

From Patronal First Secretary to Patronal President: Post-Soviet Political Regimes in Context

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Since late 1991, when they gained independence, the constituent republics of the former Soviet Union have been free to experiment with varieties of constitutional and institutional design. And experiment they did. Before gaining independence, they had very similar institutions of governance. Over time, though, the political regimes established in the Caucasus and Central Asia came to differ in terms of regime stability and whether they experienced relatively democratic spells at all, in terms of formal institutional arrangements, their economic development, and the degree of integration with, and dependence on, Russia, formerly the largest constituent republic of the Soviet Union.

Still, there have been many similarities between the political regimes that emerged after the breakup of the Soviet Union in this region. Despite notable differences in formal institutions and democratic trajectories, political elites across the region often reverted to similar methods to maintain themselves in office and to prevent leadership change. Rulers and their

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ruling coalitions simply continued—or attempted to rebuild—the existing Soviet republican monocentric and frequently personalized pyramids of authority, or “vertical power,” under the new guise of formally presidential or semi-presidential regimes. Henry Hale (2011, 2005) refers to regimes that are built on informal patron–client networks with the rulers at the top as “patronal presidencies.” As I discuss in this chapter, the informal organization of power in the Caucasus and Central Asia long before the Soviet breakup was not dissimilar to how it operated after independence. In a way, the “patronal first secretaries” of the past simply became “patronal presidents” at independence.

More than 20 years on, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and to a lesser extent, Armenia oscillate between possible democratic trajectories and perhaps an unstable form of competitive authoritarianism, while the four remaining states in Central Asia, as well as Azerbaijan, gravitate toward personalized non-democratic regimes. The differences are rooted in the inherent country traits, culture, and the history of independent statehood that will be discussed in the relevant country chapters. However, different regime trajectories can also be explained by momentous events before and after the Soviet breakup, different resources available to the incumbent political elites, the influence of Russia, and other contingent factors.

Below I briefly explain the historical and institutional context under which the union republics operated within the federal Soviet Union and outline the breakup and immediate period after the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), later regional integration, and the influence of Russia in its “near abroad,” as well as how similar political practices and institutions came to the fore across the region.¹

THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Five newly independent states in Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—together with Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus—proclaimed their independence following the failed August 1991 coup in Moscow, a coup that was meant to reverse the centrifugal tendencies underway in the Soviet Union but instead discredited

¹While this volume does not consider the fully presidential regimes of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, I however include these three in the discussion and also make references to remaining post-Soviet states whenever appropriate.

the federal institutions even further and rendered the negotiations over the reformed union close to impossible. A third republic in the Caucasus—Georgia—was the only one among these eight to proclaim independence before the coup, on 9 April 1991. On 26 December 1991, the upper chamber of the Soviet legislature declared that the Soviet Union was officially dissolved. The former constituent republics of the USSR were now independent states in the eyes of international law.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter, the vagaries of nation-making and territorial disputes in post-Soviet Eurasia in and after 1991 can only be understood in a broader historical context. Arguably, the collapse of tsarist Russia at the end of the First World War and the first attempts at nation-building across Eurasia were simply interrupted by the victorious Bolsheviks who managed to reacquire most of the lost imperial territories under the banner of the Soviet Union in the early 1920s. Some nations that declared independence in 1991 had already done so following the collapse of the Russian empire earlier. Indeed, at the end of the First World War and during the Russian Civil War, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia all proclaimed independence and existed as independent republics from 1918 to 20, 1918 to 20, and 1918 to 21, respectively. In contrast to the Baltic countries that secured their independence during the power vacuum after the First World War and the aftermath of the Polish–Soviet War the Red Army quickly conquered the three republics in the Caucasus. All three were incorporated into the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic in 1922, and in 1936, they became three separate union republics (Rywkin 1990).

What were to become the five Central Asian Soviet republics were conquered by Russia only in the second half of the nineteenth century. Apart from Kazakhstan, where several waves of Slavic settlers, both in tsarist times and under the Soviet Union, drove the indigenous population from their land, the penetration of society and governance structures in Central Asia by the Russian state and its bureaucracy was very limited (Pierce 1960; Rywkin 1990). When the Soviets re-established their control over the former Russian empire, they also created new territorial entities in Central Asia that previously had not existed (even though various khanates and emirates existed historically, albeit within borders different from those of the republics). Following several delimitations, in 1936, five union republics—the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) organized largely along ethnic lines—were established in Central Asia (Hiro 2009; Rywkin 1990).

Three republics in the Caucasus and five in Central Asia were among 15 union republics that comprised the USSR. The republics differed vastly in terms of their socioeconomic development, the size of their Russian and Russian-speaking population, and their relationship with Moscow. In the late 1980s, Kazakhstan was the wealthiest in Central Asia, with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan the poorest; Georgia and Azerbaijan were better off in the Caucasus (see Table 2.1). Formally, however, they were equal in constitutional terms and had very similar institutional structures, apart from the largest republic, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), that instead of having its own republican Communist Party structure as in other 14 member republics was instead under the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Soviet constitution also included the formal right of the union republics to leave the federation. Clearly, the federal structure of the state and the right to secede were mere formalities chosen by the communists to make their rule more acceptable.

Some union republics were already established nations when they became members of the Soviet Union, such as Armenia and Georgia, and also, to a lesser extent, Azerbaijan. In contrast, in Central Asia where local and tribal identities dominated, national identities were absent. Instead, it was the federal structure itself, as well as the Soviet indigenization policies to promote local elites that contributed to ethnic identity formation in the region (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970; Rywkin 1990). Indeed, unlike other colonial powers that often drew arbitrary borders, the “Soviet ethnographers worked hard to delineate borders, usually putting the greatest emphasis on language but taking into account other factors such as economic viability” (Lieven 2002, p. 315).

All eight republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia had some Russian and Russian-speaking populations, which were particularly present in the industry, military, and enforcement agencies. The Russians however did not dominate politics in these republics except in Kazakhstan where earlier Russian and Russian-speaking settlers made the Kazakhs a minority in their own republic (Olcott 1995). Still, across the region, even in Kazakhstan, the Soviets established the policy of installing titular nationality representatives as first secretaries. Within each ethnic republic therefore the communists created loyal party and state officials were drawn from the indigenous ethnic group but dependent on Moscow (Roeder 1991, p. 199).

While the Soviets supported the indigenization of political elites, they also blocked the possible emergence of dissent within the elite ranks by tightly managing professional, academic, and other institutions, that is,

Table 2.1 Selected economic indicators

	<i>Armenia</i>	<i>Azerbaijan</i>	<i>Georgia</i>	<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Tajikistan</i>	<i>Turkmenistan</i>	<i>Uzbekistan</i>
GDP pc, 1991	3329	8323	6282	11,258	3150	3302	7748	2953
GDP pc, 2014	7763	16,710	7233	23,092	3169	2533	14,762	5320
Population, million	3.0	9.4	4.5	17	5.7	8.2	5.2	30.2
Oil production, million tonnes	-	43.4 (1.1 %)	-	83.8 (2 %)	-	-	11.4 (0.3 %)	2.9 (0.1 %)
Gas production, billion m ³	-	16.3 (0.5 %)	-	18.5 (0.5 %)	-	-	62.3 (1.8 %)	55.2 (1.6 %)

Note

Oil and gas data for 2013 from *BP Statistical Review of World Energy* June 2014, percentage to world production in parentheses. GDP per capita is GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2011 international \$), from WDI 2015

the research of national history, and they also withdrew resources from, or outright suppressed, those outside official institutions (Roeder 1991, p. 209). As events demonstrated later, the Soviets were perhaps only partially successful as the future presidents of Azerbaijan and Georgia, Elchibey and Gamsakhurdia, respectively, were both academics turned fervent nationalists early in life (Lentz 1994, pp. 64, 302). Over time, despite the growing assimilation trend (Anderson and Silver 1983), nationalism was growing in many republics, especially among the middle classes (Simon 1991). Still, despite the federal state structure and the state-sponsored policies of affirmative action favoring titular nationalities, the mobilization along ethnic lines did not automatically occur, even when political opportunities for collective action expanded under Mikhail Gorbachev.

A voluminous literature exists on the breakup of the Soviet Union (Beissinger 2002; Bunce 1999; Cheshko 1996; Hough 1997; Suny 1993), emphasizing various factors such as bottom-up pressures for democratization brought about by economic development, the division among elites, changes in the international political economy, ethno-nationalist mobilization, among other things. In retrospect, it was arguably the combination of the ethno-federal design and several contingent factors such as Gorbachev's reluctance to employ repression or the rivalry between Gorbachev and the leader of the Russian republic, Yeltsin, that proved crucial.

As noted previously, under the federalist design, the union republics were voluntary members of the union so that instead of a political nation behind the state, it was the all-union Communist Party that cemented its unity (Cheshko 1996). Even though the “institutions of Soviet ethno-federalism and nationality policy served as an efficient lubricant of fragmentation” (Walker 2003, p. 4), it was only after the party was dismantled that the state became very fragile. When Mikhail Gorbachev created the institution of the all-union presidency—and assumed the post himself in early 1990s—the core institutions at the center, the all-union Council of Ministers and the Politburo of the Central Committee (also see section below) lost their control over the state while the new union presidential institutions were not able to steer the political regime yet.

In parallel, there were increasing demands for autonomy and even independence in the union republics, but not in all of them (Tuminez

2003). In general, the ethno-nationalist mobilization in the Central Asian republics as a whole was relatively dormant. Instead, it was the inconsistent and often feeble response of the center to the events in the Baltic, the escalation of violence between Armenians and Azeri nationalists over Nagorno-Karabakh (the largely Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan), and protests and violence in Georgia that contributed to the growing paralysis of the state structures (Cheshko 1996). On 13 October 1990, in a meeting with Gorbachev, Nazarbayev, first secretary and president of Kazakhstan, lamented their lack of any control levers whatsoever: “We need authority. Everybody—the prosecutor’s office, militia, etc.—are afraid because they are criticized in the media. We lack the mechanism of authority” (Veber et al. 2007, pp. 196–97). Indeed, emboldened by Moscow’s weak response, opposition movements in the Baltic republics, Armenia and Georgia soon turned to independence demands.

The momentous changes underway in ethnic republics contributed to the weakening of the structure of the state, but the federation could have survived albeit without some of its members. Indeed, in the relatively fair March 1991 referendum that was however boycotted in the Baltic, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia, the overwhelming majority of Soviet citizens, including those across Central Asia, voted heavily in favor of preserving the union as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics (Cheshko 1996). However, just like in 1917 when the Russian empire was brought down by rebellious Russian soldiers and workers in the capital, in 1991, it was primarily the developments within the core republic itself—RSFSR—that ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union (Zlotnik 2003). Indeed, the direct election of Yeltsin as Russian president instantly made him more legitimate than an indirectly elected Gorbachev. It also made the latter almost redundant as Russian republican institutions began supplanting the all-union ones.

In the end, the ongoing negotiations over the new union treaty to preserve the Soviet Union were thwarted by the aborted August 1991 coup in Moscow. The Communist Party that held the country together was suspended after the coup, and the authority of the union authorities all but evaporated very quickly. Early in December 1991, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus agreed to dissolve the Soviet Union establishing an amorphous Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) instead, and on 25 December 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

FROM “PATRONAL” FIRST SECRETARY TO “PATRONAL” PRESIDENT

The vertical political structures that the Soviet successor states either inherited and continued into independence, or attempted to rebuild following the instability in the early 1990s, cannot be understood without taking into account some basic facts of the Soviet political system in general and about how politics was conducted in the republics before independence. Similarly, the existing informal elite networks in place under the old Soviet system often adapted to new institutional rules, retaining the same underlying power relations. The phenomenon of the “patronal” president (Hale 2005, 2011) that emerged in the post-independence period across the region resembles that of the “patronal” first secretary that was the *de facto* ruler of the union republic. Likewise, many republican institutions continued under different names, or their core functions were simply taken over by the new institutions. For instance, republican KGB offices turned into national security agencies while the presidential administration assumed a role that resembled that of the Party Secretariat in the old republic. Below I briefly outline the political organization in the Soviet Union and in the ethnic republics and what it can tell us about politics in the newly independent states.

Consider the political organization at the federal level first. Formally, the highest political institution in the USSR was the nationally elected legislature, the Supreme Soviet. In fact, the Supreme Soviet was powerless. The Soviet included more than a thousand deputies and was in session only for limited periods of time and typically rubber-stamped whatever came its way. Its Presidium, the body that functioned between the sessions of the Supreme Soviet, served formally as the collective head of state, with the chairman of the Presidium being the nominal head of state, until 1988. In the last years of the Soviet Union, the Supreme Soviet, elected by the congress of deputies, functioned like a typical national parliament legislating full-time, however.

In turn, the Soviet government, the Council of Commissars until 1946, the Council of Ministers thereafter with the chairman of the Council of Ministers (prime minister) at the helm, served as the executive, formally subordinate to the Supreme Soviet. Just like the powerless Soviet however, the all-union (and republican) prime ministers and their councils were subordinate to the party, specifically to general (first) secretaries. Arguably, the Council of Ministers did not govern over the executive branch in the

separation of powers sense. Instead, it headed the administrative and the executive branch that included institutions for the administration of industry, redistribution, and consumption, including various ministries (Kordonskii 2006, p. 33). In fact, prime ministers were regarded as non-political administrators, in contrast to political first secretaries. Still, many republican first secretaries served as republican chairmen of the Council of Ministers first before being promoted, for example, Niyazov or Nazarbayev.

In practice, the political power belonged to the party, and the effective political leader in the country therefore was the general secretary (first secretary from 1953 to 66) of the Communist Party. Occasionally, general secretaries also occupied the posts of the head of the Presidium for a time (e.g., Brezhnev from 1977 to 82) or of the chairman of the Council of Ministers (e.g., Khrushchev from 1958 to 64). Only in 1977 did the constitution officially declare the Communist Party to be the “managing force of the Soviet society” (article 6), therefore rendering the general secretary the acknowledged political leader of the country.

The Soviet Union was therefore a single-party regime, that is, where “access to political office and control over policy are dominated by one party” (Geddes 1999, p. 121). The Communist Party organization served as the parallel, *de facto* government. Similar to the Supreme Soviet, a formally designated institution governing the state, the Communist Party congress served as the formal institution governing the party and, therefore, the state itself. The congresses, convened for short sessions of up to 2 weeks, elected the Central Committee, which, similar to the Presidium of the Soviet, ruled between party congresses, meeting for so-called plenums. The Central Committee served as the recruiting ground for the highest officials. The size of the Central Committee gradually increased from around two-dozen officials in the early 1920s to more than 200 in the 1970s (Zimmerman 2014, pp. 75–101). As the size of the Central Committee grew, its role diminished. Instead, the Politburo of the Central Committee (dubbed Presidium from 1952 to 66) emerged as the top collective executive institution in the country (Khlevniuk 1996). In a sense, it was the Politburo that played the role that a cabinet typically plays in a contemporary democracy.

There was yet another institution at the highest level of the party administration, the so-called Secretariat, which was in charge of policy management. The secretaries of the Secretariat were responsible for various policy portfolios, that is, ideology (typically, the second secretary and therefore

the second-ranking official in the party and hence arguably the state), industry, agriculture, cadres, education, and so on. As a rule, secretaries oversaw several policy departments each (Khlevniuk 1996; Kordonskii 2006). At independence, presidential administrations across the region assumed very similar roles to the party secretariats of old, with powerful departments within the administration coordinating policies implemented by particular cabinet ministers (Petrov 2012, p. 489). In Russia, for instance, oftentimes the powerful heads of the presidential administration rivaled prime ministers in their influence, similar to the old party secretaries in charge of the Secretariat (Baturo and El'kink 2014).

The political organization at the republican level was similar to that at the center. Each republic had its own Supreme Soviet—the nominal top institution in the republic—with the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet being the head of the representative branch and hence the nominal head of the republic. The Communist Party organization continued at the republican level. At the helm of the republican party, organization stood its own republican Central Committee. The Secretariat was in charge of party policy and management.

Just like at the federal level where the general secretary was the national political leader, the first secretary of the republican party organization was the *de facto* ruler of the republic. There was also the chairman of the republican Council of Ministers, that is, a republican prime minister, who was the head of the administrative branch, and who was subordinate to the first secretary. As explained in more detail below, at independence, the post-Soviet political regimes simply continued with the same political structure: the old first secretary, now president, was the effective leader of the country, and the chairman of the Council of Ministers, now prime minister, headed the administrative, now executive, branch. While the chairman of the Council of Ministers had been subordinate to the first secretary, the prime minister was now subordinate to the president.

Some union republics had regions (*oblast*); other smaller republics only had districts. Of the eight republics discussed here, Armenia and Turkmenistan had no regions, that is, cities and districts were directly below the republican level. Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan had a similar structure, but they also had several autonomous regions or republics within them, while Kyrgyzstan had both stand-alone regions and districts under republican control. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were organized as republics with regions, similar to that of Russia and Ukraine (Kordonskii 2006). The predominant majority of party and administrative organiza-

tions in the republics were directed by the republican Communist Party and administrative institutions; only some key industries were designated as union grade and bypassed the republican level altogether.

The Soviet system of power had several tiers of government, all cemented by the vertical power organization: six tiers in case of republics with regions (USSR, union republic, region, city, district, and local), and five in those without the regional tier. Possible conflicts between institutions at the lower level were always adjudicated at the higher level, that is, between institutions at the regional level by the republican authorities and between republican institutions at the level of the union. The system worked because the Communist Party aggregated all decision-making bodies under its overall hierarchy (Kordonskii 2006, p. 23). There was a clear ranking of party and other officials: the first secretary of the city party organization deferred to the first secretary of the region, the latter to the first secretary at the republican level, and the first, or general, secretary at the union level was the *de facto* ruler of the country. In other words, what was to become known as “vertical power” in many post-Soviet regimes (Sakwa 2011) had long been in place and was familiar to officials that were socialized in the Soviet system of governance.

At every level of the party hierarchy, the first secretary outranked the second secretary, while in turn the second secretary was more important than the third secretary. The Politburo members at the union level were more influential than republican secretaries. The chairman of the Council of Ministers was clearly subordinate to the general secretary; however, the former’s rank, as well as the rank of other cabinet ministers, was determined by their personal influence within the Politburo, and whether these ministers were its members in the first place. In general, highly ranked party secretaries, for example, the USSR secretary for ideology Mikhail Suslov, would have outranked cabinet ministers. Still, at the highest level sometimes, it was really difficult to assess the relative influence of individuals within the inner circle of ruling elites (Ryavec 1982, p. 119).

While the Russians dominated republican offices in the early years of the Soviet Union, in the 1950s, representatives of the titular nationalities came to occupy the most important offices in their republics. In the 1960s, the policy of indigenization in the union republics brought about the situation where members of the titular nationality became dominant in party and administration posts; and in later years, it extended further to the enforcement and intelligence agencies even (Hodnett 1978). Brezhnev, who previously served as the first secretary of the Moldovan

and Kazakh republics himself, also promoted a “stability of cadres” policy whereby senior members of the ruling elite were assured of their positions (Breslauer 1982).

In fact, many first secretaries in union republics established their own personalist regimes on the ground. As long as they were able to satisfy Moscow, they were left to their own devices. Geddes (1999, p. 133) finds that on average personal regimes last 15 years across the world. A brief look at the longevity of first secretaries in Soviet Central Asia and Caucasus indicates that their survival rates conform to this general rule. At the republican level in “late” Soviet period, the majority of first secretaries were able to remain in office for long periods of time, for example, Rashidov of Uzbekistan (1959–83), Usabaliev of Kyrgyzstan (1961–85), Gapurov of Turkmenistan (1969–85), Konaev of Kazakhstan (1960–62, 1964–86), Rasulov of Tajikistan (1961–82), or Demirchyan of Armenia (1974–88) (Hodnett 1978). Two more republican leaders, Shevardnadze of Georgia (1972–85) and Aliyev of Azerbaijan (1969–82), left after obtaining influential posts at the union level. In a way, the political regimes in the ethnic republics were somewhat personalist even before the Soviet breakup.

In the 1960–70s the leaders of the Soviet republics, particularly in the Caucasus and Central Asia, achieved “considerable de facto autonomy by creating tight and often corrupt patronage networks, controlling the flow of information to Moscow and buying off key figures in the central administration and Brezhnev’s own family” (Lieven 2002, p. 290). Indeed, the so-called “cotton affair,” an investigation that the union authorities launched against accounting irregularities in the cotton industry in Uzbekistan in the 1980s, exposed widespread corruption not only in that industry per se but also among party elites, including at the level of first secretaries and in various enforcement agencies where positions and ranks could have been simply bought (Churbanov 2007). The investigators also found that party and administrative elites cooperated with various criminal networks in the shadow economy throughout the Soviet Union, particularly in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and even Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

While the heads of the union republics were the most influential officials in their own republics, what was their role and status in the Soviet structure? The first secretaries of the union republics were all members of the (union) Central Committee, the formal institution governing the party between congresses. However, alongside them, first secretaries of Russian regions, of the main city councils, and military commanders were also included in the

Central Committee (Zimmerman 2014, p. 137). In contrast to the Central Committee, first secretaries' place at the very top party cabinet table—the Politburo—was not guaranteed. Typically, the Politburo included a dozen or more individuals, such as the general secretary, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, other high-level party officials, as well as the first secretary of the Moscow party organization (the de facto Moscow mayor) and the first secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party. The former or current republican secretaries were occasionally promoted to the Politburo membership, that is, Brezhnev as the former head of the Kazakh SSR in 1957 and Kunaev in 1971 from the same republic. Only in 1990–91 when the Politburo lost power, were first secretaries of republican parties—republican leaders—included in the Politburo automatically. The fact that republican leaders, such as Shevardnadze and Aliyev mentioned above, gladly left for new posts at the federal level clearly indicated that these positions were more influential than those of republican party leaders and were clearly regarded as important promotions in the Soviet party hierarchy.

Leaders of the union republics, like all high-ranking members of the Soviet *nomenklatura*, enjoyed various perks of office and privileges, including bodyguard detail, servants, private accommodation, access to restricted stores and goods, and personalized healthcare. But the perks of office they enjoyed were not comparable to those of the head of state. For instance, only three bodyguards from the KGB Ninth Directorate that served daily shifts each—and that often fulfilled the functions of personal valets too—were assigned to first secretaries of republican parties (Mlechin 2008). It was all to change after 1991 however.

The Soviet Union never really penetrated and remade traditional Central Asian societies in its image. While individuals formally complied with the Soviet state, various family, clan, and other traditional ties remained very strong (Collins 2006). These ties were important not only in Central Asian societies but also in Azerbaijan, as well as in Georgia and Armenia that had societies more resembling those in the western republics of the USSR. To a large extent, clan-based politics became the real regulator of political affairs in the region. For instance, in Azerbaijan under Heydar Aliyev in the late 1970s, almost all members of the republican cabinet and key officials in the Central Committee were connected by family ties; there was no vertical mobility; one could only hope to get inside that circle through marriage; and bribe-taking was rampant (Furman 1993, p. 18). Soviet authorities largely acquiesced to such arrangements and maintained an informal balance between ethnic factions, for example, assigning the

posts of first secretary, chairman of the Soviet, and chairman of the cabinet of ministers to different clans (Collins 2006, p. 35). In contrast to Russia where such informal networks are largely organized by shared professional or educational background (Baturo and Elkink 2014), in Central Asia and Caucasus, these networks are largely based on ethnic or family ties.

In summary, republican first secretaries were extremely powerful in their own republics. They were not quite as powerful as presidents of independent states, but they were in control of their local fiefdoms nonetheless. Unlike presidents, however, they could have been replaced at a moment's notice from Moscow.

After assuming the office of the general secretary in March 1985, Gorbachev quickly consolidated his authority and began replacing the old guard at the federal and republican levels. Usabaliev of Kyrgyzstan (1961–85), Nabiyeu of Tajikistan (1982–85), and Gapurov of Turkmenistan (1969–85) were all quickly “retired.” Likewise, Usmankhodzaev of Uzbekistan (1983–88), who himself earlier replaced Rashidov mired in the “cotton affair,” was dismissed amid corruption allegations. In Kazakhstan, the center replaced the long-standing first secretary and Brezhnev loyalist Kunaev (1964–86) for an ethnically Russian official, thereby provoking a series of mass protests that demanded a leader of titular nationality instead (Hough 1997). In Azerbaijan and Georgia, where old leaders were promoted to the union level earlier, new first secretaries were dismissed by the center when the former could not manage the escalation of protests in their republics.

The center installed new leaders across all union republics at some stage in the 1985–90 period, as also seen in Table 2.2. Despite their relatively short tenures as republican leaders, however, most of these individuals were experienced party and administrative elite apparatchiks, for example, prime ministers and regional or city first secretaries, and they were able to rely on the existing patron–client networks and built their own. Very soon, leaders of union republics, in the words of Valerie Bunce, of “proto-nations” and “proto-states” responded to the new opportunities structures offered to them and gravitated away from the federation (Bunce 1999).

Many republican leaders followed the example of the union leader, Gorbachev, who first assumed the formal role of head of state as the chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium in 1988 and then took the title of Soviet President in March 1990. Observing the momentous changes where the dominant role of the Communist Party under the new multiparty system was no longer guaranteed, the republican leaders also hedged their bets and had their Supreme Soviets elect them first as chair-

Table 2.2 Eurasian regimes in context

	<i>Armenia</i>	<i>Azerbaijan</i>	<i>Georgia</i>	<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Tajikistan</i>	<i>Turkmenistan</i>	<i>Uzbekistan</i>
Leader at independence ^a	Ter-Petrosyan, 1990-98	Mutalibov, 1990-92	Gamsakhurdia, 1990-92	Nazarbayev, 1989-	Akayev, 1990-2005	Nabiev, 1991-92	Niyazov, 1985-2006	Karimov, 1989-
Other leaders in 1991-2014, excl. interim	Kocharyan, 1998-2008 Sargsyan, 2008-	Elchibey, 1992-93 H. Aliyev, 1993-2003 I. Aliiev, 2003-	Shevardnadze, 1992-2003 Saakashvili, 2003-2013 Ivanishvili, 2012-13 ^b	-	Bakiev, 2005-10 Atanbaev, 2010-	Rakhmon, 1992-	Berdymukhamedov, 2006-	-
Dem. opposition in power/ "alternation in office"	1990-98	1992-93	1990-92, 2003-13, 2013-	-	-	-	-	-
Prior statehood in same/similar borders in XX c.	1918-20	1918-20	1918-21	-	-	-	-	-
Had autonomous rep./region while in USSR	-	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes	-	-
Military conflict	Nagorno-Karabakh, 1988-94	Nagorno-Karabakh, 1988-94 Civil War 1993	S. Ossetia 1991-92, Abkhazia 1992-93, 1998; Civil War 1991-93	-	-	Civil War 1992-97	-	-

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

	<i>Armenia</i>	<i>Azerbaijan</i>	<i>Georgia</i>	<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Tajikistan</i>	<i>Turkmenistan</i>	<i>Uzbekistan</i>
17 March 1991 referendum to preserve the union	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
CIS charter ratified	1994	1993	1994–2008	1994	1994	1993	-	1994
Freedom House 2013	4.5 (PF)	6 (NF)	3 (PF)	5.5 (NF)	5 (PF)	6 (NF)	7 (NF)	7 (NF)
Regime type, GWF	Personal 1994–98; 1998–	Personal 1991–92; 1993–	Personal 1991–92; 1992–2003, Dem. 2003–	Personal 1991–	Personal 1991–2005; 2005–10, Dem. 2010–	Personal 1991–	Party-personal 1991–	Party-personal 1991–

Notes

^aTime in office includes years as first secretary of republican Communist Party under USSR

^bPM under a new regime. GWF refers to Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2012)

men of those Soviets, “because it was dictated by the logic of sociopolitical development” (Nazarbayev 2009, p. 178) and then second as presidents, “because it was the logic of life that required the consolidation of executive powers, to ensure a balanced and effective state mechanism” (ibid., 188). In five republics—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—the incumbent first secretaries followed Gorbachev’s example and assumed the chairmanship of their supreme soviets, and then were all elected as presidents of their respective SSRs in 1990. Karimov and Makhamov of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, respectively, additionally took the authority as prime ministers at the same time. When the Communist Party was banned after the August 1991 coup, the rulers simply abandoned their posts as first secretaries and remained as presidents.²

Even though the power of the Soviet state was crumbling, among the eight republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, only in Georgia and Armenia was the nationalist democratic opposition able to take power in 1990 and to have the communist rulers sidelined. In the other states of the region, the old republican elites were able to retain power at independence, or if they lost it—as they did in Azerbaijan in 1992–93—they were able to regain it quickly (Furman 1993).

In this context when the authority at the top disintegrated and then disappeared, the leaders at the second tier of government, in ethnic republics, found themselves *de facto* and, after 25 December 1991, *de jure* rulers of the independent nation-states. Even earlier, republican leaders had gained more control over the police forces when the union delegated more authority to republican ministries of interior at the expense of the all-union ministry in 1989. While the new independent states undoubtedly had a difficult task of nation-building in front of them, all of the union republics but Russia had their own republican state and party institutions, republican security and police force, education systems, universities and the academies of sciences, as well as largely dominant ethnic political elites brought about by long-sponsored policies of affirmative action favoring titular nationalities. With traditional clans and networks becoming the only game in town, in places where first secretaries and traditional elites had been able to cooperate and maintain the system of vertical power, the “patronal first secretary” simply turned into a “patronal president,” and personalist non-democratic regimes emerged.

² Makhamov of Tajikistan, first secretary since 1985 and president since 1990, was replaced by his predecessor in the party office, Nabiev, following the August 1991 coup, however.

In the early to mid-1990s, new constitutions were soon adopted that delineated the authority of different branches of government. These new constitutions were however either short-lived and replaced by new ones that envisaged more powers to the president or extensively revised to a similar effect. Across the region, ruling elites reverted to similar, and familiar, methods to maintain themselves in power. Before the Soviet breakup, with a much more liberal Gorbachev than the majority of republican elites in power, the influence of Moscow was largely pro-democratic, even if the local party elites had been able to block or stall most of the reforms initiated by the center (Hough 1997). First secretaries also had to tolerate the existence of the opposition, which they quickly crushed or co-opted after the collapse of the Soviet Union, however. Multiparty democracy and competitive elections were soon replaced by sham elections and party systems where co-opted smaller parties existed alongside dominant regime parties, or the virtual dominance of one regime party with few nominally independent candidates permitted in the parliament. While in general political regimes were more open and competitive in Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, even there individual presidents were able to “glue other institutions and interests together, so that personal survival and regime stability are synonymous” (Baturo 2014, pp. 13–14).

RUSSIA, THE NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES, AND THE “CLUB OF FIRST SECRETARIES”

As argued earlier, first secretaries were powerful players in their union republics, and many enjoyed long tenures in office. Still, they depended on the general secretary for support and could have been replaced at a moment’s notice from Moscow. After independence, even though Moscow could no longer replace national leaders or direct their political affairs, the influence that Russia can exert in former Soviet republics has not disappeared. Furthermore, the Soviet Union had a command economy with a common currency, integrated energy grid, and production chains crossing republican borders. Even though economic links were severed during the breakup, they too did not disappear; Russia has remained the dominant economic power in the region after 1991. In the period from 1991 to 2014, Russia has been an important factor in the politics of countries in the Central Asia and the Caucasus. At times, it was able to support militarily political regimes threatened by domestic insurgencies; more often, however, its attempts to support or destabilize

particular governments did not bring about the desired effects. Russian economic influence in the region, particularly in the energy sector and trade, is hard to deny. However, the influence of Europe, the USA, and China, *inter alia*, whether “hard” or “soft,” for example, the US military base in Kyrgyzstan or the Eastern partnership and other EU initiatives in the Caucasus, cannot be discounted. Russia has remained the most influential foreign power in the post-Soviet Eurasia, but it has had to compete with other powers; notably, its regional integration initiatives have not been always successful and were able to include some former Soviet republics only. In this section, therefore, I briefly discuss the role of Russia in the politics of Caucasus and Central Asia and regional integration after 1991.

Unlike many European powers with vast colonies separated by the ocean, tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union were continental land empires with unclear borders between the center and the periphery. Many Soviet citizens did not distinguish between their Soviet and Russian identities; there was also a growing assimilation trend in ethnic republics (Anderson and Silver 1983). Millions of ethnic Russians lived outside the borders of Russia at the time of the Soviet collapse, mostly in large cities and other urban areas. As argued earlier, the Russian colonization of Kazakhstan was particularly extensive, but the Russians and native Russian speakers were present in all union republics. It is therefore not surprising that even after independence, Russia retained considerable influence, both “soft” and “hard,” over former union republics. Unable to perceive the latter as foreign countries proper, the Russians even coined a new term of “near abroad” to refer to these states.

The Russian language was the language of communication in the USSR and had remained so even after independence. Indeed, the citizens of newly independent states continued to consume Russian electronic and print media, which gave Moscow a considerable degree of “soft” power in the region. In 2014, in Kazakhstan, for example, Russian television remained dominant so that at least half of the country’s population watched Russian media outlets regularly, thus relying on Russian rather than a Kazakh interpretation of current news and events.³ Furthermore, after independence, the new borders remained largely nominal. The citizens of most former Soviet republics did not require visas for travel in the region, with few

³ See Novaya Gazeta, 31 October 2014, “U Soseda Slishkom Gromko Oret Televizor,” available at <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/65906.html>, accessed 2 November 2014.

exceptions, for example, Russia introduced visas for Georgian citizens from 2000 and Turkmenistan introduced the visa regime for all countries in 1999. In fact, migrant mobility greatly increased after the breakup of the Soviet Union, particularly from Central Asia to Russia. As seen in Table 2.1 earlier, all eight Eurasian regimes were predominantly poor countries, with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan being the poorest with per capita incomes around 3000 USD (constant 2011 international). Indeed, with the fall in cotton exports and the end of federal subsidies that these Central Asian economies relied on during the Soviet Union, migrant work abroad after independence remained one of the few available opportunities for a large rural population in the region. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan had higher income per capita rates however, especially Kazakhstan with 23,092 USD per capita in 2014 (all three are energy producers). The World Bank estimates that worker remittances constitute 42 % of gross domestic product (GDP) in Tajikistan, 32 % in Kyrgyzstan, or 21 % in Armenia (World Bank 2013). Almost all of these remittances originate in Russia, which provides its government considerable leverage vis-à-vis local governments.

The influence of Russian “soft” power is probably even greater at the elite level. Indeed, the political elite that took power in the newly independent republics all had their formative years in the Soviet Union where social and political mobility as a rule was not inhibited by their ethnic origins. The future leaders and officials of what were to be new nations had often studied in the institutes and universities in Moscow or in other republics. Like the majority of former Soviet citizens of that generation, political elites in Russia and former ethnic republics did not perceive former post-Soviet nations as true foreign countries. Many were equally at home in their own republics and in Russia. For instance, the first secretary of the Armenian Communist Party Harutyunyan (1988–90), when he departed from office in 1990, served as a Russian diplomat in independent Russia. Likewise, President Akayev of Kyrgyzstan (1990–2005) returned to his old academic career in Moscow when he stepped down in 2005.⁴ The close ties between the new national elites and Russia are certainly not unusual in comparative perspective. Many rulers in Francophone Africa

⁴See Noev Kovcheg, 16 October 2013, “Suren Aryutyunyan: Dlya Menya Armeniya i Rossiya – Edonoe Tseloe,” available at <http://noev-kovcheg.ru/mag/2013-19/4123.html>. Also see Akaev’s academic profile at <http://socmodel.com/Avtory/AkaevAA>, both accessed 12 September 2014.

were also fully integrated into the French political ruling class before independence and retained those links after, for example, President Leopold Senghor (1960–80) of Senegal (Meredith 2006, pp. 270–71).

The links between security and military officials in the post-Soviet independent states are probably even stronger as they all typically attended the same military colleges and KGB institutes, and after independence, they continued attending various staff colleges in Moscow (Efremov 2007, p. 11). New national armies of the newly independent states in most cases were assembled from the Soviet army units stationed on their territories. However, Georgia, fighting its breakaway provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia that were supported by Russia (Wheatley 2005), had to build its military from scratch. Similarly, Armenia and Azerbaijan that fought over Nagorno-Karabakh could not always rely on the local Soviet army units either. Furthermore, the Russian army that guarded the Tajik border with Afghanistan, actively participated in the Civil War in Tajikistan; it also exerted its influence in conflicts in the Caucasus (Ekedahl and Goodman 1997). Some post-Soviet states also coordinated their militaries in the formal alliance. The Collective Security Treaty established in 1992 and transformed into Collective Security Treaty Organization in 2003, included Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan concerned with the Russian military influence withdrew from the organization in 1999 however.

Given such extensive links with the former union republics that Russia had at both mass and elite levels, it is perhaps surprising that various integration initiatives launched since 1991 have been mostly unsuccessful. The CIS was formally established on 21 December 1991 and included all republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus except Georgia. The latter joined the CIS in 1993 in exchange for Russian support for the Shevardnadze government yet withdrew again following the 2008 war in South Ossetia. Turkmenistan, which signed the accords in 1991, never ratified the official charter however and remained an unofficial member state (observer from 2005). Likewise, Azerbaijan only ratified the charter after the return to power of the old first secretary, Heydar Aliyev, in 1993.

Because many heads of states were former republican leaders, the CIS came to be colloquially referred to as the “club of first secretaries.” Its members largely treated it as a convenient forum for maintaining the old connections in the post-Soviet environment. Russia perceived the Commonwealth “as a necessary pedestal for its great-power status” (Trenin 2011, p. 147). In practice however, Russia had neither resources

to offer attractive rewards to the CIS members, nor political will as President Yeltsin had to tackle the centrifugal forces inside his own country for most of the 1990s and pursued integration with the West. In 2005, Vladimir Putin succinctly underlined what the purpose of the CIS was from the start:

if someone expected from the CIS special achievements in economy, political cooperation, military affairs—naturally, it did not happen, because it could not have happened. Its very purpose was to ensure that the process of the breakup of the USSR occurred in the most civilized manner. [...] If the states of Europe cooperated for unity, CIS was created for a civilized divorce.⁵

Indeed, the CIS included members with often opposite goals, that is, Armenia and Azerbaijan that were engaged in military hostilities over Nagorno-Karabakh (De Waal 2003). There were also several trade disagreements between the CIS members, for example, between Russia and Moldova, Russia and Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, as well as Russia and Belarus. Generally, within the CIS, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Georgia opposed stronger coordination, while Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and sometimes, Uzbekistan favored more cooperation. Instead, Russia turned to bilateral deals (e.g., the USA with Belarus) and pursued stronger regional initiatives among a smaller number of members. Firstly, since 2001, there has been the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAzEC) that included Kazakhstan—President Nazarbayev has been the most outspoken advocate for a closer integration—Russia, Belarus, as well as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Secondly, and more ambitiously, from 2010, there has been the so-called Customs Union, and also, from 2012, the Common Economic Space (common market) both between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan only. In 2014, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan were also in the process of joining the latter organization. The structures of the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space were to be further integrated under the umbrella of an even tighter Eurasian Economic Union (not to be confused with an abovementioned EurAzEC).

⁵ Quoted in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 25 March 2005, “SNG Dolzhno Ostat’sya dlya tsivilizovannogo razvoda,” available at <http://www.rg.ru/2005/03/25/sng-anons.html>, accessed 21 August 2014.

Even though newly independent states were able to reorient their trade flows partly to other regions, including Europe and China, Russia remained a very important partner for most of them whether as an export market, the source of remittances, or provider of significant economic subsidies, especially in terms of subsidized energy exports, particularly to Belarus and Armenia. Indeed, Russia is a significant oil and natural gas producer and exporter, and therefore was able to use energy as the tool of its foreign policy multiple times. Levitsky and Way (2010) refer to Russian support of the post-Soviet regimes as the case of the so-called “black knight,” that is, a country that provides economic, diplomatic, and military types of assistance to support authoritarianism and counters the Western democratizing pressure. Russia supported the Shevardnadze government in Georgia in 1993 and could have been involved in Aliyev’s return to power in Azerbaijan in 1993 (Furman 1993, p. 16). However, Georgia and Azerbaijan still pursued their own independent foreign policy and gravitated toward the West despite Russian efforts to the contrary. Russia’s role has also been limited in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where regimes are more authoritarian and are less reliant on Russian economic or military support. In the late 1990s, Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova even formed a new anti-Russian alliance, GUAM; however, the organization has not proved to be effective.

Russian influence is the strongest in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Armenia that hosts Russian military on its territory is the traditional Russian ally in the region with an extensive Armenian diaspora in Russia; it is also reliant on Russian energy subsidies. Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has always been at the forefront of integration with Russia; the republic has also been very Russified, and ethnic Russians constituted more than a third of its population according to the late Soviet census (Olcott 1995, p. 272). Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, both extremely poor, were reliant on remittances from its migrant workers in Russia and on economic support from the Russian government. In addition, Russian army helped to end the Civil War in Tajikistan and retained its influence in the aftermath (Collins 2006).

While Russia retains considerable “hard” economic, political, and military influence over the Caucasus and the Central Asia, albeit to a different degree, and its “soft” power through media and its Russian diaspora is equally considerable, particular institutional or political developments in Russia in the period of 1991–2014 probably had limited effect on political affairs in the region. Indeed, the majority of these states were more

authoritarian than Russia for most of the period after independence. The public confrontation between President Yeltsin and parliament in 1993 that was ultimately resolved in shelling of that very parliament in a “paraconstitutional” manner (Parrish 1998, p. 63), with the president’s dominance later legitimated by the constitutional referendum, certainly attracted the attention of Yeltsin’s peers. For example, Presidents Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan and Lukashenko of Belarus, unable to work with their legislatures that they could not constitutionally dissolve, disregarded the writ of the constitutions and dismissed the intransigent legislatures on various pretexts in 1995 and 1996. Both leaders subsequently promulgated new constitutions to legitimate the new status quo. These two post-Soviet presidents, while probably cued by the example of Russian executive-legislative stalemate and its aftermath earlier, however, did not require similar drastic measures that Yeltsin had to resort to. Instead, the outcomes of particular inter-elite conflicts were contingent on the strength of the domestic opposition that rulers faced rather than the cues provided by peer leaders, or direct Russian support. President Kravchuk of Ukraine, who was also in a bitter conflict with his parliament, similarly tried to shut it down but failed (Kuzio 1996).

All post-Soviet presidents were elected to term-limited offices, renewable once. When term limits approached, many engaged in feats of constitutional engineering. One of the most frequent strategies deployed by presidents was to claim that their second terms were in fact their first under the new constitution, because new constitutions were adopted during those terms. Consider this illustrative example: in 1998, the Kyrgyz and Russian Constitutional Courts reached two opposing decisions, ironically, using very similar constitutional reasoning about the appropriate interpretation as to what constituted the “first term.” While the Kyrgyz court decided that the president’s second term was in fact his first, in Russia, the Constitutional Court simply dismissed the case “due to the obvious lack of ambiguity in interpretation of relevant articles, ruling that two terms consecutively constitute the constitutional limit that cannot be exceeded” (Baturo 2014, p. 59). In other words, even though both rulers, in Russia and Kyrgyzstan, faced similar obstacles because of very similar institutional circumstances and constitutional origins, the court ruling in Russia has not necessarily provided the norm to follow for other post-Soviet constitutional courts.

Clearly, many post-Soviet presidents followed similar designs to counter the opposition or prolong their stay in office. If anything, it appears

that the process of institutional innovation in post-Soviet Eurasia, while clearly influenced by some political developments in Russia, was more complex and reciprocal. For example, when President Putin honored term limits and assumed the post of prime minister in 2008, only to return to the presidency in 2012 (Baturo and Mikhaylov 2014), it provoked a mass speculation that the Armenian President Kocharyan was posed to implement the Armenian version of tandem with his successor.⁶ Kocharyan did not assume the prime minister post however; the party system in Armenia was also more competitive than the hegemonic party system in Russia at the time. In a way, even though the minute coverage of Russian political developments in the post-Soviet republics often triggers speculation among local pundits about whether their countries will follow the Russian example, these comparisons are probably more a reflection of the postcolonial mentality of pundits that grew up in the Soviet Union and cannot fully accept the fact that Moscow is no longer the imperial center of old, than of political contingencies of their countries, which have been independent now for more than two decades.

There are also numerous examples where Russia provided no demonstration cues whatsoever. When Nazarbayev simply prolonged his tenure by 5 years ad hoc in 1995 without subjecting himself to the election, he most probably followed the precedent provided by Niyazov of Turkmenistan who extended his rule by referendum in 1994. In turn, by lengthening the presidential term from 5 to 7 years in 1998, Kazakhstan pioneered the longest presidential term length in the region. Indeed, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan soon followed suit adopting the same term length (Baturo 2014, p. 64). As the time since the cutting of the umbilical cord between republics has passed, ironically, it is Russia that is being influenced by its more authoritarian brethren, with President Putin following many designs that his more authoritarian peers tested and implemented building their own systems of vertical power.

Following the 1990s period, when Yeltsin's government left former Soviet republics largely to their own devices (even though Russia was involved militarily in the Caucasus and Tajikistan), President Putin, particularly from his second term on, sought a meaningful integration and a greater Russian hegemony in the region. The Eurasian Economic Union between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, signed in 2014 and in force

⁶See Robert Kocharyan: "I Don't Rule Out My Return to Big Politics," available at <http://www.mediamax.am/en/news/politics/2664/>, accessed 21 August 2014.

from 2015, which was also to include Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, envisaged serious economic integration between its members and certain sub-national institutions above national governments.

The annexation of Crimea and the hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 rendered the future of the post-Soviet integration profoundly uncertain however. As argued earlier, millions of ethnic Russians live not only in Ukraine but also in the Baltic states, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. In light of the accession of Crimea to Russia, Vladimir Putin's lament in his "Crimean speech" on 18 March 2014 that the Russian people were arbitrarily divided so that "millions of Russians went to bed in one country and woke up abroad, suddenly finding themselves ethnic minorities in the former union republics," could place Russian integration initiatives in a different perspective for political elites in the region. As a result, even the most integrationist of the post-Soviet leaders, such as Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, took pains to emphasize the predominantly economic nature of the new economic union.⁷ Indeed, it is difficult to imagine circumstances under which the CIS or any other regional union that includes Russia could be an effective organization of equal states. Russia is too powerful economically vis-à-vis all of the other members combined; a stronger degree of integration can arguably only lead to an even more Russia-dominated union.

CONCLUSION

After independence, the political regimes that emerged in post-Soviet Eurasia resembled local fiefdoms that existed before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Former first secretaries, now presidents, established, or attempted to establish, personalized regimes with the same vertical organization of power that existed earlier. In Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, the incumbent first secretaries simply continued as presidents; in Tajikistan, the Civil War prevented continuity but the elites soon rallied around the new champion; and while in Georgia and Azerbaijan, the old republican secretaries, previously promoted to the union level of leadership, apparently retained their old client networks and connections and were able to return to power. In Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, new incumbent

⁷The full text of the Address of the President of Russian Federation is available from <http://kremlin.ru/news/20603>. For Nazarbaev reservations about the union, see the full transcript of the meeting, 24 December 2013, <http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/19913>.

presidents experimented with democratic reforms first but soon came to resemble their peers. Across the region, rulers established “the institutional facades of democracy, including regular multiparty elections for the chief executive, in order to conceal (and reproduce) harsh realities of authoritarian governance” (Schedler 2006, p. 1).

In general, over the 1991–2014 period, political regimes were more open and competitive in Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. Such political regimes are typically defined as partly democratic (Freedom House 2013), electoral authoritarian (Schedler 2002), or competitive authoritarian (Levitsky and Way 2010). Regimes were more repressive, often authoritarian, in the rest of Central Asia and in Azerbaijan (in the latter except for the brief period in early 1990s) (Furman 1993). Table 2.2 summarized these differences across the region as captured by several available indicators. While it is difficult to extrapolate from such a small group of countries, it appears that the previous history of statehood, the opposition strength developed in late years of the Soviet Union, resources available to ruling elites, and alongside rulers’ own preferences contributed to varieties of regime trajectories in the region. There are numerous reasons behind the initial success of opposition movements in Georgia and Armenia including the longest history of statehood of the eight independent nations considered here; the strength of nationalist mobilization in these two countries was also sustained by conflict, whether internal or external. More authoritarian regimes of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, as well as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, could rely on energy resource rents, albeit to a different extent (Jones Luong and Weinhil 2010). Because energy rents can be used as private rewards for coalition members, they can favor loyalty to the incumbent leader (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, pp. 65–68). In contrast, the leaders of Georgia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan had fewer opportunities to rely on such rents, and these regimes had been less stable as a result.

Whether regimes operated under semi-presidential or presidential constitutions and whether the degree of competitiveness was sufficient to differentiate some of them as competitive authoritarian as opposed to authoritarian proper, they are all distinguished by the role that the traditional informal politics plays behind the façade of formal institutions, where informal networks underpin formal institutions (Helmke and Levitsky 2006; Ledeneva 2013). In the buildup of their vertical power, presidents came to rely on their own personalist networks for governance (Collins 2006). Such regimes are defined in the literature as personalistic: based on personal loyalty of members of the political elite, they often

exhibit a lack or weakness of institutions that are autonomous from the ruler, and where “access to office and the fruits of office depends much more on the discretion of an individual leader” (Geddes 1999, p. 121). As argued earlier in this chapter, many first secretaries in union republics have long ruled over their sub-national personalist regimes, based on clan and ethnic ties, even before the collapse of USSR. After independence, “patronal” first secretaries became “patronal” presidents of their own nation-states.

Even though they are subjected to elections, the incumbent presidents in the Caucasus and the Central Asia have yet to lose a single executive election since independence in 1991. Indeed, President Saakashvili of Georgia, albeit not in an executive election, lost a parliamentary election in 2012 and represents the only instance of a true democratic rotation in the region. Certainly, all presidents ensured they could remain in office unhindered by term limits either by including full or limited grandfathering clauses at the time of when new constitutions were adopted, or scrapping term limits altogether. Still, presidents are mortals, and they cannot rule forever. Because succession is problematic in personalized regimes, the second most important post, that of prime minister, is crucial. Indeed, prime ministers can have access to the distribution of rents and financial outlays and in principle can build their own patron–client networks, even challenging the presidents. There is no surprise, perhaps, that in Turkmenistan, the most personalized regime in the region, the post of prime minister was abolished altogether in 1992 (Horak 2007).

After the Soviet breakup, Russia remains the source of significant economic subsidies to former Soviet republics, especially in terms of subsidized energy exports, and it has not shied away from using its economic resources as carrots and sticks in its “near abroad,” particularly regarding the regional integration initiatives with Russia at the helm. When the CIS, “club of first secretaries,” proved ineffective, more ambitious initiatives, for example, the Customs Union and an even tighter Eurasian Economic Union, were initiated. The political leaders and the majority of political elites in the post-Soviet Eurasia have grown up and socialized in the Soviet Union; after independence, they still maintain links to, and often rely on support from, Russia. As the events in Eastern Ukraine demonstrated in 2014, the apparently (largely) peaceful territorial settlement of the Soviet empire’s disintegration more than two decades ago may not have been completed yet. It remains to be seen whether the new generation of leaders that will inevitably replace the current cohort would

continue its reliance on Russia for support and, equally, whether Russia itself manages to maintain the process of “divorce” that was the breakup of the Soviet Union, “civilized.”

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