

Democracy recession and growth of authoritarianism in the OSCE region

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According to the theory of Samuel Huntington, democracy spreads in the world through waves of democratization. However, after the last wave, the decline of democracy began. According to the Freedom House reports, there is a complete lack of progress since the early 2000s. Moreover, the situation with democratic institutions in most countries of the world has deteriorated. The global level of democracy has been declining for twelve consecutive years. Perhaps, the data of the ranking is rather conditional, but, nevertheless, it confirms the fact that the world is going through a democratic recession.

Indeed, political freedoms in many countries of the world are declining, and liberal values have been under pressure. The wave of demonstrations and putsches against dictatorial regimes in the Middle East turned out to be a disappointment, and in some countries, even more rigid regime was established in the end. The Turkish authorities violate civil liberties, and after the failed coup attempt in 2016, many media and educational institutions were closed, a lot of journalists, teachers, civil servants and members of the judiciary were dismissed or arrested.

However, liberal democracy today is under threat not only in countries that have gone through democratization in recent decades but also in exemplary democratic states of the West.

In such EU countries as Hungary and Poland, which at one time were called an example of successful democratic transit, there are attacks on the free press and independence of the judiciary, violation of the constitutional order and undermining the foundations of democracy. In Hungary, there has been a concentration of power in the hands of the ruling party “Fidesz”, with a simultaneous decrease in the role of the Constitutional Court, i.e. checks and balances have been eliminated. Restrictions on the freedom of the media were introduced, including in the field of coverage of election campaigns. Opportunities for the work of NGOs, including international ones, were narrowed. The situation surrounding the reform of the Constitutional Court of Poland poses a direct threat to the rule of law in the country. The growing pressure of the ruling party “Law and Justice” party (PiS) on the media and the judiciary, according to some analysts, raises the question of the viability of the Polish democracy. The level of nationalism and populism continues to grow in the country.

The United States has retreated from its traditional role as a leader of democratic countries. The level of political rights and civil liberties is declining in the country, and the US is more rarely regarded as an example of democracy. According to a national survey released by The Democracy Project, a majority of Americans see democracy in the US as weak and getting weaker.

We often hear that authoritarian regimes in Russia or China are a threat to liberal democracy. However, the real threat does not come from outside but from within the West itself, and anti-liberal democracy can turn into a new form of authoritarianism, which threatens democratic institutions throughout the OSCE region.