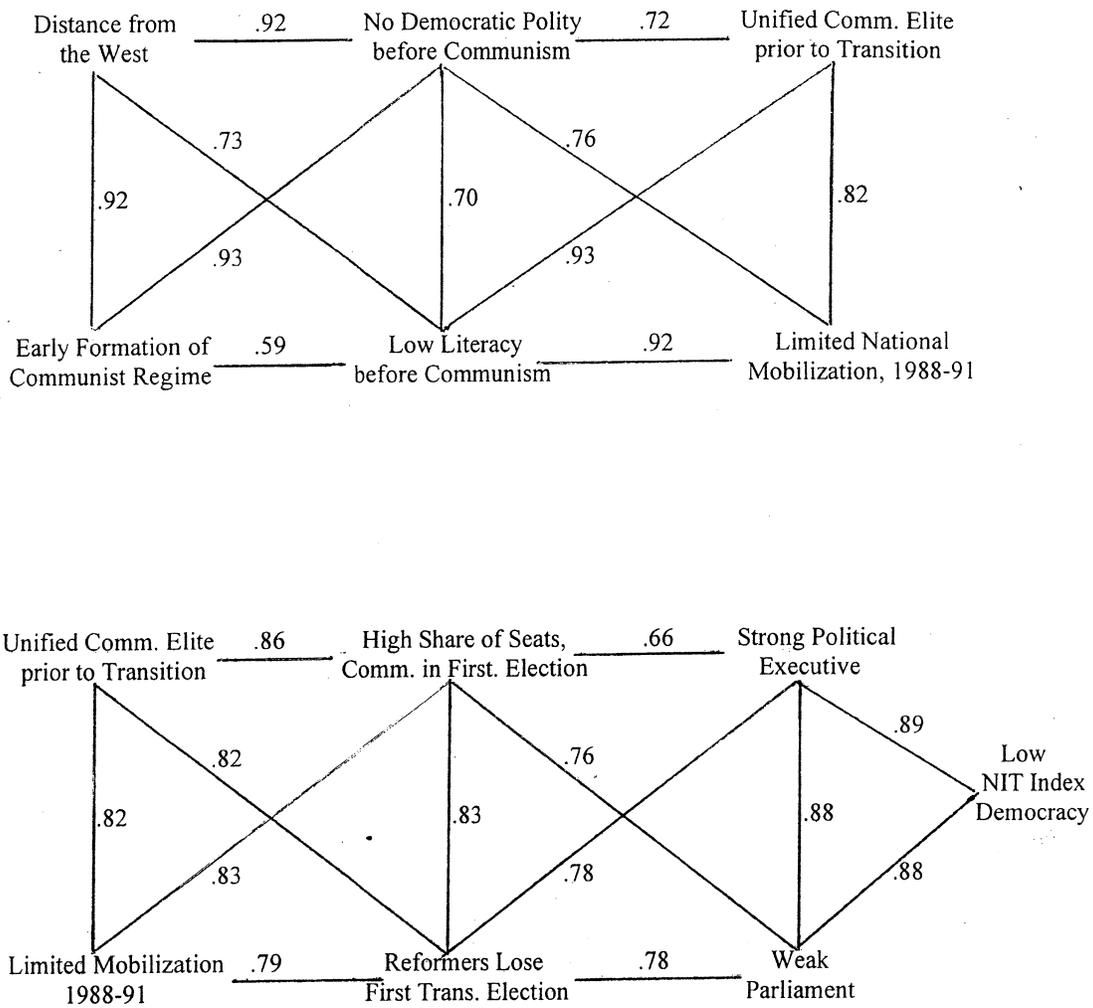


Figure 2: The Pathways to Post-Soviet Authoritarianism: A Conjecture

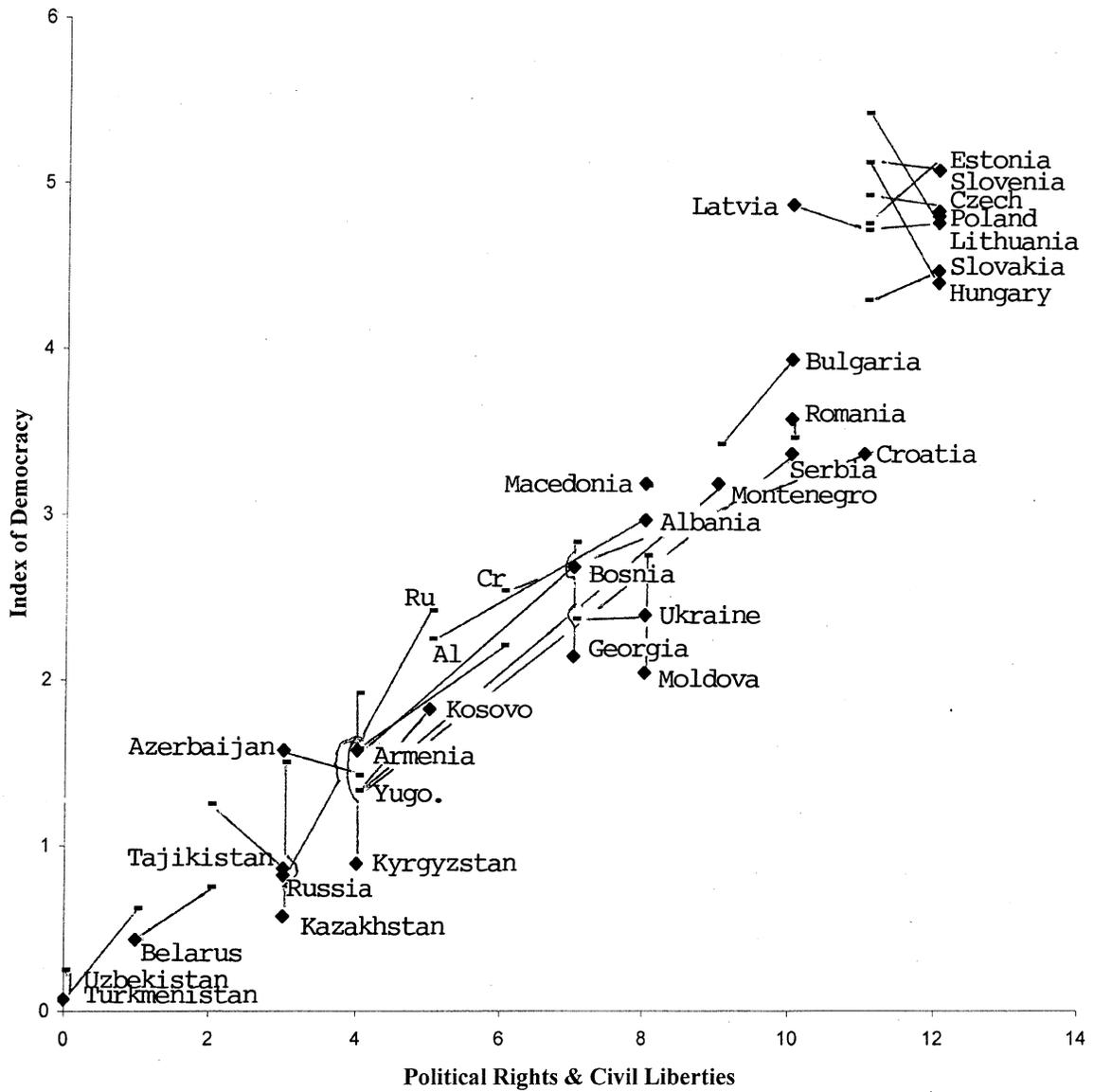


Figure 3. Change in Democracy in 29 Post-Communist Countries, 1999-2010

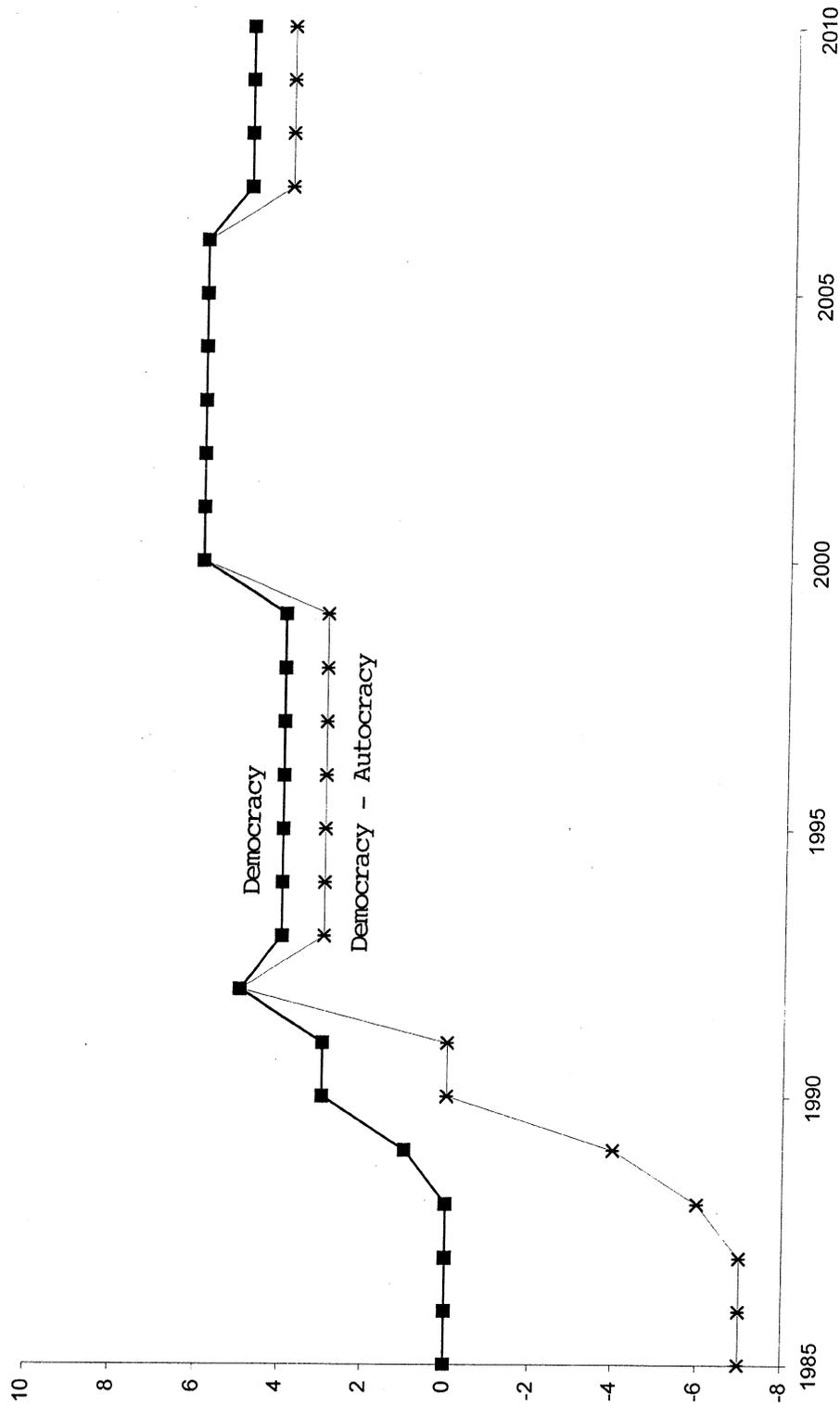


Figure 4. Polity IV Measures of Democracy and Democracy-Autocracy, USSR and Russia, 1985-2010

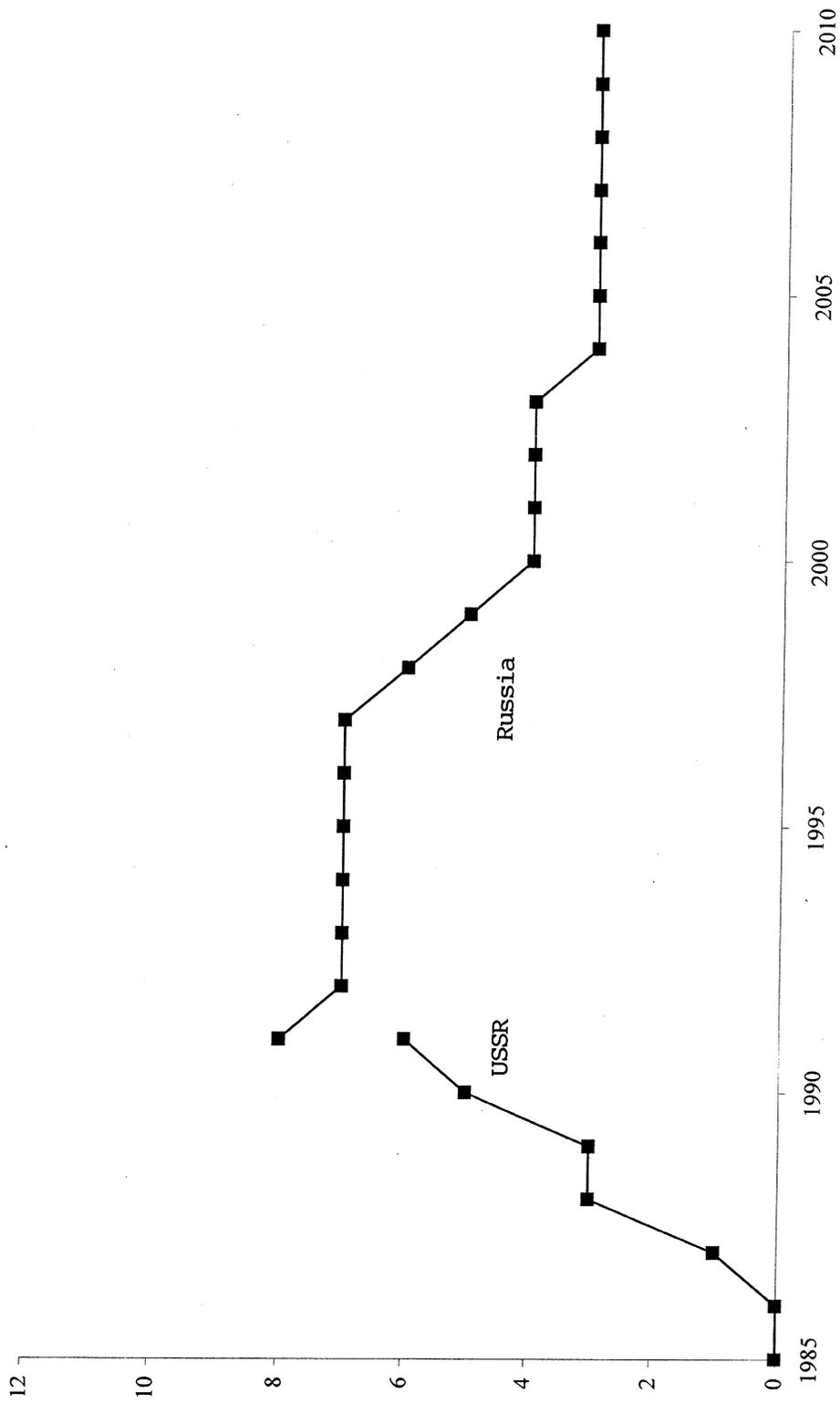


Figure 5. Political Rights & Civil Liberties in the USSR and Russia, 1985-2010

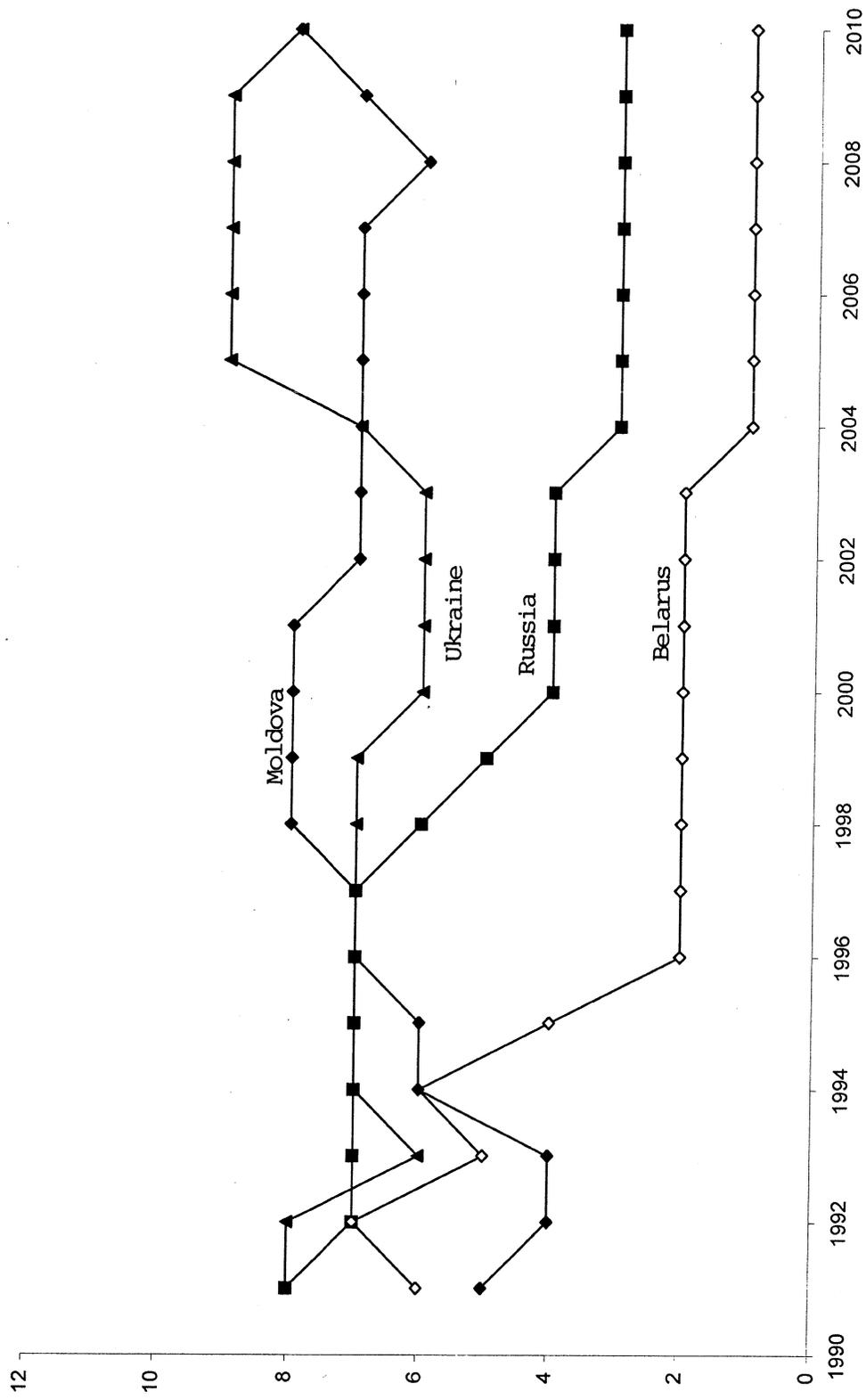


Figure 6. Political Rights & Civil Liberties in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, 1991-2010

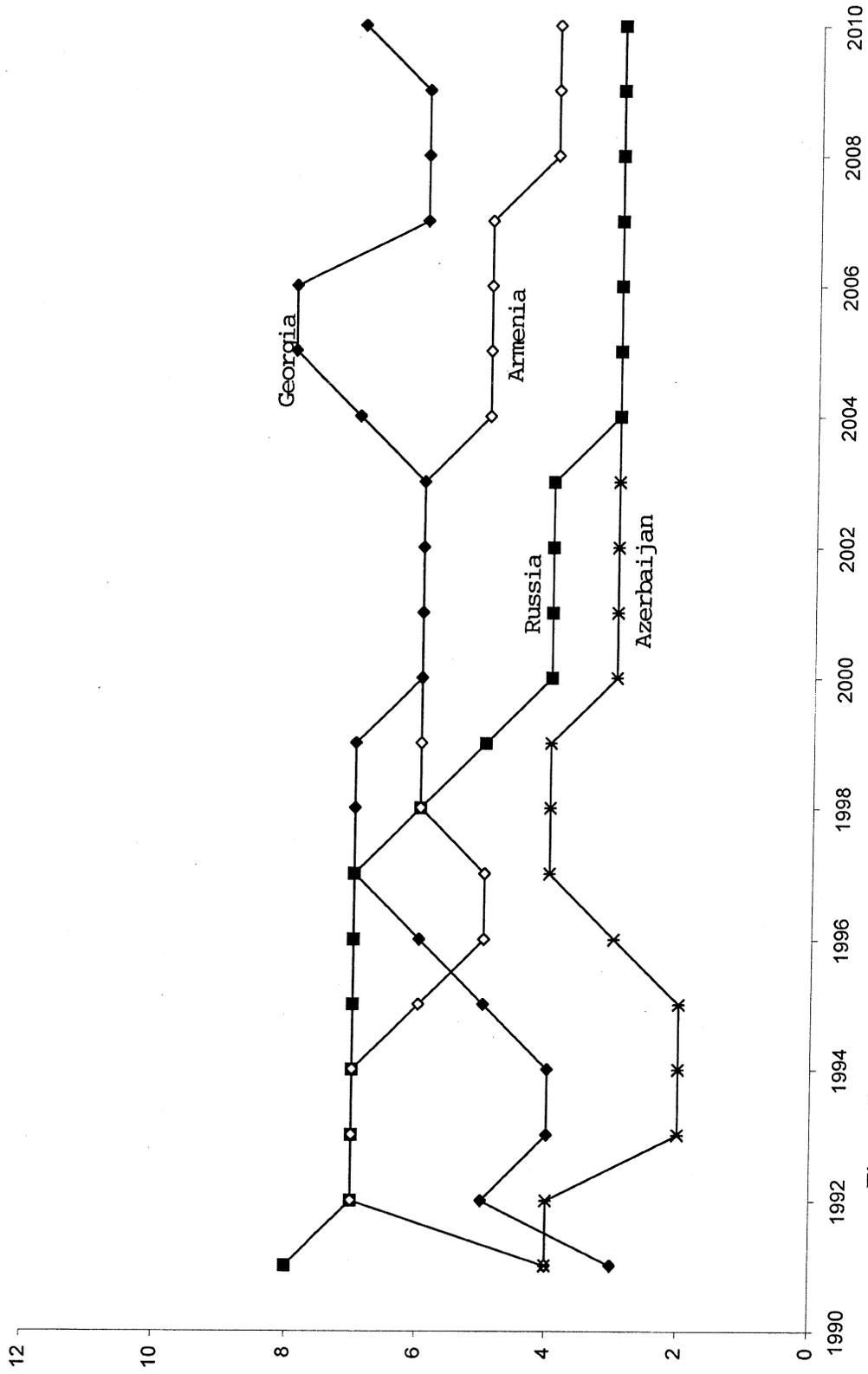


Figure 7. Political Rights & Civil Liberties in Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, 1999-2010

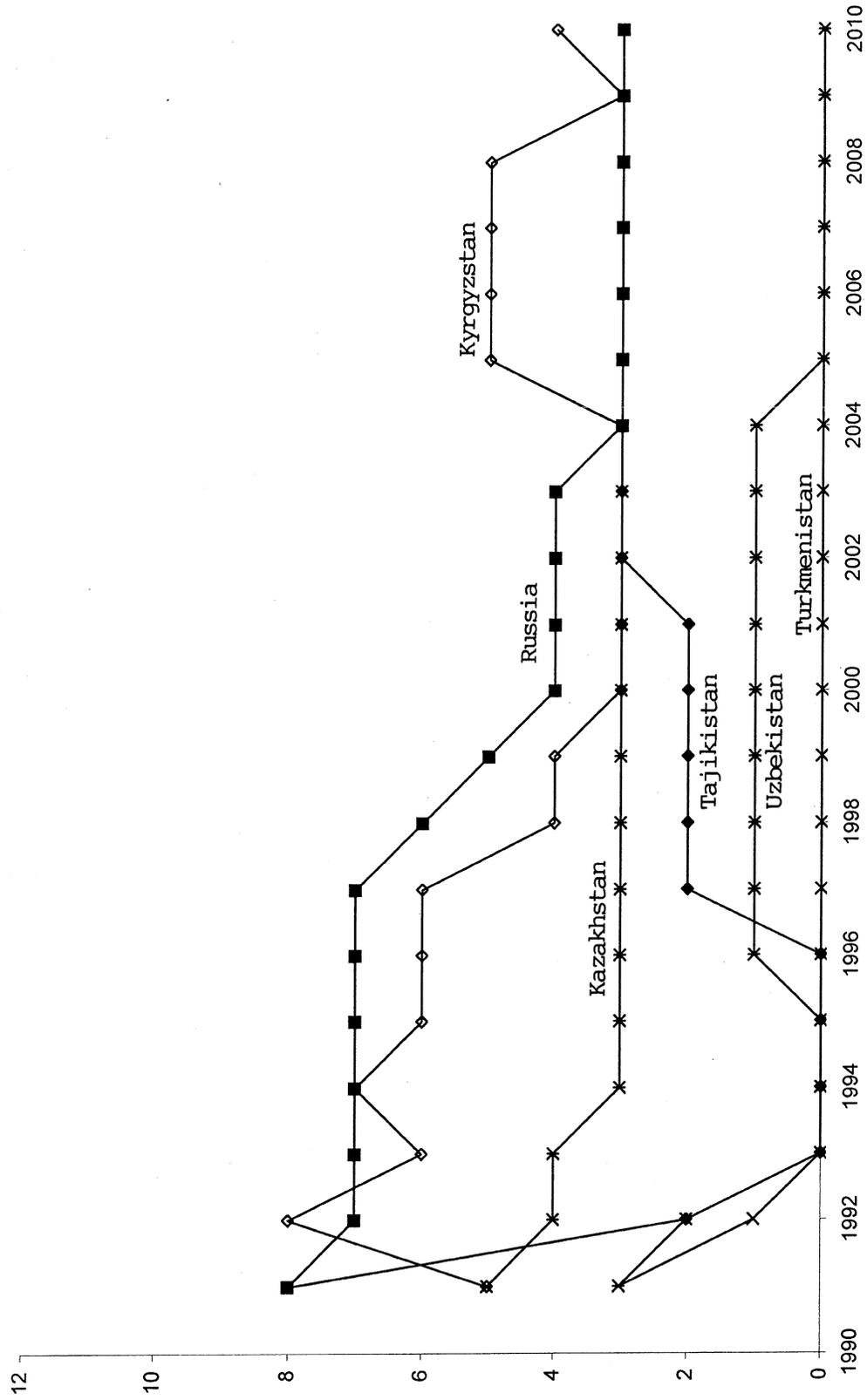


Figure 8. Political Rights & Civil Liberties in Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, 1999-2010

Table 1. International Correlates of Post-Communist Democracy

	Political Rights & Civil Liberties, 2010	NIT Index of Democracy, 2010
Proximity to the West	.87	.87
Proximity to Brussels	.80	.80
% of Exports to EU, 1994	.75	.81
% of Exports to EU, 1997	.81	.86
% of Exports to EU, 1999	.81	.84
Years since EU/SAP Agreement	.81	.87
Years since EU Application	.79	.86
Years since EU Accession	.73	.83

Table 2. The Historical Antecedents, Transitional Politics, and Institutional Attributes of Post-Communist Democracy

	Political Rights & Civil Liberties, 2010	NIT Index of Democracy, 2010
<hr/>		
Historical antecedents		
Late Communist rule	.85	.86
Pre-Communist literacy	.81	.85
Pre-Communist democratic experience	.85	.87
Transitional politics		
National mobilization, 1988-91	.79	.84
Divided Communist elite	.74	.80
Reformers won first transitional election	.81	.81
Non-Comm seats, first transitional election	.74	.76
Post-Communist institutions		
Parliamentary system	.66	.73
Strong parliament	.92	.88
Weak presidency	.70	.78
Weak political executive	.88	.89

Table 3. Trade Linkages of the Post-Soviet States, 2008

	Population (millions)	GDP/ capita	Trade as % of GDP	% of exports to CIS	Russia	Russia's rank in export markets
Armenia	3.2	\$2,754	42	30	19	1
Azerbaijan	8.4	5,119	83	3	1	13
Belarus	9.7	5,123	120	44	32	1
Estonia	1.3	13,462	120	13	10	3
Georgia	4.4	2,429	68	36	2	11
Kazakhstan	15.6	6,922	82	20	11	2
Kyrgyzstan	5.3	853	115	48	19	2
Latvia	2.3	11,437	75	20	15	2
Lithuania	3.4	11,023	114	26	16	1
Moldova	3.6	1,700	108	43	29	1
Russia	142.0	8,682	46	14
Tajikistan	6.5	766	71	16	9	3
Turkmenistan	6.5	2,842	91	57	1	15
Ukraine	45.8	2,493	84	36	24	1
Uzbekistan	27.7	1,073	69	57	17	2

Source: Population, GDP/capita & trade/GDP: EBRD database, at www.ebrd.com.

Others: IMF (2009).

Table 4. Production and Imports of Oil and Gas in the Post-Soviet States, 2006

	Oil & Gas		Imports as % of	
	Production*		Consumption	
	Oil	Gas	Oil	Gas
Armenia	0	0	100	100
Azerbaijan	647	241	2	40
Belarus	33	6	15	99
Estonia	7	0	100	100
Georgia	1	0	100	100
Kazakhstan	1388	341	15	88
Kyrgyzstan	2	1	95	96
Latvia	0	0	100	100
Lithuania	8	0	11	100
Moldova	0	2	98	98
Russia	9677	23167	0	11
Tajikistan	0	1	100	98
Turkmenistan	177	2232	3	0
Ukraine	109	689	23	75
Uzbekistan	108	2216	0	0

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, "International Energy Statistics," available at www.eia.doe.gov.

* Oil: annual average thousands of barrels per day. Gas: annual billions of cubic feet.

Table 5. International Institutional Linkages of the Post-Soviet States

	Member of				Relation with EU			
	CSTO	SCO	EurAsEC	GUAM	European Neighbor PCA	Eastern Partner	Negotiating Association Agreement	Member
Armenia	x				x	x	x	
Azerbaijan				x	x	x	x	
Belarus	x	(x)	x		(x)	(x)		
Estonia								x
Georgia				x	x	x	x	
Kazakhstan	x	x	x					
Kyrgyzstan	x	x	x					
Latvia								x
Lithuania								x
Moldova				x	x	x	x	
Russia	x	x	x					
Tajikistan	x	x	x					
Turkmenistan								
Ukraine				x	x	x	x	
Uzbekistan	x	x	x					

Source: CSTO, SCO, GUAM, EU websites.

Note: Belarus is a “dialogue partner” in SCO. It signed a Partnership & Cooperation Agreement with the EU in 1996 but the ratification process was suspended in 1997. It participates only in certain multilateral activities of the Eastern Partnership.

Table 6. Russian Military Units Based in Other Post-Soviet States as of 2009

	Ground	Air	Naval	Radar/ Early Warning
Armenia	x	x		
Azerbaijan				x
Belarus			x	x
Estonia (NATO)				
Georgia	x			
Kazakhstan		x		x
Kyrgyzstan		x	x	
Latvia (NATO)				
Lithuania (NATO)				
Moldova	x			
Tajikistan	x	x		x
Turkmenistan				
Ukraine		x	x	x
Uzbekistan				

Source: Hedenskog and Larsson (2007) and Kramer (2008).

Note: For Georgia, ground forces represent troops in Abkhazia and South Ossetia after Nov. 2008. Russia withdrew from a ground and an air base in Georgia in 2007. For Moldova, ground forces represent the operational group headquartered in Tiraspol in Trans-Dniester. For land-locked Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, naval forces represent, respectively, a naval communications node and an anti-submarine weapons testing site.

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