



POLITICAL STABILITY AS A PHENOMENON AND A POTENTIAL

STABILNOŚĆ POLITYCZNA JAKO ZJAWISKO I POTENCJAŁ

*Łukasz Perlikowski** 

— ABSTRACT —

Political stability is a key category in general political theory and in the analysis of political systems. The correct determination of the semantic scope of this concept and its proper operationalization seem to be of fundamental importance for both theoretical and empirical scientific considerations. The text draws attention to two basic variants of stability (invariability and flexibility) and two basic aspects of the concept of stability (phenomenon and potential). The conceptual ordering of the issue of political stability, supported by a literature review on the subject, aims to provide a basis for formulating the most adequate approach to the study of political systems stability. The main purpose of the text is therefore to operationalize the concept of stability and, moreover, to indicate the possible research consequences of adopting the proposed perspective.

Keywords: political stability, political system, potential, conceptual analysis, flexibility, political change

— ABSTRAKT —

Stabilność polityczna jest kluczową kategorią w ogólnej teorii polityki oraz w analizie systemów politycznych. Wydaje się, że prawidłowe wyznaczenie zakresu semantycznego tego pojęcia oraz właściwe jego zoperacjonalizowanie ma fundamentalne znaczenie zarówno dla naukowych rozważań teoretycznych, jak i empirycznych. W tekście zwrócono uwagę na dwa zasadnicze warianty stabilności (niezmiennność i elastyczność) oraz dwa podstawowe aspekty pojęcia stabilności (zjawisko i potencjał). Uporządkowanie konceptualne kwestii stabilności politycznej, poparte przeglądem literatury na ten temat, ma na celu stworzenie podstawy do sformułowania możliwie najbardziej adekwatnego podejścia do badania stabilności systemów politycznych. Celem głównym tekstu jest więc operacjonalizacja pojęcia stabilności, a ponadto wskazanie możliwych konsekwencji badawczych przyjęcia proponowanej perspektywy.

Słowa kluczowe: stabilność polityczna, system polityczny, potencjał, analiza pojęciowa, elastyczność, zmiana polityczna

* Nicolaus Copernicus University, Faculty of Political Science and Security Studies.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of political stability is highly relevant within the remit of political science. The main reason is that it can serve to evaluate given political phenomena, while having at the same time a significant predictive power. Moreover, in empirical research on stability, it is possible to distinguish certain indices that can be used for heuristic purposes. The research armed with mathematical and statistical tools provides substantive knowledge about the state of affairs in particular political context. This in turn allows for carrying out comparative analysis and even for ranking certain political entities in regard to their respective stability (The World Bank, 2020). For example, not only can it help estimate political risk for international investment (Brink, 2016) but also it can impact various kinds of important reports such as, say, *Human Development Index*, which is strictly related to human rights issues (Khan et al., 2020). Rule of law and democratization are other fields of research calling for the studies on stability (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). All these examples mentioned above evince the relevance of the concept of political stability. This category should be recognized as a crucial one that is necessary in analysing political systems – their structure and functions as well as their functioning in given environment.

The separation of basic aspects of political stability is essential because by determining semantic assumptions and establishing its proper meaning on the ground of political theory one can obtain more adequate tools for analysing particular instances of political systems. Conceptualization always relies on available and actual knowledge and data but, on the other hand, it can also determine the shape of the cognition. Considerations that shall be presented in the following parts of this paper aim at arriving at the distinction between main aspects of the concept of stability and at pointing out the most adequate approach in the research on political stability. This theoretical proposition will be followed by the overview of conceptualizations that are presented in contemporary scholarly works. The selected theories revolve mainly around controversies and problems in defining political stability in particular and stability in general. Next, we will focus on two main aspects of stability: its phenomenon and its potential. As we argue, this distinction is crucial for properly comprehending the stability of political systems. We hypothesize at the beginning of this research that by focusing on the level of phenomenon one can miss the most important factors that play an extremely important role in the mechanism of stability of political

system. To reveal the proper structure of this mechanism one should take heed of the category of potentiality. The invocation of both *phenomenon* and *potential* makes a wide range of otherwise murky and unclear issues readily explicable. To bring those categories to a higher level of theoretical abstraction, one can say that they are related to yet another distinction between probability and causality. Both are essential in scientific explanation, but they touch different dimensions of reality. The main purpose of our investigations can be formulated as follows: to point out main aspects of political stability and establish an approach that can be useful in analysing instances and models of political systems and its elements. Although the character of this research is mainly of *a priori* nature, its empirical significance should not be underestimated.

THE CONCEPT OF STABILITY AND ITS ASPECTS

Before we shall proceed to analyse political stability, some remarks on stability in general are due. It begins with the most general distinction in comprehending stability and its relations with other concepts such as balance, equilibrium, etc. Before referring to contemporary literature on stability, we should assume two important things for the sake of consistency.

Firstly, there is a significant difference between stability understood as invariability and stability understood as flexibility. The criterion of this distinction is a category of change (Perlikowski, 2019). This issue is most apparent on the grounds of system analysis approach. According to this perspective the change is regarded as a signal from environment and as such it must be interpreted by the system. It means that the change can be transformed, adapted or refused but it cannot be ignored or avoided. Otherwise, the system can find itself in danger which can lead to its collapse. In this perspective the crucial term is *entropy* understood as the main concern of each existing system (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Wiener, 1989). A systematic approach by its very essence is able to capture many different phenomena by the same analytical tools. Its reductionist character can be perceived either as a virtue or as a vice. Nonetheless, it remains valuable, especially heuristically. Stability as flexibility is exposed in the interesting way by Berwick Sayers in his remarks on library catalogues and the concept of expansibility: “a notation which is so constructed that by the addition of a symbol or symbols any new subject may be inserted into any place in the classification without dislocating the sequence of either the notation or the classification itself”

(Sayers, 1947, p. 63). This way of approaching the concept of stability is significant for the systems wherein the change is an unavoidable element of functioning, and the existence of the system depends on its reaction towards the change.

Secondly, another distinction is in strict relation with the first one and it should be recognized as an extension thereof. Within the frame of philosophical tradition (Ficino, 2001, pp. 63, 71) one can find the distinction between stability of the homogenous object which has limited scope of movement and stability of the heterogenous object constituted by a set of elements that are in motion. In a word: this is the distinction of uniformed object and composed object. The stability as invariability is related to the former while the stability as flexibility is related to the latter. Although the distinction has a general character, it can be directly applied in the field of political science. Political systems of the unitary states with a homogenous ethnic structure achieve the stability in a different way and in a different form from the political systems characterized by plural forms of institutional dimension as well as of social one. These conceptual assumptions are reflected in the scholarly subject-matter literature that will be analysed below.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE STABILITY

A theoretical approach that is very helpful in clearing up the concept of stability is to be found in Sven Hansson and Gert Helgesson's theoretical approach. The authors distinguish three types of stability: a) constancy; b) robustness; c) resilience. As we can read in their article: "It turned out that all or nearly all of the references that we found to the concept of stability belong to three major categories, that we have chosen to call *constancy*, *robustness*, and *resilience*. By constancy is meant that some variable or aspect is not changed or is not changed much. By robustness is meant that some variable or aspect does not tend to change, or does not tend to change much, when exposed to certain disturbances. By resilience is meant that if a variable or aspect changes due to certain disturbances, then it returns to the original state or to some state close to it" (Hansson & Helgesson, 2003, p. 220). This typology reveals the multidimensional character of stability and underlines the fact that the crucial category for grasping stability is a change. It is precisely the reaction towards the change that determines the type of stability that could be used for the explanation of particular cases. Moreover, the constancy is presented as one of the several aspects of stability. Robustness and resilience are, on the other hand, the features of the object that is dynamic

and responsive. Examples of such an object can be found in a political system. Its main principle of functioning consists in transforming and managing changes and not in avoiding those changes by all means.

These authors also underline the difference between the concept of stability and the concept of equilibrium. Two main types of equilibrium can be pointed out: a) a strong view of an equilibrium; b) a weak view of an equilibrium. The former is related to a stable balance (that can react properly to disturbances) and the latter can be associated with the balance that needs not to be stable but can still be validly regarded as balance anyway (Hansson & Helgesson, 2003, p. 232). The best example of balance without stability is a pencil that can stand on the table and balancing on its top. In spite of temporarily maintained equilibrium, its fragility makes it unstable. Hence, stability is a broader concept than equilibrium and it assumes the conditions for equilibrium. This is the first sign that, generally speaking, stability exceeds beyond a particular phenomenon and is related to a broader context of the functioning of a given object.

Stable equilibrium is an effect of conjunction of constancy, robustness, and resilience (Hansson & Helgesson, 2003, p. 232). This concept can be also applied in political science where the political system with unstable equilibrium would be identified with the system that lasts in spite of the odds. The methods of maintaining the stability are adapted to occurrent circumstances and they can be changed in any single stage of political process. In this case, flexibility of political institutions plays a crucial role in the stabilizing process. Examples of this form of equilibrium are to be found in states *in statu nascendi*, e.g., the State of Israel (Smith, 2004), or in the states with expansionist appetite, e.g., Imperial Russia (Lieven, 2006).

On the other hand, equilibrium is stable within the system which is effective and responsive to the signals from the environment. This kind of system is of course flexible as well, but its institutions remain unchanged and methods of managing crisis are well-established. The way such a system operates is determined by customs, conventions and practices. It refers to systems with rich institutional tradition and matured political culture, e.g., the United Kingdom (Goldsworthy, 2001). In both cases, as has been shown above as well as in the entire approach proposed by Hansson and Helgesson, it becomes clear that reducing stability merely to the concept of constancy is unreasonable. Moreover, after distinguishing the main types of stability (such as invariability and flexibility), the next step of our analysis should be focused on investigating two main aspects of stability; that is, phenomenon and potential. Both aspects of

stability are to be found in each type of stability. Stability as invariability can be understood as phenomenon and potential as well as stability as flexibility. These two directions: invariability and flexibility can be depicted as two arrows of the same continuum that illustrates possible examples of political stability. Although it would be also a valuable tool for considering the main subject-matter, something is missing in this perspective. To provide a complete view on political stability one should inquire about the relation between stability as phenomenon and stability as potential.

STABILITY AS A PHENOMENON

Within the remit of political science, Claude Ake claims that it is improper to define stability exclusively in terms of invariability. Or, at the very least, he maintains that it is not the only incontrovertible way of analysing political phenomena that should be undertaken in political science research. He assumes that the structure of a political system is determined by the “pattern of the flow of political exchanges” (Ake, 1975, p. 273). These exchanges are associated with two types of deviances: a) adaptive deviances; b) non-adaptive deviances. The dynamic and frequency of its occurrence influences the shape of political stability. Irregular political exchanges manifest themselves in practising what is forbidden by the law and a regular political exchange consist in actions that are not explicitly forbidden by the law. In accordance with these assumptions, the definition of political stability assumes the following form: “If political stability is the regularity of the flow of political exchanges, then the level of political stability should be expressed quantitatively as a proportion: the ratio of regular exchanges to the totality of political exchanges” (Ake, 1975, p. 277). In other words, political stability does not need a structure that is immune to changes but rather an efficient mechanism of analysing a stream of changes that affects a political system or exerts an impact on its elements. Moreover, the author points out that the concept of stability affects not only the shape of our research or method but it can also determine the process of evaluation of particular cases or events in political sphere. Overemphasising the category of stability is a sign of a reductionist approach that manifests itself in defining politics through the interaction of elites (Ake, 1975, p. 283). Moreover, due to the identification of stability with invariability, one can push some relevant phenomena beyond the scope of analysis. These are, for example, the cases in which the absence

of changes is not equivalent with stability. Quite the contrary, instability does not imply the occurrence of any kind of political changes (Ake, 1975, p. 280). Although Ake's theory deserves a great attention and interest, some further investigations should be conducted for the sake of clarification and consistency. What is significant in presented approach, stability is reduced merely to the sphere of phenomena. This is a significant step in analysing stability of the political system but one should go beyond empirical data and enquire about the factors that are not so apparent. Ake's theory is enhanced by the research done by Leon Hurwitz.

The author develops a catalogue of the phenomena that can be regarded as salient features of stability. He distinguishes the following positions that are present in scholarly literature on the concept of stability: "(a) the absence of violence; (b) governmental longevity/duration; (c) the existence of a legitimate constitutional regime; (d) the absence of structural change; and (e) a multifaceted societal attribute" (Hurwitz, 1973, p. 449). In this enumeration, the author stresses the multidimensional character of political stability. Each of the elements mentioned above is indisputably a relevant element of the definition, but relations between them are unclear. That is the reason why we are facing some difficulties in comparative politics research. In spite of these odds, Hurwitz introduces the definition which is at the same time valid and coherent with intuitive predictions: "A stable polity is seen as a peaceful, law-abiding society where decision-making and politico-societal change are the result of institutionalized and eufunctional procedures and not the outcome of anomic processes which resolve issues through conflict and aggression" (Hurwitz, 1973, p. 449). When Hurwitz claims that stability of a polity "is seen as", he makes an explicit assertion that the main concept of our interest should be regarded as a phenomenon. It can be seen, and furthermore all the data that flows from this empirical action can help assess the political stability level. Main advantage of the theories introduced by Hurwitz and Ake is that they expand the scope of phenomena that can be regarded as relevant for political stability. However, they did not go beyond the phenomenal dimension. Analysing the political stability on the grounds of empirical research consist mainly in observing events that happen in political sphere as well as exposing its structure. This kind of knowledge can be gained by inductive empirical science, but as we argue, for the sake of the complete theoretical picture, the nonempirical element is needed. Before scrutinizing this element, we shall show another important theory that is focused on the structure of events.

Frank Tannenbaum compares two kinds of political entities in the context of political stability. On the one hand, there were monarchies of French and

Russia before the stage of revolutions. On the other hand, political systems of the United Kingdom and the United States have been juxtaposed. The author argues that the political power of the former was actually without foundations and while they were *merely seemingly* powerful; in actual fact, they were rather vulnerable. Stability of political systems of the second group was provided by the set of well-developed institutions especially at the local level. Based on these observations, Tannenbaum introduces an interesting distinction between the power and the strength. The former is structural while the latter has a functional character. Both are independent of each other. Moreover, they are not interconnected (Tannenbaum, 1960, p. 165). The author explains this distinction by presenting the following example: "A grown man is much stronger than a small boy, but his power over the boy is not equal to his strength. His power is limited by restraints over which he has no control – the opinion of his friends, the police, his own ethical and religious beliefs, his affections and his own bringing up" (Tannenbaum, 1960, p. 165). According to Tannenbaum, political stability should be associated with the category of phenomenon that has a given structure. In this sense the phenomenon is something more than the manifestation of an object or just a state of affair. It is always a kind of event that can be examined from the perspective of structure and function. Tannenbaum claims that the lack of stability, in the case under scrutiny, is caused by the centralization of political power. This process pushes local self-governance community out of politics. It is clearly defined that: "Political stability requires that the government derive its ultimate strength from the adhesion of these small societies which in their totality contain the nation itself. The little society makes possible a busy creative life for the individual. It involves him with his fellows in a common concern" (Tannenbaum, 1960, p. 176). Supremacy of political power over the political strength, which is structurally conditioned by the possibility of realizing the power, can lead to uncontrolled abuses. Tensions stemming from exercising political power regardless of the structure leads to the cases of instability. This kind of research is a perfect example of considering political stability at the level of phenomena enhanced by its structure. Tannenbaum introduces a profound perspective of political sciences analysis, which goes beyond purely empirical investigation. It makes his theory more applicable on different fields of comparative studies in political systems. We are dealing with an approach that gives us a hint of the proper direction of further investigations. Namely, it means that the political stability should be the object of the analysis of potential.

Researches described above incline us to formulate preliminary conclusions. On the one hand, stability is an analytical tool that can be used for explaining some political phenomena, comparing them and setting them in a given order. On the other hand, it can be also regarded as a particular state of affairs or the part of reality that constitutes the subject-matter of research. It is possible to conduct this research in two modes: a) a manifestation of the state of affairs; b) a structure of the phenomenon. It means that the stability is not devoted exclusively to past and present events but it can also handle the issues of estimating future actions, strictly in the sense of setting the potential of stability.

STABILITY AS A POTENTIAL

Eli Margolis goes beyond the perspective reduced to the phenomena. According to this approach, stability and instability can be presented as a potential. As the author points out: "Scholars can no more understand stability by just one of its manifestations than can doctors understand a disease by just one of its symptoms. Incidence can be a useful research tool, but it is a poor substitute for a concept" (Margolis, 2010, p. 327). Manifestations and phenomena belong to the accidental domain and as such they are unreliable and can lead to false conclusions. As Margolis points out: "An object can be judged as stable despite disruptions and unstable despite stasis. Protest no more makes the United States unstable, for example, than does a lack of protest make North Korea stable" (Margolis, 2010, p. 333). A scientific perspective is shifted from the stability of a state to political stability. This new approach is based on defining stability in terms of the distance between formal and informal aspects of politics. Compatibility of the two (formal roles and structures with informal roles and structures) is a main condition of political stability. It can be achieved by using four methods: a) coercion; b) reform; c) consent; d) change in authority. What can be derived from above assertions is that relations between these factors are the main object of interest, and through adding the informal section the scope of research is getting broader. The first method is related to the organs of authority; the second one is recognized as the crucial domain of stability: "[...] reform is resilience, or the formal's ability to adapt to change" (Margolis, 2010, p. 335); the third method is based on legitimacy; the fourth method consists in the replacement in authority and institutional ability to function. Hence, the advanced definition of stability is as follows: "Political stability is the health of authority, resilience, legitimacy, and replacement in a

political object” (Margolis, 2010, p. 336). And the next element that should be added to complete the definition is the opportunity. By this concept, Margolis understands three conditions: a) social; b) economic; c) environmental. All these elements put together can be used for estimating the potential of political stability. If all conditions are satisfied, then the potential of instability is attenuated.

One should be aware that the potential and causality are very different concepts. The distinction in question contributes to great progress in comprehending political stability, especially if we compare this theory to the others elaborated above. As Margolis claims: “Government endurance may be correlated with stability, but it does not cause it” (Margolis, 2010, p. 336). All actions undertaken for the purpose of maintaining stability should be focused on all five factors mentioned earlier; but first of all, they should be coordinated with the relations of the formal and informal spheres. Relying merely on the empirical level of phenomena leads to the misrecognition of the state of affairs.

By considering stability as a phenomenon one can commit a fallacy of perceiving political façade as stable while in the core of political sphere there could exist some factors that can bring about instability. It happens when informal structure that dominates in a given political system is not compatible with a formal structure. Hence, the endurance of a government can be threatened in every single moment and at any stage of functioning.

It is worth noticing that some similarities are to be found in one of the classical theories in political science, namely, Lipset’s studies on legitimization. In his work, there is a thread that illuminates the discrepancy between phenomena and potential. The context of this observation is provided in the considerations on legitimacy and effectiveness. As Lipset says: “[...] even when the political system is reasonably effective [...], the system’s legitimacy will remain in question. On the other hand, a breakdown of effectiveness, repeatedly or for a long period, will endanger even a legitimate system’s stability” (Lipset, 1960, p. 80). For the sake of presenting the consequences that follow from the cross-cutting categories of legitimacy with effectiveness the author presents the following matrix:

Table 1.

	Effectiveness	
Legitimacy	+	-
+	A	B
-	C	D

Source: Lipset, 1960, p. 81.

According to the matrix, we can see clearly that the gradation of stability goes in the descending order from A to D. To put it more precisely, those political systems that are marked by both legitimacy and effectiveness are most stable. Then, the cases designated by B, which are legitimated but not effective, are less stable than those designated by A. And at the same time, they are more stable than political systems designated by C, which are in turn effective but not legitimated. And the lowest level of stability is obviously identified with the case where neither effectiveness nor legitimacy are present (D). What is the most interesting element of this conception comes with the question about the relations holding between B and C. It is precisely at this moment that we can see clearly the relevance of phenomena paradigm and the one that is determined by the category of potential. This is how Lipset comments on this problem: "From a short-range point of view, a highly effective but illegitimate system, such as a well-governed colony, is more unstable than regimes which are relatively low in effectiveness and high in legitimacy. [...] On the other hand, prolonged effectiveness over a number of generations may give legitimacy to a political system" (Lipset, 1960, p. 82). Beyond any doubts, this is an argument for understanding the stability as a concept that can't be exhausted merely by focusing on phenomena. In Lipset's view, the whole attention is turned to the political legitimacy. But what is behind this concept can be defined exactly as an informal sphere of politics. In this respect, Lipset's theory is linked with Margolis' conception of stability as a result of intertwining formal and informal sections of political system (Margolis, 2010, p. 333). Moreover, an approach based on potential, not merely on empirical dimension allows us to formulate a thesis with *ceteris paribus* proviso. For example, as Lipset asserts: "[...] the chances for stable democracy are enhanced to the extent that groups and individuals have a number of crosscutting, politically relevant affiliations" (Lipset, 1960, pp. 88–89). This factor is perceived as one which brings legitimacy to a higher level and the legitimacy constitutes a main condition of stability. These assumptions allow the author to present a conclusion that is valid under the caveat of *ceteris paribus*: "If crosscutting bases of cleavage make a more vital democracy, it follows that, all other factors being constant, two-party systems are better than multi-party systems, that the election of officials on a territorial basis is preferable to proportional representation, and federalism is superior to a unitary state" (Lipset, 1960, p. 90). This kind of observations presents an array of possible ways of research. The main conclusion stemming from this approach is that informal elements or nonempirical (in the sense that they do not belong to the simple data gathered from the phenomena)

ought to constitute the proper content of political science branches which are revolving around the concept of stability.

The criticism of purely empirical research has a broad and rich tradition. The most significant author who introduced this topic to philosophy and science is David Hume. It is worthwhile to mention his works on stability for the sake of locating this approach at the more general level. His contribution to the science of political stability cannot be overstated. He was one of the first thinkers who suggested that in considering the stability one should go beyond the perspective of a political regime (Perlikowski, 2019). But within the frame of strictly political investigations, what he did was an attempt to employ *a priori* approach that would be able to put forward a substantive thesis with a high degree of certainty. Hence, in this conception some interesting axioms are to be found, e.g.: “It may therefore be pronounced as an universal axiom in politics, *That an hereditary prince, a nobility without vassals, and a people voting by their representatives, form the best Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Democracy*” (Hume, 1987, p. 18). This assertion has of course an *a priori* character and it is true under the *ceteris paribus* proviso. The main source of political stability according to Hume follows from the social practices and social institution. These are not at the front of political façade but they are crucial to maintain stability as such.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE STABILITY

The recapitulation of all threads elaborated above is to be done in this stage of our investigation. At the beginning we have done a conceptualization of stability as such, then two main aspects of stability have been distinguished. That is, a phenomenon and a potential. What exactly would be designated in particular analysis to a large extent depends on the shape of concepts. When confronted with such a multidimensional and ambiguous concept as political stability, one should be aware of the proper meaning that will be used for the purpose of analysis.

Phenomenological approach, as we can label the first one, is entirely focused on phenomena and events that are characteristic of the state of stability. In the context of political science this method manifests itself in the analysis of political processes, factors of changes, and decisions influencing the political reality. In this sense, one identifies a stable political system with the one which seems to be stable. Here is the case of supremacy of the effects over the causes.

Potentiology is the label for the second approach since its main concern is the potential of political stability. In a specific sense, it is an extension of phenomenological approach, because on the one hand, it is *a priori* by its nature, but on the other hand, it focuses on the state of affairs in the substantive and empirical contexts. In this sense, we can say that potentiology consists in analysing phenomena and the condition of possible changes thereof. It is worth noting a difference between potentiality and causality. The former means ability that can lead to actions, with actions being contingent upon external factors and circumstances. These factors have a different impact on the potentiality, because potentiality is not identical to the relation of causation. Probability is the domain of cause-effect chains and by manipulating factors and circumstances one can affect the degree of probability. This kind of research has a strictly predictive character and by using particular tools the precise result of prediction can be achieved. The analysis of potential have a much more modest scope and considering potential does not amount to forecasting future events. Although potentiology has limited capacities, the results that can be achieved are quite promising. Some conclusions that follow from this kind of investigations elucidate, for example, the relation between particular models of political systems. Under precisely determined conditions the claims about the stability can be formulated in a consistent way. One can enquire about the institutional model that will be more adequate and will be working better than others in the given context. Then the answer should have a form of that delivered by David Hume in his axiom mentioned above. What is merely sketched here has a deep philosophical background in debate over a reason and a cause in the context of the principle of sufficient reason (Schopenhauer, 2015).

At the end of these investigations, we should decide what is the proper usage of the concept of stability. In researching this issue, we should keep in mind two faces thereof. One is the stability of uniformed object and the second is the stability of a composite object. Although we made a sharp distinction between phenomenon and potential, the biggest value is that a holistic perspective was still achieved. It means that in searching for political stability one should not ignore either empirical elements or those related to the potential. The most adequate way of analysing political systems and their responsiveness consists in looking for stability as an effect of formal and informal structure being intertwined. What does it mean in practice? For example, it is impossible to achieve a complete picture of political order without knowing about the workings of informal sections in political systems. It seems to be hard for a researcher

to gain knowledge about these non-official elements, but there are also other ways of exploring the informal. Informality is also relatable to such things as constitutional conventions, social practices, public opinion, social consciousness, etc. The key to understanding political stability lies in the relation between these above-enumerated examples of informal sphere with official institutions. The direction of analysis can be twofold: a) methods of influencing on official institutions by informal subjects; b) modes of activity of formal institutions in the informal sphere. Both ways of researching can significantly contribute to comprehending potential of political stability.

CONCLUSIONS

Political stability is a concept that demands a clear and adequate theoretical background. In the previous parts of this paper few attempts at this much-needed clarification have been made. There is a significant distinction between perceiving stability as invariability and stability as flexibility. The relations between the categories of equilibrium, balance, and stability are important for delivering a proper description of given cases. Moreover, the holistic view on stability consists in heeding the sphere of phenomena and the sphere of potential. It can be achieved by considering the connections between formal and informal sections of political system, which was presented in detail in the previous section.

There are two points that matter for the perspective of further investigations, but at this stage these will be only briefly mentioned due to the fact they are over and above the purpose stated at the beginning of the paper. Firstly, there is a need for a clear definition of the process of stabilizing. What kind of actions could designate a stabilizing process? Stability, as it was elaborated above, is a state of being. A definition of stabilizing should focus on stability as a particular activity. Secondly, the object and the subject of stability should be determined. These are the questions: Who can be an agent (subject) of stabilizing process? What is an object of that process? Or in other word: What can be stabilized? These points together with general assertions made within the frame of this paper can constitute a subject-matter of further research.

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