

Tracing Authoritarian Learning in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine

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SSEES

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I, Stephen Hall confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

The thesis addresses how authoritarian regimes remain in power, and the processes of learning they engage in, using the case studies of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. I investigate six propositions, arguing that firstly, authoritarian learning differs from democratic learning because authoritarian regimes are concerned principally with survival and so learn best practices to ensure that they possess a full palette of survival practices. Secondly, there is a flattened learning hierarchy or network between authoritarian regimes. Thirdly, internal networks are important for learning among authoritarian regimes. Fourthly, success and failure are equally important for authoritarian learning. Fifthly, internal examples are as relevant to authoritarian learning as external examples. Sixthly, authoritarian regimes use a full palette of survival practices than just relying on repression.

Therefore, authoritarian regimes are more likely to be concerned than democratic regimes about survival, and so they develop a full palette of survival practices. The thesis argues that learning hierarchies are flattened. Success and failure are as important to authoritarian learning as each other, with authoritarian regimes drawing on both successful and failed examples. Similarly, internal sources of learning are as relevant to understanding authoritarian learning as external examples. Lastly, authoritarian regimes have a full palette of survival strategies than just relying on repression.

Analysis of the four cases studies helps better understand how authoritarian regimes learn to retain control. Often learning comes from internal sources and this is particularly the case in Moldova and Ukraine. By analysing authoritarian learning in detail I expand existing literature and increase understanding of how authoritarian regimes survive.

Impact Statement

There are a number of relevant areas of impact in this thesis. Within academia, there are a number of areas where this thesis improves understanding. Firstly, by providing a framework of authoritarian learning, incorporating learning theories into the outline of authoritarian learning depicted here the thesis improves existing literature which has so far failed to ground authoritarian learning in existing learning theories. Secondly, the thesis provides a similar outline for democratic learning with existing literature on democratic learning failing to base it in the theoretical literature. Thirdly, by ascertaining that the aims of authoritarian and democratic learning are distinct from one another the thesis increases understanding on authoritarian learning. Fourthly, existing literature on the subject has to a great extent concentrated on state-to-state relations and learning from failure. But, as the thesis shows authoritarian regimes learn from domestic examples as much as from external sources. Fifthly, networks of authoritarian learning are less hierarchical than previously envisioned, with different and practices shared by a multitude of states, rather than one key actor.

The benefits of the thesis to areas outside of academia are primarily for policymakers at the national and regional level to counter the survival of authoritarian regimes. By increasing understanding of how authoritarian regimes learn governments can improve public policy design to aid in countering the growth of authoritarian regimes and providing better democratisation practices. With increasing pushback by authoritarian regimes to existing efforts at democratisation, understanding how authoritarian regimes learn and survive helps the creation of new practices to counter this pushback and survival. With rollback in full swing, some authoritarian regimes are becoming role models for others,

leading to the possibility that established international norms and structures will be threatened.

Authoritarian regimes are learning from one another and from domestic examples to hold onto power, and it is possible that in the future such cooperation will occur. By understanding how authoritarian regimes learn and what they learn from provides a clear analysis for the division for countering this rise. The rise of authoritarian regimes and understanding the means of this rise and their survival is likely to have an impact at the national and international levels for decades to come.

The impact of this thesis is likely to reach the academic community. I have used ideas from the thesis and developed them for publication in scholarly journals and the wider thesis is likely to have a greater impact in the academic world. It is also likely to serve as the basis for work with the mainstream media and engaging with policymakers and could help influence government ministers in the near future.

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List of Abbreviations

AEI	Alliance for European Integration (Moldova)
BISS	Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies
BPP	Bloc Petro Poroshenko
BRSM	Belaruski Respublikanskiy Sayuz Moladzi (Belarusian Republican Youth Union)
CCECC	Centre for Combating Economic Crimes and Corruption (Moldova)
CHS	Council of Heads of State
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CMIA	Council of Ministers of Internal Affairs
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPU	Communist Party of Ukraine
CSASS	Council of Security Authorities and Special Services
CSS	Supreme Security Council (Moldova)
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
DDoS	Distributed Denial of Service
DPR	Donetsk People's Republic
EADB	Eurasian Development Bank
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union

EC	European Community
EMP	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
FSB	Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (Russian Security Service)
IAC	Information Analytical Centre (Belarus)
ICU	Investment Capital Ukraine
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISP	Internet Service Provider
KDB	Kamitet Dzyarzhaunay Byaspieki (Belarusian State Security Agency)
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (State Security Committee ((Soviet Union))
KPRF	Communist Party of the Russian Federation
KRO	Congress of Russian Communities
LDPR	Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
LPR	Luhansk People's Republic
NABU	National Anti-Corruption Bureau
NAPC	National Agency for Preventing Corruption (Ukraine)

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OAC	Operational Analytical Centre (Belarus)
OMON	Ortyad Mobilny Osobogo Naznacheniya (Russia)
ONF	All-Russian People's Front
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PCRM	Communist Reformist Party (Moldova – clone of the PCRM)
PCRM	Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova
PDM	Democratic Party of Moldova
PiS	Law and Justice (Poland)
PLDM	Party of Liberal Democrats of Moldova
PPEM	European People's Party of Moldova
PSRM	Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova
RISI	Russian Institute for Strategic Studies
SBU	Sluzhba Bezpeki Ukraini (Ukrainian Security Service)
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SDP	Social-Democratic Party (Romania)
SORM	System for Operative Investigative Activities
TsPK	Anti-Corruption Centre (Ukraine)

UN	United Nations
VTsIOM	Russian Public Opinion Research Centre
ZPB	Związek Polaków na Białorusi (Union of Poles in Belarus)

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Preface

On a cold day in 2015, protesters congregated near Hermitage Park in Moscow's Tverskoiy District. They were not opposition demonstrators, but from pro-Kremlin groups, like the All-Russian International Youth Union, Cossack groups and pro-Kremlin opposition political parties like the illiberal Liberal Democrats. In a show of strength, they marched through central Moscow.

These groups united under the Anti-Maidan banner. Established by the Kremlin, Anti-Maidan incorporates many pro-Kremlin organisations and its very name provides its *raison d'être*, to counter a potential Euromaidan on Moscow's streets. Anti-Maidan highlights a clear example of Kremlin learning.

The Anti-Maidan case emphasises the thesis's aim. I am concerned here with how authoritarian regimes learn to consolidate and maintain power. I investigate whether and how authoritarian regimes learn, by analysing Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine as all four retain authoritarian characteristics. I question current literature which misses a key aspect of political learning, the authoritarian piece. With less than 10% of the world's population living in full democracies and over a third residing in fully authoritarian regimes, understanding how these regimes operate and practices used to retain power offers ways to frustrate the growth of pseudo-democracies and counteract democratic backsliders.

For authoritarian regimes, learning and adaptation are important to survive. I am less interested here with the mimicry across the post-Soviet space that has occurred regarding legislation and political structures – although that is interesting – but rather how authoritarian regimes learn to aid their survival. Direct interaction is not required to induce

learning as diffusion, emulation and adaptation are important for understanding authoritarian learning. Regimes do not just learn from each other, but learn from domestic examples. The failure of authoritarian regimes can be traced as it often results in revolution and violence, which is easy to see. However, to truly understand authoritarian learning, learning from success is important too.

Retrieving information from authoritarian regimes is difficult. The authoritarian black box remains shut and information hidden behind access codes. Researchers have difficulty understanding the inner workings of authoritarian regimes and their learning capabilities. This makes their study complicated but inestimably rewarding when information is found.

I have been fascinated by the idea of authoritarian learning since I was told that the Colour Revolutions and democratic diffusion were outdated and authoritarian diffusion was increasingly relevant. Since then my academic career has assessed authoritarian learning, especially in the post-Soviet region. Following the paper trail of learning has been hard and highlighting authoritarian learning has proven convoluted.

When I began this research I naïvely imagined an authoritarian school where Vladimir Putin, Nursultan Nazarbaev and Alyaksandr Lukashenka were either star pupils or teachers. It turned out the school analogy was incorrect. Rather the parallel of mad scientists in laboratories conducting experiments and occasionally sharing notes is more appropriate. In authoritarian learning there is interaction, but diffusion, adaptation and emulation are as important if not more so. Experimentation is also a valuable tool.

My naivety surfaced again during my first field trip. I assumed the country where interviewees would require anonymity would be Belarus as it is often considered the last European dictatorship, which would make people wary of speaking to a Western researcher. However, it was in Moldova where interviewees were cautious. As one friend explained “he has ears everywhere,” a reference to oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc, who until 2019 controlled Moldova from behind the scenes. This explanation from my friend explained why I had more requests for anonymity among Moldovan interviewees than anywhere else.

Authoritarian learning is a fact. As the examples of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine emphasise, it is different to its democratic counterpart. For instance, authoritarian regimes revert to repression more easily; rely on networks to a far greater extent with only limited central control; learn from success and failure; and internal and external examples. While failure compels other authoritarian regimes to learn – as they are concerned with their survival and authoritarian breakdown forces others to quickly adapt – success is relevant as other regimes want to emulate a winning model.

Authoritarian learning is concealed. It is easier to trace learning in democratic regimes. They are more open, with elites, advisers and policymakers meeting to discuss pressing issues. Authoritarian learning, by contrast, is hidden, although it is possible to see the results of learning after the fact.

Authoritarian learning focuses on hard power. Again these regimes are adept at concealing it, while also being proficient in the many methods of deploying repression. Democracies normally use persuasion rather than coercion. Authoritarian regimes – concerned with challenges to their rule – resort to harder methods to keep power. This does not mean outright repression, the authoritarian coercive palette is more subtle. This points

to learning as these regimes adapt to an environment where repression leads to condemnation from the international community. While democrats want to remain in power, a democratic system allows them to get elected repeatedly and enjoy power again. In an authoritarian system once power is lost it is often terminal, making retaining power imperative.

There are a number of reasons why this thesis is relevant and timely. The literature on authoritarianism lags behind that of democratisation. By tracing four post-Soviet cases I investigate learning processes and convergence. I define convergence as the merging of distinct attributes. The post-Soviet region has many authoritarian regimes, providing researchers with an opportunity to enhance their understanding of authoritarian learning and corroborating the assumption that learning is important for authoritarian survival.

As the number of authoritarian regimes increases, understanding how they learn to keep control is important. If authoritarian regimes share ideas, it helps them consolidate power quickly making democratisation harder as authoritarian regimes become impervious to these efforts. The growing authoritarian challenge could affect processes like globalisation or democratisation as the only-game-in-town, threatening, reinterpreting, or even reversing these trends. The authoritarian challenge may shape the world and lead to a less harmonious global order.

By investigating learning and consolidation practices I expand existing authoritarian learning literature. Currently, the literature on authoritarian learning is vague with a limited basis in learning theory. By establishing a theory of authoritarian learning – even if similar to

democratic learning – the authoritarian learning literature will be significantly improved¹.

Existing literature sees learning as occurring because states B, C and D copy state A. Through an in-depth analysis I significantly contribute to existing literature and place authoritarian learning in the wider learning literature.

The four case studies of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine provide excellent examples for understanding authoritarian learning and understanding that authoritarian learning is a wider concept than the existing literature provides for. The investigation of authoritarian learning in the four case studies runs from 2000 to February 2019. 2000 was chosen as it is the start of Putin's first presidency and was also a period when Ukrainian President, Leonid Kuchma began to become more authoritarian. In 2001, the Communist Party of Moldova (PCRM), under President Voronin came to power and Voronin as president began to consolidate power. Lukashenka in Belarus also fully consolidated power by the early 2000s. Therefore, 2000 seemed the most appropriate year to begin analysis. Early 2019 was chosen as the cut-off date as this is when the thesis was finished.

¹ Conversation between the author, Professor Thomas Ambrosio and Professor Andrew Wilson at a workshop at Aarhus University on Authoritarian stability and breakdown in Russia and its neighbour countries, 02/12/2016, Aarhus. Author has spoken with Professor Ambrosio on this topic on Skype numerous times.

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Chapter One: Introduction – A Contextual Overview

So far...democracies have not taken seriously the authoritarian challenge².

Between 2003 and 2005 three so-called revolutions occurred in the post-Soviet region, in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005). These alarmed other post-Soviet authoritarian regimes. The first successful effort at countering a Colour Revolution was Uzbekistan in May 2005. President Islom Karimov³, ordered the security services to shoot protesters, during the Andijon demonstrations, making him “a hero” to Russian President Vladimir Putin as the first leader to halt a Colour Revolution (Zygar, 2016: 107). Uzbekistan was fortunate that Western governments did not receive information about the massacre until after the demonstrations were crushed (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 45). This lack of linkage between Western states and Uzbekistan limited Western leverage to sanction the regime. For other post-Soviet authoritarian regimes with closer ties to the West, such violence was impossible to replicate.

An example of less violence occurred in Belarus, as the fall of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia in the 2000 Bulldozer Revolution forced the Belarusian authorities to instigate tactics to counter such possible events in Minsk (Hall, S, 2017b). In the 2000s, Belarus was a testing-ground for devising authoritarian practices (Wilson, 2011a: 209).

In 2006, after the presidential elections about 10,000 protesters erected tents in central Minsk (Korosteleva, E, 2012: 39). President Lukashenka expecting protests had moved security units to Minsk learning from the 2001 presidential elections and how other

² Diamond et al. 2016: 17.

³ I use the Uzbek spelling, Islom, rather than the Russian spelling, Islam.

regimes had failed to increase security near the capital (Korosteleva, E, 2012: 45). The Belarusian State Security Services (KDB)⁴ compiled a dossier on previous Colour Revolutions and the 2001 Belarusian protests, allowing the regime to devise anti-protest tactics (Korosteleva, E, 2012: 45). The document's focus was on the 2004 Orange Revolution with information compiled by Belarusian embassy staff in Kyiv⁵.

This learning and adaptation occurred also in 2010. In 2006, the Belarusian authorities allowed protesters to set-up tents, reminiscent of the 2004 Orange Revolution in Kyiv, making it difficult for the security services to remove demonstrators, resulting in the use of force⁶. However, during the 2010 protests, the security forces quickly arrested protesters (Padhol and Marples, 2011: 15). The speed and force of the crackdown was a direct lesson from the 2006 failure of allowing protests to build⁷.

The Belarusian example emphasises how authoritarian regimes adapt and learn from previous events, with the Belarusian regime learning from the fall of Milošević in 2001 and then adapting to changing circumstances in 2006 and 2010. The Belarusian example shows that learning encompasses success and failure. Learning is not just a Belarusian phenomenon, Gel'man (2015c: 6) argued that the Kremlin⁸ during the 2011-2012 protests copied Belarusian practices from the 2010 demonstrations. I (2017b) contended that the

⁴ To differentiate the Belarusian security services from its Soviet namesake I use the Belarusian transliteration of *Kamitet Dzyarzhavnay Byaspieki* (KDB).

⁵ Three interlocutors Valery Kavaleuski, Aliaksandr Filipau and Balázs Jarábik argued that staff from most embassies in Kyiv would be at the Maidan ascertaining what was occurring and that it is certain Belarusian embassy staff were there.

⁶ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016.

⁷ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016; Interview with David R Marples – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

⁸ I use the term the Kremlin to refer to the Russian regime.

Kremlin learnt from Belarus's preventive counter-revolution. There is evidence that authoritarian regimes learn. Here I draw out questions like how they learn, why they learn and what they learn, and what constitutes authoritarian learning?

How authoritarian regimes learn from external and internal experience has only received limited investigation. In the 1990s, much research assumed that democratisation would become the political system of most – if not all – states. But the Afghan and Iraq wars – coupled with the resurgence of international terrorism – led to decreasing democracy promotion globally allowing “democracy-inhibiting powers” to increase (Tolstrup, 2014: 2).

Authoritarian regimes have found ways to protect themselves (Schedler, 2002a; Carothers, 2006; Gershman and Allen, 2006; Krastev, 2006), in some cases acting with confidence and challenging the West (Diamond, 2008; Gat, 2008). Therefore, it is not only relevant to study these regimes but to understand their survival. Much authoritarian endurance is due to dialogue, emulation, copying and learning. If democracy is no longer resurgent and authoritarian regimes are collaborating to counter democratic norms (Cooley, 2013; 2015; Diamond et al. 2016: 4; Koehler et al. 2016) then studying authoritarian persistence and learning is crucial to account for this endurance.

Of course, some authoritarian states retain paternalistic cultures, which is particularly the case in the post-Soviet region. For example, the population waits for the state to act, wanting strong and competent government. This might be nostalgia, but post-Soviet societies are more accepting of certain practices and the public acquiesces in living in authoritarian regimes because these provide strong and stable government⁹. To better

⁹ Interview with Tadeusz Iwański – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw; Interview with Kamil Całus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

analyse authoritarian learning I use four case studies from the post-Soviet region: Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. I assess why each is chosen later, but paternalism and stability remain strong in all four states. Public opinion surveys in the four case studies show that the public wants a strong leader and stability. The Belarusian Nezavisimyi Institut Sotsial'no-Ekonomicheskikh i Politicheskikh Issledovaniy¹⁰ (2016) showed that 65.5% of Belarusians agreed that Belarus was “a nook of stability,” due to the policies of Lukashenka. The Moldovan Institutul de Politici Publice (2018) highlighted that 71% of Moldovans wanted stability and a strong leader¹¹. The Russian Levada Tsentr¹² (2016) found that 35% of Russians wanted a strong hand at all times and a further 37% felt it necessary at certain times to have all power in one set of hands. Therefore, 72% want a strong leader. The Ukrainian Tsentr Razumkova¹³ (2018) found that 55% of Ukrainians wanted stability, although this can be attributed to the ongoing conflict. A 2018 poll, by the Rating-Group, found that 70% wanted stability and were willing “to sacrifice their rights and freedoms” (Semeniuk, 2018). In Belarus, Moldova and Russia a majority want stability and a strong leader. By contrast, Ukrainians want stability, but not necessarily a strong leader. This is justification for the incumbent regimes to keep power as stability trumps change.

This paternal notion is summed up by a 2017 Levada poll, where 18% of Russians stipulated that at the 2018 presidential election they would vote for Kremlin candidate, Andrei Semyenov. A further 15% stated they would consider voting for him and 3% claimed they had heard of him (Levada Tsentr, 2017). The Levada Centre created Semyenov to

¹⁰ The Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies in English.

¹¹ The Institute of Public Policy in English.

¹² The Levada Centre in English.

¹³ The Razumkov Centre in English.

ascertain whether people were taking an interest in the election. It could be that respondents gave an answer they thought the pollsters wanted, or are attuned to knowing what the correct response should be. But, the example highlights the popular demand for a paternal figure.

While society in the four cases still mostly accepts stability and a strong leader – an argument made by the regimes to claim they are democratic and merely following public wishes – I want to explain how regimes learn, and investigate authoritarian practices existing in each regime. Therefore, I analyse the regime, not the public.

This chapter is a contextual overview providing perspective to what follows in the next chapters. I define authoritarianism, before investigating why the cases were selected. Then I analyse Freedom House data and evidence that the four cases studies at least have periods of attempted authoritarian consolidation. This contextual analysis clearly shows that Belarus and Russia are electoral authoritarian regimes and Moldova and Ukraine are competitive authoritarian regimes. The Belarusian and Russian regimes – even as established authoritarian regimes – engage in learning to aid survival and the Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes have periods where regimes attempt to consolidate power, likely looking to more established regimes and domestic examples to devise best practices to keep power. An explanation of what constitutes authoritarian learning follows, and then a plan for the other chapters.

1.1. Defining Authoritarianism

To understand authoritarian learning it is vital to define authoritarianism, and how it includes electoral and competitive authoritarian regimes. Linz (1964: 297) defined authoritarianism as:

“political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones”.

Casper (1995: 40-50) expanded Linz’s definition, arguing that authoritarian regimes have limited political pluralism; constrain institutions; emphasise that only the regime can maintain stability and protect society from the ‘other’; real or potential opposition is quickly hindered, and regime powers are ill-defined so its authority can be reinterpreted whenever necessary. Glasius et al (2018: 7) perceive authoritarian regimes as not only not having free and fair elections, but violating “freedom of expression, access to information and freedom of association.” All three definitions clearly show how authoritarian regimes function with the need to maintain authority at all costs, while lacking political pluralism controlling institutions and denying rule of law and protection of human rights.

As the Freedom House data shows the four case studies are different from one another, with Belarus and Russia being established authoritarian regimes, whereas Moldova and Ukraine are competitive authoritarian regimes. Unlike established, or electoral, authoritarian regimes where elections are mere window-dressing (Schedler, 2002a), competitive authoritarian regimes hold elections where the opposition has a strong chance of winning, but the incumbent regime does its utmost to control elections (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 5). All three definitions of authoritarianism emphasise that authoritarian regimes try to control elections and state structures while denying freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom to gather. Of course, equating all four case studies as

similarly authoritarian is inaccurate. The Belarusian and Russian authorities have exerted greater control over elections and state institutions while restricting alternatives.

By contrast, Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes compete for power and unlike, for instance, Russian presidents who have all been anointed; Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes do lose power. The 2019 electoral defeat of Petro Poroshenko to Volodymyr Zelens'kyi in Ukraine and the sudden political demise of the Moldovan puppeteer, Vladimir Plahotniuc, are testament to the potential for Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes to lose power. The July 2019 parliamentary election removed many of the so-called old guard from parliament, providing Zelens'kyi and his political party, Servant of the People, with the opportunity to instigate reform (Sukhov, 2019a). However, these states retain authoritarian characteristics.

For instance, Zelens'kyi retains a close association with oligarch Ihor Kolomois'kyi, and it remains to be seen whether Zelens'kyi is independent of Kolomois'kyi (Iwański, 2019). Other instances of the possibility that Zelens'kyi – like other earlier Ukrainian presidents – is consolidating power can be seen with the appointment of Andriy Bohdan as Head of the Office of the President in 2019 after a brief stint as Head of the Presidential Administration. Bohdan worked closely with former President Yanukovich and after Yanukovich fled he worked for Kolomois'kyi (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2019b; 2019a). Similarly, two proposed candidates for Zelens'kyi's new political party Servant of the People, Andriy Kholodov and Volodymyr Kozak, have close ties to pro-Russian groups, and other candidates are close to Kolomois'kyi and Interior Minister Arsen Avakov (Grytsenko, 2019). Zelens'kyi and his political party Servant of the People have near complete power controlling the presidency and parliament, providing the potential for consolidation and Kolomois'kyi's influence appears to be growing with Valeria Gontareva who began the privatisation of

Kolomois'kyi's PrivatBank under Poroshenko was involved in a hit-and-run in London and Oleksander Danilyuk was sacked due to criticism of Kolomois'kyi (Sorokin, 2019b). There is also a possible agreement between former Yanukovich aide, Andrei Portnov and Zelens'kyi for Portnov to instigate charges against Poroshenko and Poroshenko allies like Vitaliy Klichko, allowing Zelens'kyi to distance himself from these allegations (Goncharenko, 2019). While, many of the so-called old guard were removed from parliament at the 2019 parliamentary elections, there are politicians with ties to the past across the political spectrum, and the Opposition Bloc – For Life coalition, a pro-Russian party, is now the main opposition (Sukhov, 2019a).

While Plahotniuc has fled Moldova, his allies remain deeply embedded in state structures, and part of the new governing coalition – the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) – retains close ties to Plahotniuc (Gherasimov, 2019; Shupak, 2019). Therefore, all four case studies fit the definition of authoritarianism, but there are significant differences between them in how authoritarian they are.

1.2. Case Choice

Although analysed in-depth in chapter three, I explain why the four cases were chosen. Belarus and Russia are electoral authoritarian regimes. By contrast, Moldova and Ukraine are competitive authoritarian regimes. The four cases represent a broad selection on the authoritarian-democracy spectrum.

The Belarusian and Russian regimes are established authoritarian regimes, but they constantly adapt and learn best practices to keep power. While Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes are by no means established authoritarian regimes they have periods of attempted authoritarian consolidation. Authoritarian learning is principally about survival, and regimes

from all four case studies are concerned with maintaining their power. Authoritarian learning is about attempting to preserve the regime in power and consolidate that power. However on the whole, authoritarian regimes still have to make it appear that there is competition as viable elections provide some domestic and international legitimacy. Too much control leads to the opposition boycotting elections, which reduces regime capacity to claim the right to rule. This is the case in Belarus, where the regime has stopped the opposition from competing to such an extent that opposition parties decided to boycott, for instance, the 2012 parliamentary elections (Petrovskaya, 2012). While, Belarusian opposition political parties failed to unite over a boycott in 2012 (Petrovskaya, 2012) and again later in 2016 (Korovenkova, 2016), the lack of competition in elections has led to the Belarusian regime to be labelled as a dictatorship¹⁴, and the need to change this image resulted in nominally competitive elections in 2015 and 2016 where the regime provided nominal competition to placate Western observers to highlight that Lukashenka was willing to allow competition¹⁵. While, regimes are principally concerned with their survival, and those that are competitive authoritarian regimes – like Moldova and Ukraine – are looking to survive, authoritarian regimes still need to provide a modicum of competition. This can be done by having a systemic opposition, or allowing the non-systemic opposition to compete in a limited capacity. The balance of survival and legitimacy is a crucial equilibrium in authoritarian regimes, and learning is an important procedure for authoritarian regimes to find the appropriate balance.

¹⁴ Nazarenka, Artsiom – Lecturer at the Belarusian State University (BSU), 07/12/2016, Minsk.

¹⁵ Interview with Yauheni Preiherman – Head of the Minsk Tack II Initiative and Head of the Liberal Club in Minsk, 18/08/2016, Coventry.

In Moldova, the political elites change ideological allegiance when there is a change of power. For example, Plahotniuc was a close associate of Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) president Vladimir Voronin, before switching allegiance to the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) as the PCRM regime collapsed in 2009¹⁶. Current Moldovan president, Igor Dodon, portrays himself now as Putin's greatest supporter, but as Minister of Economy and Trade under the PCRM in 2009 "he advocated that Moldova sign an association agreement with the European Union," although by 2019 he promised to scrap the association agreement with the European Union (EU) should the PSRM win a majority in the 2019 parliamentary elections (Orenstein, 2019: 105). Moldovan political elites remain in power during different regimes, merely oscillating in how much power they hold¹⁷. This leads to elite competition for more power, making Moldovan regimes weak, contributing to their collapse. Therefore, it is difficult for any group to consolidate power.

Unlike Moldova, Ukraine visibly changes governments through revolution, seen with the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2013-2014 Euromaidan. The 2009 protests in Moldova only indirectly led to a change of government, but Ukrainian protests do lead to change. However, like Moldova, Ukrainian political elites jockey for position, but largely remain in power under different regimes. For instance, by 2016 there was a counter-revolution underway as the oligarchs re-established their power after the Euromaidan (de Borja Lasheras, 2016). Yet, it remains difficult for any Ukrainian government to consolidate power. Even though former President Poroshenko tried to restrict alternatives to his 2019 re-election, once it became likely Zelen'skyi would win, Poroshenko's support dried up and

¹⁶ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 20/04/2017.

¹⁷ Interview with Kamil Catus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

his administration could not achieve his re-election. As mentioned, it is uncertain whether Zelens'kyi is independent, or a front for oligarchic interests (Iwański, 2019), emphasising the potential for the whole process to continue.

The four cases provide a broad picture of how learning helps maintain power in Belarus and Russia, and accounts for attempts at consolidation in Moldova and Ukraine. Using the Democracy Scores from Freedom House I show that there are periods of attempted consolidation, which in part can be attributed to learning. All four cases help explain authoritarian learning, as they learn from internal and external sources; and from successes and failure, which can be traced to show where learning occurs.

1.3. Case Selection as Authoritarian Regimes?

Having analysed why the four case studies were selected I investigate Freedom House data, showing that all four regimes can be classified as adjectival authoritarian regimes. The Freedom House data shows that the Belarusian and Russian regimes became more authoritarian over time, with the Kremlin reaching the same level of authoritarianism as the Belarusian regime in 2018. Similarly, the data shows that there are periods of attempted consolidation in Moldova and Ukraine. However, before analysing the data, I address possible ramifications of using the data.

For some, Freedom House arbitrarily places states in categories unrepresentative of reality (Armstrong, 2011: 661-662). The variables do not fit understandings of democracy (Bollen and Paxton, 2000: 79) as the family size variable has equal weight as the free elections category, likely affecting measurement (Denk, 2013: 3462-3463). The data tries to quantify qualitative sources (Coppedge and Gerring, 2011: 249). States with different political and cultural systems often score the same. The coding system for compiling final

scores is vague, and the core variables of political rights and civil liberties are imprecise and open to misinterpretation (Coppedge and Gerring, 2011: 250-251). Sometimes questions require two answers making it difficult for evaluators to respond to each equally (Schneider, 2014). There are issues with reliability, and replication is difficult with data accepted on trust (Giannone, 2010: 69; Munck and Verkuilen, 2002: 21).

But Freedom House's criteria are "the most conceptually similar to the definition of democracy" (Bollen and Paxton, 2000: 61). Although Freedom House cannot differentiate nuances, it gives comprehensive "spatial and temporal coverage" (Pernstein et al. 2010: 428). The data is broad allowing for state specificity (Schneider, 2014).

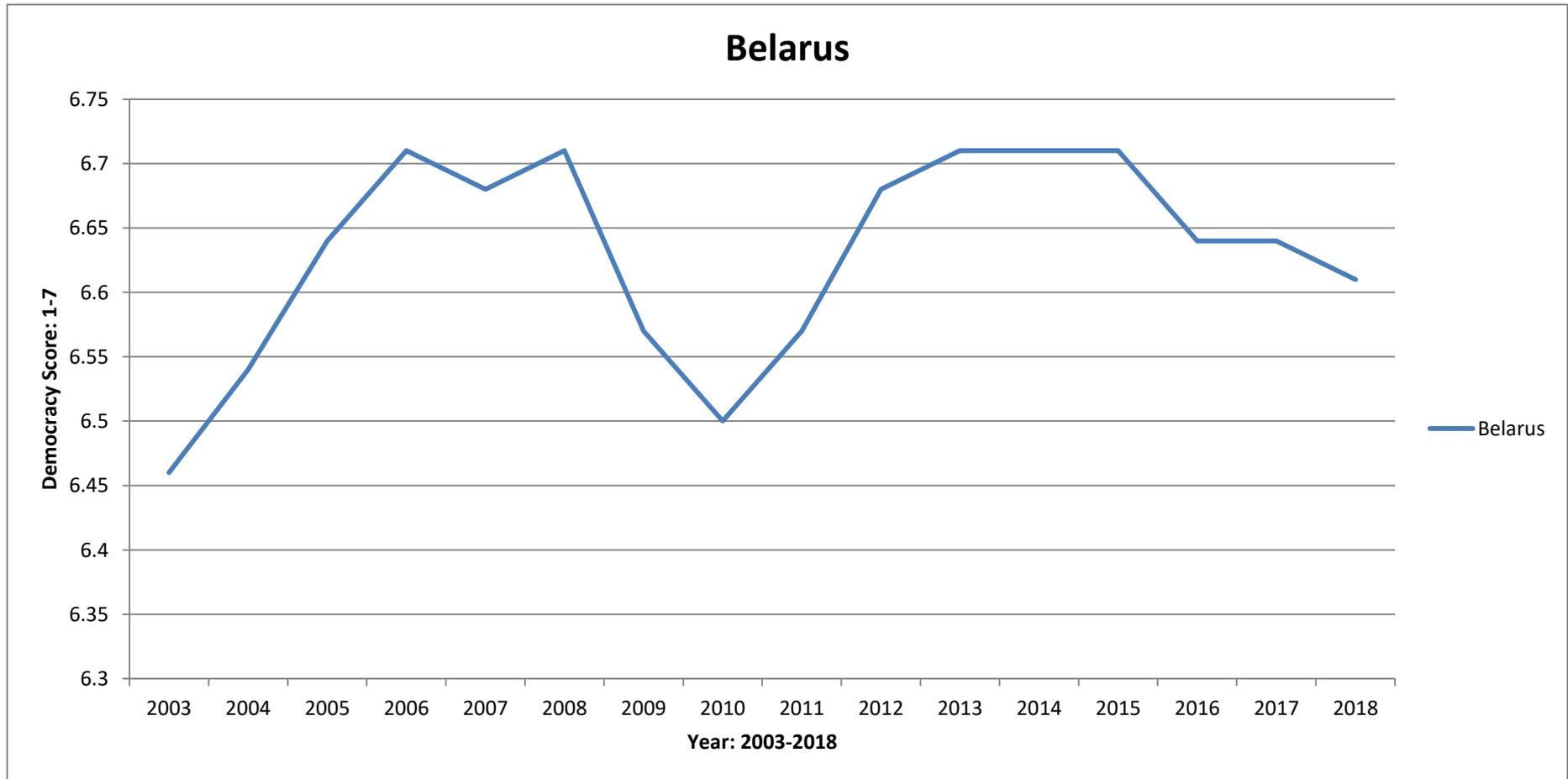
There are alleged ideological concerns with Freedom House. It gets 80% of its budget from the American government, State Department, USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy. Some researchers see it as "an instrument of the U.S. government" (Bigwood, 2012: 63). For others, it is the West in general that uses it to advance democracy, capitalism and liberalism in other states (Giannone, 2010: 70). For some, using Freedom House data is tantamount to accepting neo-liberal values (Giannone, 2010: 90-91). Most ideological criticism of Freedom House comes from researchers with a left-wing bent. Other researchers argue the data is tainted as categories are devised by people with a Western background (Giannone, 2014: 512-513; Tsygankov and Parker, 2015: 84). But any criticism is tainted as authoritarians use the same justifications to cover their democratic failings (Schneider, 2014).

But is there ideological bias? Bollen (1993) and Bollen and Paxton (2000) argue there is a bias towards American allies. But Steiner (2012, 2016) analysed Freedom in the World since it began in 1973, showing that American allies, like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia,

do badly compared with non-American aligned countries. Any pro-American ally bias has diminished as the methodology has become more rigorous.

While there are potentially methodological and ideological weaknesses, Freedom House datasets best represent scoring for democracy. The dataset used is the Nations in Transit, beginning in 2003. It is scored from 1 to 7. A consolidated democracy scores between 1 and 2.9; a semi-consolidated democracy scores 3 to 3.9; a hybrid and transitional regime scores 4 to 4.9; a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime scores 5 to 5.9; and a fully consolidated authoritarian regime scores between 6 and 7 (Freedom House, 2016). Nations in Transit consists of seven variables: electoral process, civil society, independent media, governance, constitutional, legislative and judicial framework and corruption (Freedom House, 2003). The score of each is added together and divided by seven to give the democracy score (Freedom House, 2018). By accounting for seven variables the democracy score clearly shows how democratic, or not, a state is.

Graph One: The Democracy Score of Belarus – 2003-2018

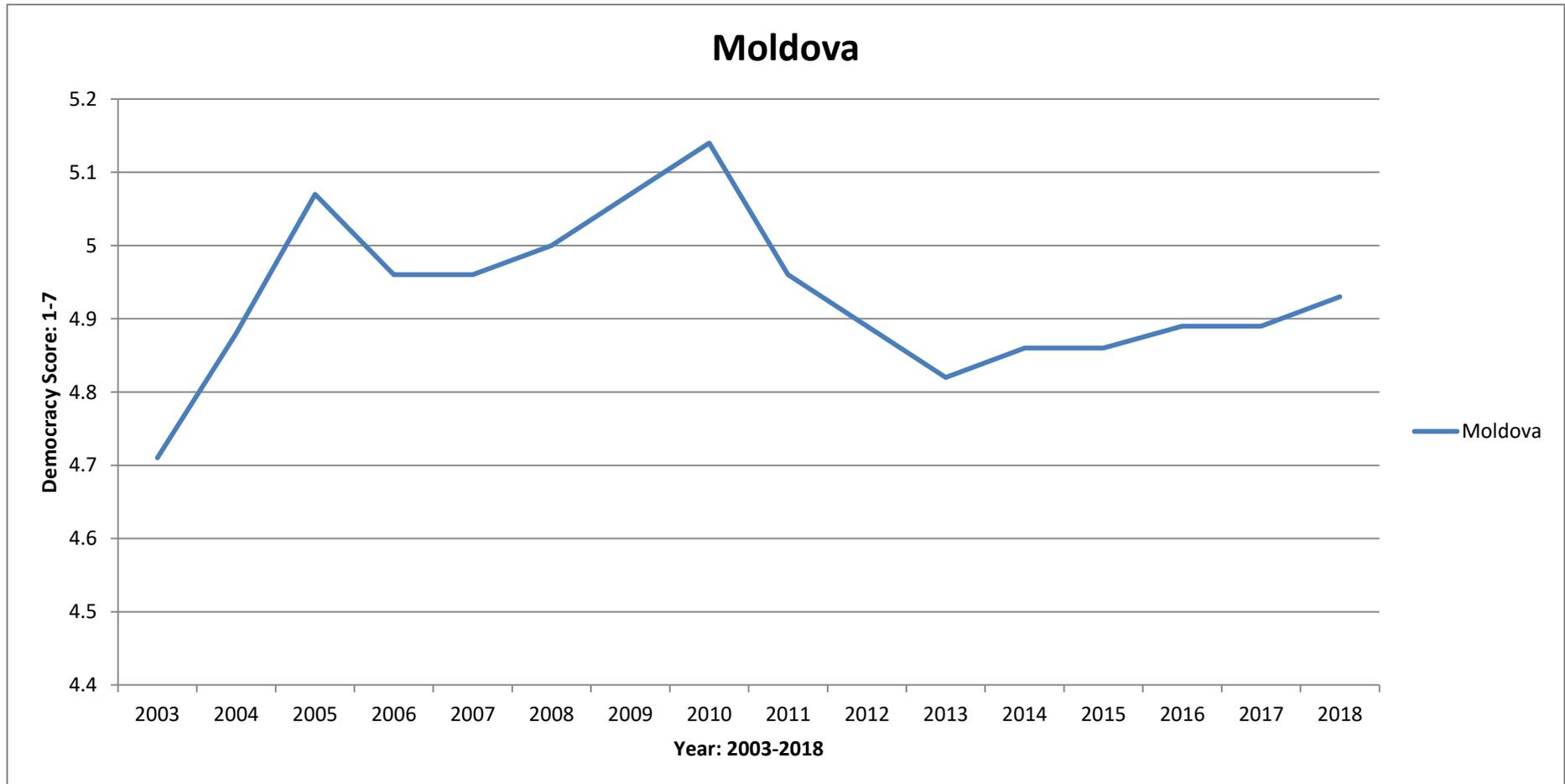


Source: Freedom House

As graph one shows Belarus has been a fully consolidated authoritarian regime since 2003. While the regime is clearly authoritarian there are periods in the data when the score falls, if only slightly. There was liberalisation in the build-up to the 2010 presidential election due to a breakdown in relations with the Kremlin, forcing Minsk to seek an opening with the EU. But after a secret meeting with then-Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev¹⁸, the Belarusian regime got the green light for repression, and this is why the score shot-up. With the Ukrainian conflict and fears that Belarus may be next, the Belarusian authorities have liberalised again. But Belarus remains a fully consolidated authoritarian regime, which is unlikely to change.

¹⁸ In 2010, Medvedev and Lukashenka met in Moscow, which rectified a growing discord. The Kremlin gave the Belarusian regime support to stop dialogue with the EU and crackdown on protesters during the 2010 presidential elections (Padhol and Marples, 2011: 7).

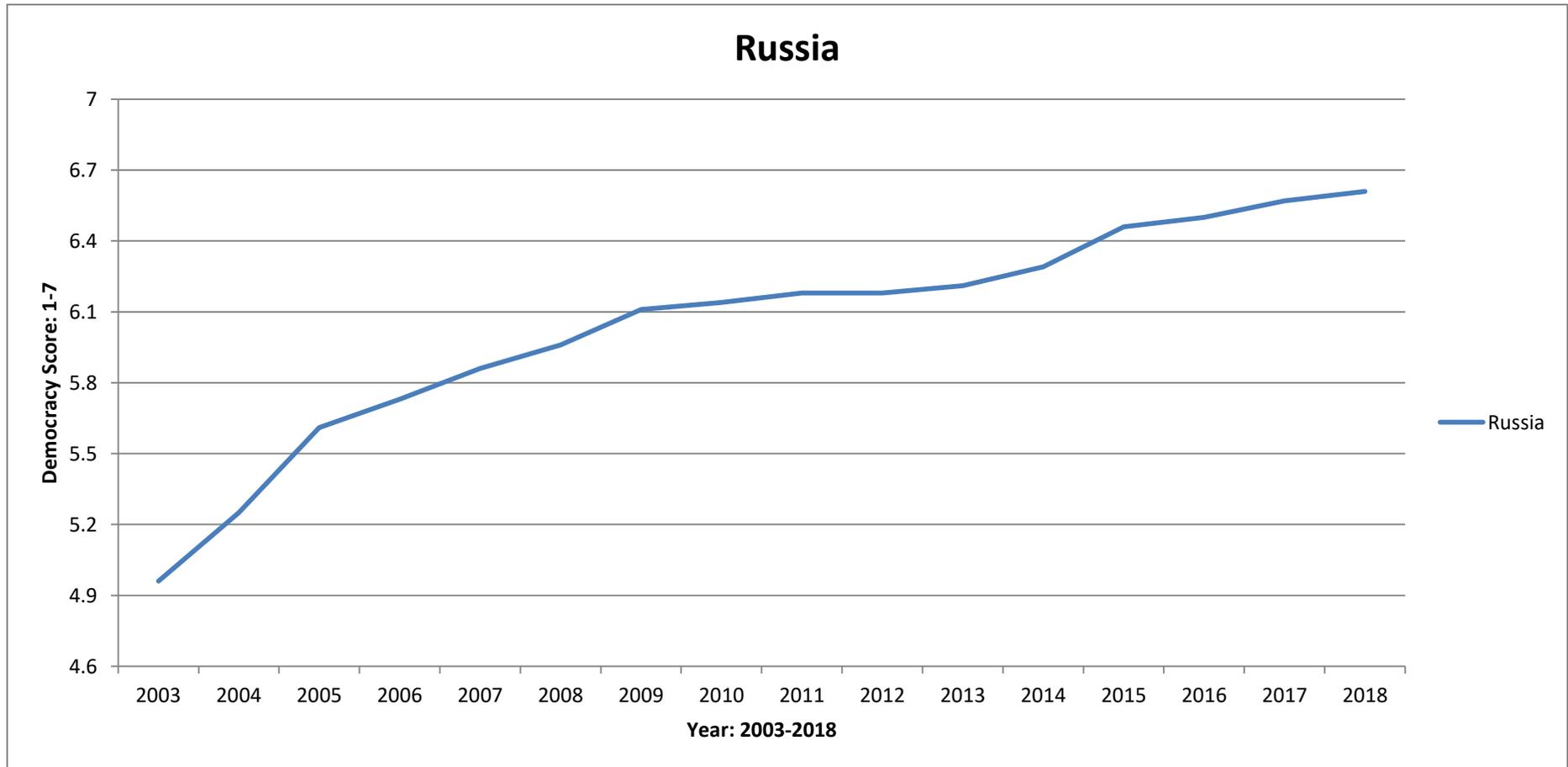
Graph Two: The Democracy Score of Moldova – 2003-2018



Source: Freedom House

Moldova has fluctuated between what Freedom House classifies as a hybrid-regime and a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime. For most of the period, Moldova has been a hybrid-regime, although with a high score. There have been periods of increased authoritarianism, principally between 2003 and 2009 when the PCRM was in power, and the score currently is slowly increasing. The data shows that the arrest of oligarch Vlad Filat in 2014, allowed Plahotniuc greater control. 2019 data has not been published, but the electoral defeat of Plahotniuc is unlikely to affect the data much as many Plahotniuc allies remain in state structures (Shupak, 2019). The coalition between the PSRM and ACUM is unlikely to hold, and the PSRM retains ties to Plahotniuc (Gherasimov, 2019). Moldova has periods of weak authoritarianism before becoming a hybrid-regime.

Graph Three: The Democracy Score of Russia – 2003-2018



Source: Freedom House

Graph three shows that Russia has become increasingly authoritarian, becoming a consolidated authoritarian regime by 2009. While Belarus has traditionally had higher scores than Russia, currently, both score equally. The differences are that the trajectory of Belarus's scores is currently downwards, whereas for Russia the curve is upwards.

Graph Four: The Democracy Score of Ukraine – 2003-2018



Source: Freedom House

Ukraine appears as the most democratic of the four case studies; however, it was probably over-marked between 2004 and 2006 with the Orange Revolution casting a democratic glow on the then government. Even with this over-marking Ukraine has never been better than a hybrid-regime. On the other hand, it has never been more authoritarian than this classification. Like Moldova, there are pointers to the idea that when Ukraine becomes more authoritarian there is a break, and the system reverts back to a hybrid-regime. This is particularly apparent in the data where two spikes in 2004 and 2010 stand out. Before both years there was an increase towards authoritarianism which peaked and then rapidly tailed off as the state oscillated back to a hybrid-regime. Electoral defeat for Poroshenko in the 2019 presidential elections highlights that even though Ukrainian regimes do try to hold onto power it remains difficult for Bankova¹⁹ to retain power if the chances of the incumbent losing are likely. The Ukrainian regime relies on other actors, like the oligarchs, to retain control.

Data from Freedom House points to the idea of authoritarian learning. Belarus and Russia are established authoritarian regimes. Moldova fluctuates between semi-consolidated authoritarianism and a hybrid-regime. Ukrainian score peak before falling rapidly and then building up again. Each case points to the likelihood that authoritarian practices occur and that learning is real.

However, to affirm that the cases at least retain authoritarian practices, I provide a contextual overview. Gerschewski (2013) provided a framework of three pillars of authoritarian stability: legitimation, co-option and repression. Legitimation gets the regime popular support and co-option increases the number of allies. For example, authoritarian

¹⁹ I use this term to refer to the Ukrainian regime. Bankova is the street in Kyiv where the presidential administration and other government structures are based.

regimes borrow democratic institutions like legislatures to increase popular support (Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2006; 2007).

Repression is the other pillar and it remains important in the authoritarian arsenal. But regimes do not always resort to outright coercion, rather threatening such action to keep others in line (Davenport, 2007). However, how do the four cases fit into Gerschewski's (2013) conceptualisation of authoritarian stability?

1.4. Placing Four Cases in Context

1.4.1. *Co-option*

Co-option is integral to the "arsenal" of authoritarian regimes (Tanneberg et al. 2013: 118) and it involves giving supporters rent access, which I define as a regime giving supporters state institutions or state-owned businesses to extract money for personal gain²⁰. Rent-access and corruption are integral to authoritarian stability and are extensive in the four case studies. To maintain regime power the authorities co-opt what is called a winning-coalition (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2011) of those who support the regime. Authoritarian regimes often co-opt opposition groups by giving rent access for support to increase survival. Corruption is accepted in authoritarian regimes as the glue holding the system together. To maintain loyalty, authoritarian regimes allow supporters to enrich themselves through rent access (Chang and Golden, 2010: 2; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003: 204; Hollyer and Wantchekon, 2011).

For example, the Kremlin allows allies control of state assets and institutions to maintain loyalty (Dawisha, 2014; Gel'man, 2016: 457). If the Kremlin stopped rent access it

²⁰ An example is the close relationship between Plahotniuc and Dodon. When Dodon was economic minister he gave Plahotniuc the import licence for fish and other produce for a small cut in profits. This example was given by a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 11/07/2017.

would reduce the number of supporters willing to help in a crisis (Melville and Mironyuk, 2016: 145).

It is why the Russian economy is increasingly state-owned. While in the early 2000s, state-owned and state-controlled companies accounted for 35% of the economy this increased to 70% by 2017²¹. Private ownership is murky with control of 'private' businesses, in the hands of individuals close to the Kremlin with companies like Gazprom, Rosneft, Sberbank and Transneft in the hands of close Putin associates (Appelbaum, 2014; Dawisha, 2014). The regime entices businesses with incentives from special investment contracts (Nazarova and Ageeva, 2019) to gain control of businesses and use these to invest in national projects and retain control over more of the economy (Kolesnikov, 2019). While there were changes in 2016 with old associates removed and replaced by younger cadres who are less likely to try to oust Putin²², old allies remain close, like Igor' Sechin, and in control of state assets like Gazprom.

In Moldova and Ukraine regime allies get rents, although because regimes cannot reduce former-regime supporter's control of resources there is a smaller pie to share. Often supporters do not offer full support and non-allies could oust the incumbent regime, resulting in a balancing act of keeping both supporters and competitors onside. While non-

²¹ Interview with Maxim Trudolyubov – Editor-at-large for Vedomosti and Senior Fellow at the Kennan Institute, 06/04/2017, Skype.

²² Interview with Nikolai Petrov – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow, 01/11/2016, Moscow; Interview with Michael Rochlitz – Assistant Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow, 08/11/2016, Moscow (since the interview at the Ludwig Maximilians Universität München and now Professor of Economics at Universität Bremen).

allies may have fewer resources they do not, mostly, have all rents appropriated. Regimes balances different group interests to maintain power²³.

The Moldovan theft of the Century²⁴ banking scandal is a good example of familiarity between elites. Companies were given loans by three banks (Banca di Economii, Banca Sociala and Unibank), which then sent the money to Russia's Gazprombank and from there to shell companies in London. The companies then declared bankruptcy leaving the banks with a \$1 billion hole (Rapoza, 2016; Popșoi, 2016a). Ilan Șor, who was indicted for the theft had links to oligarchs Filat and Plahotniuc, but Plahotniuc used his media stations to pressure Filat into resigning as prime minister, contributing to his eventual arrest (Rapoza, 2016; Popșoi, 2016a).

Belarus is an outlier as Lukashenka does not rely on old allies, or have to balance non-regime supporters. If someone disappoints him they are removed, although people like Viktor Sheiman have remained since Lukashenka came to power in 1994²⁵. When Lukashenka came to power there was a large contingent from *Mahilioŭskaja voblast* (Mogilev oblast), but most have been removed²⁶. Those who have stayed close to Lukashenka, are those who know where the bodies are from the disappearance of

²³ Interview with Kamil Całus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw; Interview with Ernest Vardanean – Lecturer at Moldova State University (MSU), 10/09/2017, Skype; Interview with Tadeusz Iwański – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw; Interview with Volodymyr Yermelenko – Director of Internews Ukraine, 26/04/2017, Kyiv.

²⁴ This was the loss of a billion dollars from three Moldovan banks.

²⁵ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

²⁶ Interview with Dzianis Melyantsou – Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Co-ordinator at the Minsk Track-II Initiative, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

opposition activists between 1999 and 2001²⁷. Lukashenka keeps loyalty by swapping people between jobs, preventing them building power bases. Everyone relies on Lukashenka for rent access which maintains loyalty²⁸.

However, there is more than rent access to co-optation. Authoritarian regimes use political parties to increase support and help control the political system (Svolik, 2012: 164). Russia represents a clear case of co-optation. The Kremlin's controlled party system utilises four political parties as a managed opposition (Stanovaya, 2012). They can access power, but must accept Kremlin decisions and refrain from criticism (Stanovaya, 2017a). However, as the 2018 protests against pension reforms showed systemic opposition parties occasionally do not support the Kremlin (Ivanov and Inyutin, 2018), although once the Kremlin instigated concessions systemic opposition deputies supported the law (Didkovskaya and Mukhametshina, 2018). Mostly the systemic opposition remains controlled, and the Kremlin often changes their structures, ideology and even party symbols, adapting to current requirements (Shevtsova, 2011).

To entice the systemic opposition to maintain support, the Kremlin allows these parties to win regional elections while keeping control of central elections. However, even in state-wide elections there are incentives for the systemic opposition. Although, United Russia is guaranteed victory it is beneficial to come second or at least have parliamentary seats (Petrov, 2011b) to get rent access. Parties accept subservience for a share of the pie, like control of parliamentary committees (Polunin and Petrov, 2011).

²⁷ Interview with Aleś Łahviniec – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Aliaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

²⁸ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

The systemic opposition acts as a balance between the public and the regime. During the 2011-2012 protests, these parties catered to an angry electorate, while maintaining close ties to the Kremlin (Makarkin, 2011). The Kremlin proficiently uses political technology, with constant adaptation to alleviate popular apathy towards pro-regime opposition. The Kremlin offers incentives to real opposition activists to entice them to support the authorities (Stanovaya, 2016c), creating political parties to get popular support, whether indirectly or directly (Pavlovskiy, 2016b). The Kremlin co-opts protester demands to reduce protester numbers (Tumakova, 2017). During the 2011-2012 protests, A Just Russia co-opted opposition leader Aleksei Naval'niy's anti-United Russia maxim of the "party of crooks and thieves," attempting to co-opt the message and bring voters back to the Kremlin (Zygar, 2016: 210). Similarly, during the 2017 and 2018 protests, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) co-opted demands for a national anti-corruption bureau (Garmonenko, 2018: 3).

One political technology creation, Rodina was a far-right political party taking KPRF votes (Parfitt, 2005), which became increasingly independent (Horvath, 2013: 57-63). However, it was re-established in 2012 as a nationalist party (Zavtra, 2012: 1) to bring nationalist factions onside. This tactic has been used to increase support among the liberal strata, with political parties like Right Cause and Civic Platform. However, these 'liberal' regime parties failed to bring in large numbers (Solyanskaya, 2008; Stanovaya, 2013).

The Kremlin even creates smaller parties against the systemic opposition to limit their ability to seek systemic change (Wilson, 2007: 9-10). Having been a liberal party, Right Cause became right-wing to take votes from the KPRF and the Liberal Democrat Party of Russia (LDPR) (Surnacheva, 2011; Ul'yanova, 2012). During the 2012-2013 regional elections, the Communists of Russia emerged to reduce the KPRF's vote (Pertsev, 2013), and the All-

Russia's People Front (ONF) was created after 2012 as an alternative to the existing systemic opposition should the Kremlin need a substitute (Pertsev, 2016; 2017b).

To alleviate growing public apathy during the 2018 presidential election campaign the Kremlin used Kseniya Sobchak, a person famous for being Russia's Paris Hilton and Putin's goddaughter (Carroll, 2017). With her youth, the Kremlin believed she would appeal to people who stopped supporting the authorities after the 2011-2012 protests (Sonin, 2017). The Kremlin needed a new candidate as A Just Russia, LDPR and KPRF candidates were perennial election losers (Stanovaya, 2017b).

Her appeal to the youth vote and new candidacy made the vote appear competitive (Stanovaya, 2017c). While Sobchak criticised Putin and the system (Sobchak, 2017; Osin, 2017), her candidacy usefully split the non-regime opposition (Ponomareva, 2017; Pavlovskiy, 2017), and was less radical, and controlled then chief-opposition leader Naval'niy (Alekseeva, T, 2017; Baunov, 2018). While, she appealed to liberals, her influence did not exceed a small percentage of Russians (Buyev, 2017). The Kremlin hoped her candidacy would increase turnout and give Putin's re-election legitimacy, in the final term of his constitutionally limited two-terms, due to the elections 'competitive' nature (Gurova and Rogozhnikov, 2017: 60-62; Pertsev, 2017a).

Sobchak's candidacy fitted a favoured Kremlin tactic: *dramaturgiya* (dramatic art). Needing a competitive election, the Kremlin banked on a candidate with youth appeal and a television personality to increase turnout (Movchan, 2017). It is likely the Kremlin co-opted Sobchak by offering a new television show on state television, thereby significantly increasing her audience (The Moscow Times, 2017a; 2017e). Co-option allows the Kremlin to claim elections are competitive while having a controlled opposition that helpfully loses elections and does not criticise (Osetinskaya, 2017; Gel'man, 2015b: 2).

Russia with a controlled political system clearly shows co-optation. The other cases co-opt but are not as refined in the tactic. The Belarusian system is different as Lukashenka co-opts people by offering them a regime position. Even if taken away they support him, hoping their loyalty is rewarded²⁹. Pro-regime political parties legitimise elections, mobilise voters and staff regional electoral commissions³⁰, but their role is limited (Charnysh, 2015). Unlike the Kremlin, the Belarusian regime does not have a party-of-power as this would mean elections would have to be nominally competitive, which the regime does not want (Shraibman, 2016c). The movement Belaya Rus' has been touted as a potential party-of-power, with one interviewee³¹ giving the anecdote of Lukashenka meeting its leaders, saying "guys I understand why you need me, but I am not sure why I need you," summing up the role of Belarusian political parties.

In Moldova, Plahotniuc's financial clout gets opposition politicians to join the PDM (Grigorița, 2016), or, if necessary, stay in their own parties and stop them being viable opposition³². For example, in 2015 the PCRM was split and 14 former-PCRM politicians formed the political party For Moldova and voted with the PDM (Jurnal.md, 2015a). As in Russia, Moldovan governments use clone parties, like the Communist Reformist Party (PCRM) at the 2014 parliamentary elections. This was used to take votes from the true PCRM. Its 4.92% denied the real PCRM and PSRM a majority (Brett and Knott, 2015: 440;

²⁹ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

³⁰ Interview with Yauheni Preiherman – Head of the Minsk Tack II Initiative and Head of the Liberal Club in Minsk, 18/08/2016, Coventry.

³¹ Interview with Yauheni Preiherman – Head of the Minsk Tack II Initiative and Head of the Liberal Club in Minsk, 18/08/2016, Coventry.

³² Interview with Ion Manole – Director at Promo-LEX, 12/07/2017, Skype; Interview with Viorel Cibotaru – President of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova and Executive Director for the European Institute for Political Science, 11/11/2016, Chișinău; Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 09/11/2016.

Galben, 2014). Political parties come and go with party allegiance transient as deputies change loyalty, especially during changes in power (Kobzar', 2016). Parties promote oligarchic interests, rather than being state controlled, which historically increased competition, but the dominance of Plahotniuc, until 2019, resulted in a period of control.

Ukraine, like Russia, has a long history of political party and candidate creation. In the early 2000s, Kuchma created political parties to control parliament (Wilson, 2005b). During the 2010 presidential election, the three main contenders Tymoshenko, Yanukovych and Yushchenko used other candidates to weaken each other. Yanukovych supported Inna Bohaslovska as an alternative to Tymoshenko. Yushchenko utilised Arseniy Yatseniuk to attack Tymoshenko. Serhiy Tihipko was used by Tymoshenko to take votes from Yatseniuk because of his youth and from Yanukovych as he comes from eastern Ukraine (Hale, 2015: 334). It is possible Tihipko played both sides against each other. Tihipko allied with Yanukovych in preparation for the 2012 parliamentary elections merging Strong Ukraine into Party of Regions (Dymchenko, 2011). He had headed Yanukovych's election campaign in 2004, only leaving once Yanukovych's defeat was obvious (Kravets and Larin, 2015).

Under Yanukovych, Bankova allegedly funded nationalist groups like Pravy Sektor (Nayem, 2014). Evidence of this can be deduced from a meeting between Sluzhba Bezpeki Ukraini (SBU) personnel and Pravy Sektor leader, Dmytro Yarosh, on February 20, 2014, the day of the Euromaidan shootings, pointing to Pravy Sektor being created by Bankova (RIA Novosti Ukraina, 2015). Another far-right party, Svoboda, was likely funded by Bankova with its anti-Russian and nationalist stance set by Bankova (Jatras, 2011).

Clone tactics continued with the Poroshenko regime creating new virtual parties in the 2015 local elections to undermine the Opposition Bloc, the Radical Party, Samopomich

and Batkivshchyna (Butkevych, 2015: 8). Like Moldova, political parties are funded by oligarchs and maintain their sponsors' interests. Obtusely this strengthens parties as oligarchs invest to make sure their parties get parliamentary representation, to preserve their interests (Kudelia, 2016: 71-72). Oligarchic control is both national and regional, with oligarchs constructing power-bases throughout the state (Kazan'sky, 2015). To prosper Ukraine needs reform, but it is unlikely the oligarchs will allow reforms, as this would affect their wealth and power (Jarábik, 2015). The mixed member electoral system requires that politicians have a 'sponsor' to support their campaign. Either this is done by political parties financially supported by an oligarch, or directly by an oligarch. Therefore, politicians promote their 'sponsor's' interests (Dabrowski, 2017). Attempts to reform the system have failed, with personal investment in parties exceeding legislative allowances (Makarenko, 2017). Current parliamentary parties – which have oligarchic funding – can access new funding to reduce oligarch influence, meaning taxpayers finance oligarchs (Kosmehl and Umland, 2016).

All four case studies try to co-opt other political parties or opposition leaders. This is particularly so for the Kremlin, which has a highly tuned co-option system. The Belarusian regime uses rent access to keep supporters and other groups onside, or at least not openly in opposition. In Moldova, Plahotniuc had the financial resources to co-opt other politicians. Like the Kremlin, the Moldovan authorities have created clone parties, but as governments come and go, the system is ineffective. Similarly, various Ukrainian regimes have used party cloning. As the system is highly pluralist due to oligarch competition for power, Ukrainian regimes like in Moldova have been unable to create Russia's strong co-opting system. Co-option is crucial to maintaining authoritarian systems.

1.4.2. Legitimation

Legitimation methods are crucial for an authoritarian regime remaining in power. Without popular support, it is difficult for any government to remain in control, so authoritarian regimes use legitimation strategies to keep most of the public content.

In Moldova, Plahotniuc gets popular legitimacy by controlling two popular television channels, and having minority stakes in another two (NewsMaker, 2017a). During the theft of the century banking scandal Plahotniuc used his media to frame Filat for the theft, thereby removing a competitor (Calus and Oleksy, 2016: 76-77)

Similarly, in Ukraine, Poroshenko used his television station, Channel Five to promote his image, although its viewership is small. While Ukrainian media outlets rely on the state for subsidies, most are controlled by interests “mostly connected to or indirectly involved in politics,” code for oligarch factions, who vie to shape public opinion (Ryabinska, 2014: 49). To retain their interests, oligarch-controlled media portrays the government of the day positively, sacking independent-minded journalists, resulting in self-censorship (Ryabinska, 2014: 54), as journalists follow the interests of their owners (Kutovenko, 2014: 36). In 2016, the top ten media channels provided only limited negative coverage of Poroshenko to increase his popularity (Kuznetsova, 2016; Berdinskikh, 2017)³³. There was criticism of Poroshenko on television channel 1+1, but this was due to the clash between Poroshenko and 1+1’s owner Kolomois’kyi (Zhavoronkov, 2018). Although muted, 1+1 programmes, like TSN, published reports that Poroshenko made millions from his Roshen company, which was supposedly in an inaccessible trust (TSN.ua, 2019). These reports

³³ Interview with Maxim Eristavi – Co-founder of Hromadske International, 16/11/2016, Kyiv.

contributed to the public's low opinion of Poroshenko in the run-up to the 2019 presidential elections (UNIAN, 2018).

Television also legitimises regimes in Belarus and Russia. As Pomerantsev (2015: 7) contends television is used by the Kremlin to shape “what the country's history and fears and consciousness should be.” Early in Putin's first presidential term, the Kremlin forced oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky to sell his media holding, NTV, to Gazprom-media to cover a Yeltsin era debt which Gazprom suddenly called in (Arutunyan, 2009: 33; Hale, 2015: 272). ORT was seized from Boris Berezovskiy and transformed into Perviy Kanal (Lipman, Mar, 2013: 129). Television provides an emotional pull which the Kremlin exploits³⁴. Most television channels are owned by state companies, like Gazprom (Boletskaya, 2017), or pro-regime businessmen (BBC Russia Service, 2014; Novaya Gazeta, 2007: 15). The Kremlin directly controls the First Channel and the All-Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company manages Channel Two (Arutunyan, 2009: 54). As the Kremlin wants to influence people it needs an audience, so some debate makes television watchable (Schimpfoss and Yablokov, 2014). Signals are important to regime control; journalists perceive the Kremlin's stance and act accordingly³⁵. Through media control, the Kremlin directs the message, thereby increasing regime legitimacy through positive spin³⁶.

³⁴ Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man— Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

³⁵ Interview with Anna Arutunyan – Senior Analyst at the International Crisis Group. Former Journalist at RIA Novosti. Author of the *Media in Russia* and *The Putin Mystique*, 11/09/2016, Prague; Interview with Marc Bennets – Former Journalist at RIA Novosti and author of the *I'm Going to Ruin Their Lives*, 03/11/2016, Moscow.

³⁶ Interview with Anna Arutunyan – Senior Analyst at the International Crisis Group. Former Journalist at RIA Novosti. Author of the *Media in Russia* and *The Putin Mystique*, 11/09/2016, Prague; Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man – Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

This allows the Kremlin to control messages reaching the public (Burrett, 2011: 13). For example, the 2017 and 2018 protests were not mentioned on television (Bryzgalova and Boletskaya, 2017). But, the story of a pensioner dying in an ambulance unable to reach a hospital because of demonstrations was continually cited (Gavrilina and Garmonenko, 2017: 1). During the 2011-2012 protests, the Kremlin ran the story that the opposition was financed by the West, which reduced protest numbers (Stanovaya, 2017e). Surkov directed television directors “on whom to attack and whom to defend, who is allowed on TV and who is banned, how the president is to be presented” (Pomerantsev, 2014). According to Pavlovskiy television should “be the incense through which we sanctify the president,” portraying Putin as a Harley-Davidson-riding, tiger-saving hero (Pomerantsev, 2013). Media is crucial to how the Kremlin retains legitimacy³⁷.

Traditionally most Belarusians get information from Russian television (Astapenia, 2014a; Rudnik, 2018), but because of the time difference between Moscow and Minsk, the Belarusian authorities cut programmes deemed confrontational³⁸. The Belarusian regime has – due to the Ukraine crisis – reduced access to Russian media (Belsat, 2016), but this has failed as about 80% of Belarusians still get information from Russian news sources (Astapenia and Balkunets, 2016). The Belarusian regime hopes that by reducing Russian media influence they can better control Belarusian society (Khralovich, 2017). The regime through media control shapes the message the public receives (Manaev et al. 2013: 196). Out of 243 central and regional television channels, the state owns 170 directly, and others are managed by local and national state structures (Manaev et al. 2013: 197). Data showed

³⁷ Interview with Irina V Soboloyeva – Lecturer at Columbia University, 01/11/2016, Skype.

³⁸ Interview with Aleś Herasimenka – Specialist on the Belarusian Internet and media, 19/08/2016, London.

that in the lead-up to the 2015 presidential election, Lukashenka received 78.35% of air-time (Klaskovskiy, 2015). Like the Kremlin, the Belarusian regime maintains legitimacy through media.

A key aspect of the Belarusian authorities legitimacy is the social contract, which is like its Soviet predecessor (Savchenko, A, 2009: 189). Presently, its *raison d'être* offers acceptable wages and social welfare, so long as the populace do not get involved in politics (Makushina, 2012; Bykovskiy, 2016). People may have fixed wages, but the regime compensates through welfare spending, reducing disparities between rich and poor and guaranteeing jobs (Wilson, 2011a: 242-243). The Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) (2009a; 2009b) found people accepted the social contract as a low paid but guaranteed job was better than a short-term well-paid job and poor quality free health care was better than paying for it.

But the social contract relies on Russian financial support which can fluctuate (Makushina, 2012). BISS found that young people want independence from the state, but they want free education and guaranteed health care (Artemenko, 2014) as do paid workers who increasingly work in the small private sector and rely less on state support, making them less loyal to the regime (Avtushko-Sikorskiy, 2014a). Even pensioners rely less on the state but want the state to pay pensions and maintain stability (Avtushko-Sikorskiy, 2014b). While society is increasingly self-sufficient, the public wants the regime to maintain stability and keep the social contract's financial benefits flowing (Pikulik and Artemenko, 2014). With limited finances, the social contract is increasingly strained (Bykovskiy, 2016).

Since the Ukraine conflict, the Belarusian regime has adapted its social contract. Lukashenka (2015b)³⁹ during his fifth inaugural presidential speech argued that reform would lead to instability but the social contract was changing. After 2015, the state would make sure Belarusians did not experience Ukrainian instability. The re-shaping of the social contract was seen in Lukashenka's 2015 election campaign slogan where previously it had been "for a strong and prosperous Belarus" in 2015 it changed to "for the future of an independent Belarus" emphasising preservation of Belarusian independence for acquiescence (Wilson, 2016a: 81).

Although the Belarusian regime has started engaging in older Belarusian history and nativist symbols⁴⁰, it gets most legitimacy by linking the partisans of the Second World War with Lukashenka⁴¹. Similarly, the Kremlin uses the Soviet victory as a legitimisation tool. By protecting Russia's great power status, the Kremlin preserves the Soviet victory⁴².

With increasing nationalist rhetoric – particularly after Crimea's annexation – the Kremlin tries to increase popular support among society (Kolesnikov, 2017b; 2016a; Pertsev, 2016). Crimea's annexation allowed the Kremlin to construct a new social contract, with Crimea as the bribe for Russians losing freedom and economic prosperity (Kolesnikov, 2015; Rutland, 2016: 358). The contract incorporates an anti-Western agenda (Siegert, 2014) and

³⁹ Access to the speech is here: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/tseremonija-vstuplenija-v-dolzhnost-vnov-izbrannogo-prezidenta-respubliki-belarus-12496/ (in Russian). The speech can be located by clicking on the first link. A Word document provides the speech.

⁴⁰ Interview with Dzianis Melyantsou – Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Co-ordinator at the Minsk Track-II Initiative, 04/05/2017, Minsk; Interview with Alyaksei Lastouski – Analyst at the Institute "Political Sphere", 08/12/2016, Minsk.

⁴¹ Interview with David R Marples – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

⁴² Interview with Ekaterina Bobrovskaya – Lecturer at Lomonosov Moscow State University, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

its ideological underpinnings are conservative and patriotic – showing a continual line of governance through the centuries – with Russia always against the West (Lezina, 2017).

The Kremlin increasingly champions traditionalist values (Fish, 2017: 63) building a strong affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church, giving the authorities legitimacy as the protector of Christianity (Kaylan, 2014). Patriotism has become organised, with patriotic values taught in schools (Yasaveev, 2017; Khodzhaeva and Meyer, 2017). But these values are opportunistic, if the authorities truly promoted traditional values, divorce and abortion would be harder to obtain (Dumančić, 2014; Stanovaya, 2014). The Kremlin is tiring of the traditional and military rhetoric, although there remains no alternative to this message, as the Kremlin is unprepared to countenance reform and nationalist rhetoric maintains current legitimisation levels (Stanovaya, 2015).

The Kremlin constantly devises ways to legitimise its rule and elections are crucial to this. Kuratory⁴³ control elections as the regime wants elections to appear legitimate, giving the authorities validity, but it does not want competitive elections. The Sobchak example highlighted how the Kremlin controls elections, but makes them appear legitimate. However, if necessary the regime goes for a comprehensive electoral result, as in the 2016 parliamentary elections, when there were no viable ‘alternative’ candidates (Stanovaya, 2016e), so United Russia won an unbelievably large parliamentary majority of 343 seats out of 450, with at least 45% of the vote won through fraud (Litvinova et al. 2016).

Former Presidential Administration head Vyacheslav Volodin devised a system to control political parties to reduce fraud. By replacing Central Electoral Commission head, Vladimir Churov (Hobson, 2016), with Ella Pamfilova, Volodin created controlled, but

⁴³ *Kuratory* are representatives of the Kremlin tasked with working with governments – and in some cases entities – across the post-Soviet region, to preserve Russian interests. *Kuratory* can be tasked with domestic issues like monitoring the political system.

relatively competitive elections (Stanovaya, 2016d), which Volodin's successor, Sergei Kirineko has maintained (Stanovaya, 2016a). In the 2016 elections, the Kremlin created a relatively fair vote compared to 2011 and 2012, which gave some legitimacy⁴⁴. Through the internal division of the presidential administration, the Kremlin controls civil society, elections and the populace to limit future protests (Pallin, 2017).

While the Kremlin uses the state-owned polling company VTsIOM to provide data the Kremlin wants, rather than highlighting potential problems (Hartog, 2016), VTsIOM locates potential problems that the Kremlin can alleviate through television⁴⁵. The authorities have worked with the Expert Institute of Social Research to give United Russia a popular platform (Dorofeev, 2017: 3). Legitimation helps the Kremlin reduce the need for repression (Haase, 2016).

Similarly, the Belarusian regime has effective polling determining what may cause future protests⁴⁶. The Information Analytical Centre (IAC), while part of the presidential administration gives information the regime may dislike (Raskolnikov, 2014). However, there are questions about how useful such polling can be with selection bias a real possibility as respondents are unlikely to divulge information if they know who the pollsters are. The Belarusian regime uses a number of polling firms to return opinions that the regime may not like, acting as an early warning system against future demonstrations⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ Interview with Irina V Soboloyeva – Lecturer at Columbia University, 01/11/2016, Skype.

⁴⁵ Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man – Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

⁴⁶ Interview with Balázs Jarábik – Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21/11/2016, Skype; Interview with Andrej Kazakevič – Director of the Institute "Political Sphere", 26/08/2016, Skype.

⁴⁷ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who required anonymity, 29/01/2018.

1.4.3. Repression

Repression is the main pillar of authoritarian stability. An appropriate palette of repression reduces the chance of regime collapse. Therefore, authoritarian regimes constantly learn and adapt to refine their repressive capacity. Gel'man (2015c: 6) argued that during the 2011-2012 protests the Kremlin analysed the coercive tactics of the Belarusian regime in 2010, incorporating many of these repressive practices. As analysed in chapter six, post-Soviet regional organisations share repressive tactics. The Collective Security Treaty Organisation's (CSTO) 2013 Unbreakable Brotherhood exercise used "special means and water cannon, split the aggressively-minded crowd and detained the leaders of the "mass riots"" (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2013a). Therefore, there are examples of direct learning between authoritarian regimes on coercion. However, regimes do not rely solely on repression as it is expensive and hard for a regime to repress society constantly (Fjelde, 2010: 201). Rather, regimes rely on maintaining the mantra that they have repressive capabilities, thereby reducing protester numbers (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 58; van Eerd, 2016: 158). The Belarusian and Russian regimes have a greater capacity for repression than the Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes, which partially explains why the Belarusian and Russian regimes are established authoritarian systems. However, the palette of repression is more nuanced in Belarus and Russia than merely cracking heads.

The Belarusian regime has traditionally drawn "on all aspects of state coercion at its disposal...showing...long-term tactics to pre-empt...as well as harsher and more violent means of persecution" (Frear, 2019: 24). While the regime has other tactics to maintain control it uses repression when faced with any threat. As one interviewee stated if Russian

opposition leader Alekssei Naval'niy were Belarusian he would be imprisoned immediately⁴⁸. As repression against protesters after the 2006 presidential election shows the regime uses coercion rather than co-option as Lukashenka is wary of opposition (Forbrig et al. 2006: 12; Silitski, 2006: 22). However, the regime considered that it had not been repressive enough in 2006. The government learnt from mistakes in 2006 considering that the authorities had allowed protest numbers to build in Minsk. The rapid reaction of the regime to protests in 2010 highlighted this learning⁴⁹, with the regime using new tactics in 2010 to stop a repeat of 2006 (Jarábik et al. 2011).

The ensuing clampdown culminated in the total disorganisation of the opposition (Ash, 2015: 1031), debilitating them further. During the disappearances between 1999 and 2001, there was apparently a regime “death squad” which killed thirty people (Feduta, 2005: 531, 539). The disappearances were a signal for others in the opposition to stay quiet⁵⁰. There are allegations that 2015 opposition presidential candidate Tatsiana Karatkevich and opposition parliamentarians, Hanna Kanapatskaya and Alena Anisim are regime supporters⁵¹, and while likely true, these allegations highlight how divided the opposition is due to earlier repressive and co-option practices (Radio Svoboda, 2016; Shraibman, 2016d). This divide-and-rule tactic has been effective since 1994⁵².

⁴⁸ Interview with Balázs Jarábik – Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21/11/2016, Skype.

⁴⁹ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016; Interview with David R Marples – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

⁵⁰ Interview with David R Marples – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

⁵¹ Interview with Pavel Usov – Head of the Centre for Political Analysis and Prognosis, 19/12/2016, Warsaw.

⁵² Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 27/11/2016.

Signals are used by the regime to tell others not to stand against the authorities, so one group is repressed as an example for others⁵³. Lukashenka has made examples of ex-regime members, like Alyaksandr Kazulin and Michail Chigir to show that he will not tolerate elite defection⁵⁴. Similarly, the police only require a signal to crack down, which stops most people protesting⁵⁵, and repressive structures are controlled by Lukashenka's trusted allies⁵⁶. The KDB keeps Kompromat⁵⁷ on the opposition, allowing the regime to co-opt some opposition leaders and blackmail others⁵⁸. The regime and public both know the authorities will resort to repression⁵⁹.

Students are targeted as potential demonstrators. They face losing student accommodation which is cheap, and so many do not protest⁶⁰. With state-ownership of at least 50% of the economy – not to mention 'independent' businesses controlled by the state⁶¹ – the regime pressures workers not to demonstrate for fear of losing their jobs⁶².

⁵³ Interview with Aliaksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 08/08/2016, Warsaw.

⁵⁴ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at TUT.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

⁵⁵ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at TUT.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

⁵⁶ Interview with Yauheni Preiherman – Head of the Minsk Tack II Initiative, Head of the Liberal Club in Minsk, 18/08/2016, Coventry.

⁵⁷ This is compromising material. It is collected to blackmail others.

⁵⁸ Interview with Balázs Jarábik – Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21/11/2016, Skype.

⁵⁹ Interview with Aleś Łahviniec – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Aliaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

⁶⁰ Interview with Valery Kavaleuski – Consultant at the World Bank and Country Analyst Consultant at Freedom House, 02/08/2016, Skype.

⁶¹ Interview with Alyaksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies, 09/08/2016, Warsaw.

The Belarusian regime has been adept – due to Belarus’s small geographic size – at controlling communications⁶³. The Operational Analytical Centre (OAC) has been proficient at monitoring communications and the Internet (Electroname, 2010). The OAC not only monitors the public but also regime personnel to make sure they follow orders from above, helping to maintain the power vertikal’ (Lebedok, 2019). The OAC uses Russian-made System for Operative Investigative Activities (SORM) devices, to monitor any phone call, text or email (Ezhednevnik, 2010). All Belarusian companies must use the domain .by, allowing the OAC to track users (Aliaksandrau, 2013). All information on visited websites must be kept by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) (Charnysh, 2011; Amnesty International, 2016: 36, 40). The regime creates fake networks on social media sites or instigates distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks in the build-up to elections⁶⁴.

Although media is mostly a legitimization tool in Belarus, the interior ministry can close a media outlet after two warnings, and legislation broadly defines what constitutes a warning, leading to self-censorship (Herasimenka, 2016). Similarly, the ministry can close a media outlet for disseminating ‘inaccurate’ information, although it is regime controlled courts that determine what constitutes an inaccuracy (Manaev, 2014: 212). Beatings and killings of journalists often occur (Euroradio, 2016; UDF.by, 2012). Belarus has long been a pioneer of using the tax and hygiene authorities to close independent media outlets⁶⁵, and

⁶² Interview with Aliaksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies, 09/08/2016, Warsaw.

⁶³ Interview with Valery Kavaleuski – Consultant with Freedom House and journalist with Voice of America, 02/08/2016, Skype.

⁶⁴ Aleś Herasimenka– Specialist on the Belarusian Internet and media, 19/08/2016, London.

⁶⁵ Interview with Joerg Forbrig – Director, Fund for Belarus Democracy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, 16/09/2016, Skype.

outlets are kept short of funds, forcing them to acquiesce to regime policies⁶⁶. Even the pro-regime TUT.by⁶⁷, which offers some criticism, had journalists arrested in August 2018, as the regime exerted control over a nominally independent outlet (Makushina, 2018).

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) face closure for “gross violations,” like using the word organisation instead of association and missing quotation marks on forms (Markusheuski, 2003: 1-2). NGOs can only be registered if the government approves their work, which places restrictions on democracy and human rights NGOs (Silitski, 2006: 74). Since 2006, NGOs have had to reveal financial dealings with foreign NGOs who are also banned in Belarus (Chernov, 2008). By 2014, most independent NGOs had been replaced by state-controlled GONGOs (Clark, 2015: 171-172; Matchanka, 2014: 68-69).

The Belarusian regime spends significant sums to have a highly capable coercive capacity⁶⁸. While, the opposition is consistently “subject to periodic imprisonment and regular harassment” and opposition media and websites appear with difficulty (Marples, 2007: 89-90), the annexation of Crimea and the Russian presence in eastern Ukraine has meant the regime wants to limit Russian influence. Therefore, there is a rapprochement with the EU, with the authorities no longer resorting to the repression seen in 2006 and 2010⁶⁹. During the 2017 protests, the authorities were less coercive than previously and protesters were released soon after being arrested (Preiherman, 2017a).

⁶⁶ Interview with Valery Kavaleuski – Consultant at the World Bank and Country Analyst Consultant at Freedom House, 02/08/2016, Skype.

⁶⁷ Aleś Herasimenka – Specialist on the Belarusian Internet and media, 19/08/2016, London.

⁶⁸ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

⁶⁹ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

With the rapprochement with the EU, the regime rather than use mass repression gives large fines to stop people demonstrating.⁷⁰ During the 2017 protests the Belarusian regime balanced EU intransigence towards violence with Kremlin wishes to stop a potential Euromaidan in Minsk (Shraibman, 2016a; 2017a; Gubareich, 2017; Bohdan, 2015; Tolkacheva, 2017). During the 2017 protests, the Belarusian regime did not use all repressive practices in its arsenal, a qualitative difference to 2006 and 2010⁷¹, with a range of tactics from threatening physical action to turning off the 3G Internet network in central Minsk and playing on popular fears of violence (Euromaidan Press, 2017). Repressive tactics in 2017 were reduced, because of improved relations with the EU, and Belarusian regime fears that Russia may intervene in Belarus. The regime could ill-afford a crackdown like in 2006 and 2010 causing a split with Brussels⁷². Waiting out the protests until March 25, a day when the opposition often rallies allowed the regime to disperse opposition protesters, rather than, citizens, which would have received EU condemnation (Shraibman, 2017d; 2017c; Kosarev, 2017).

But the Belarusian regime also had to pacify the Kremlin. Although wary of Russian actions in Ukraine, the Kremlin remains Belarus's main ally. It is another reason why the regime waited until March 25, to crack down on protesters, to send a message to the Kremlin that the Belarusian authorities remained in charge (Goble, 2017). To get Kremlin support, the Belarusian regime instigated lessons from the Euromaidan, claiming that the

⁷⁰ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 27/11/2016.

⁷¹ Interview with David R Marples – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

⁷² Interview with Anna Maria Dyer – Head of the Eastern European Programme at the Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych (The Polish Institute of International Relations), 17/05/2017, Warsaw; Interview with Anaïs Marin – Adjunct Professor at Collegium Civitas, 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

Belyi Legion⁷³ was the Belarusian version of Pravy Sektor (BelGazeta, 2017a). Never mind that Belyi Legion had been used before to justify crackdowns after the 2010 Minsk bombings (Pankovets, 2017) it re-emerged in 2017 as a signal to the Kremlin to support Lukashenka (Lukashuk, 2017; Hansbury, 2017) and as a sign to the public that the regime was cracking down⁷⁴. The regime encountered difficulties because it did not repress straight away, highlighting weaknesses which increased protester numbers (Sivitskiy and Tsarik, 2017). But the regime eventually controlled the demonstrations, to the satisfaction of the Kremlin, resulting in Putin meeting Lukashenka in April 2017 (UDF.by, 2017a; Gazeta.ru, 2017b; Makushina, 2017; Bohdan, 2017a).

Lukashenka promotes the perception of a strong leader, intolerant of opposition, having to win any challenge to his authority⁷⁵. It is why internal troop numbers outnumber the army and why they are well equipped and trained⁷⁶. The natural instinct of the regime is to crack down⁷⁷, but it is aware such practices are now unacceptable. Since 2015, a favourite practice is to fine protesters (Shraibman, 2017b)⁷⁸. The fine is prohibitive often resulting in the person having to sell property⁷⁹. The regime can easily revert back to mass repression⁸⁰.

⁷³ White Legion.

⁷⁴ Interview with Aleś Łahviniec – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Alyaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

⁷⁵ Interview with David R Marples – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

⁷⁶ Interview with Alyaksandr Aleshka – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies, 17/08/2016, Skype.

⁷⁷ Interview with Aleś Łahviniec – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Aliaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

⁷⁸ Interview with Alexei Pikulik – Academic Director at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2016, Minsk.

⁷⁹ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 27/11/2016.

Like the Belarusian regime, the Kremlin has coercive capacity, however, its palette of repression is more nuanced, with the Kremlin using contained escalation (Bershidsky, 2019a) to send signals to others by using one group as an example. However, in the aftermath of the 2019 protests it appears that the faction of Siloviki from the so-called power ministries like the interior ministry have taken greater control and are using random repression of activists and bystanders, to scare others from protesting (Romanova, O, 2019). While, repression is used the Kremlin continues to rely on intimidation, rather than coercion⁸¹, preferring to legislate against independent groups to maintain control⁸². One example is the 2012 foreign agents law, which placed NGOs involved in political activity – as defined by the authorities – and receiving money from abroad on a register. The law on foreign agents with its Stalinist connotations (Lipskiy, 2013: 12)⁸³ requires that NGOs publish biannual activity reports and receive an annual audit (Vezhin, 2012: 3). In the 2011-2012 election cycle only a few NGOs published polls questioning official results, but many more were targeted as the Kremlin cracked down on NGOs (Gorbachev, 2014: 3), with a poorly defined law allowing the Kremlin to target any NGO it wished⁸⁴. Legislative changes in 2014 allowed the authorities to place NGOs the regime considered foreign agents on the list (Prosvirova, 2014: 6). The foreign agent law restricted NGO independence, as without Western finance they rely on Kremlin funding (Trifonova, 2014: 3). Restrictive legislation

⁸⁰ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

⁸¹ Interview with Maria Lipman – Editor-in-chief of the Counterpoint Journal, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

⁸² Email correspondence with Andrei Kolesnikov – Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 08/08/2016; Interview with Dmitry V Goncharov – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 06/09/2016, Prague.

⁸³ This term was used in the Stalinist period to denote Western spies.

⁸⁴ Interview with Maria Lipman – editor of the Counterpoint Journal, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

was used after the 2017 and 2018 protests, with new laws subjecting single picket protesters to restrictive protest legislation (Vishnevskiy, 2017: 9).

However, the Kremlin retains a large coercive capacity. Although media is a Kremlin legitimization tool independent media is constrained, as is the Internet. With the Arab Spring and the 2011-2012 protests, the Kremlin has tried to control the Internet, with SORM re-adapted to monitor all Internet traffic, with all visited websites kept on a database (Galushko, 2014). Pro-regime businessmen, Alisher Usmanov and Aleksandr Mamut control Mail.ru, Yandex.ru, Vkontakte, Rambler.ru and LiveJournal (Van Herpen, 2016: 90; Bershidsky, 2014), giving the Kremlin control of Russia's versions of Gmail, Google Search, Yahoo, Facebook and Russia's biggest blog, LiveJournal. With filters and blacklists the Kremlin blocks websites from public view, a practice used against opposition websites (Soldatov and Borogan, 2015: 172-173; Soldatov, 2015: 1). Since the Euromaidan, independent media outlets like Dozhd' and RBK have experienced restrictions (Lun'kov, 2014; Krainova, 2014; Malgin, 2014; Martynov, 2015: 12), and a 2016 media law restricted foreign ownership of Russian media (Bazenkova, 2015; Hobson, 2015), as the Kremlin wants all media outlets "singing from the same hymn sheet"⁸⁵.

While the Kremlin harasses and defames opposition leaders, who face "fabricated crimes" and are encouraged "to emigrate, rather than being murdered en masse" (Guriev and Treisman, 2015), the murder of Boris Nemtsov provides evidence that Kremlin factions will kill. Although linked to Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov (Novaya Gazeta, 2016b), his death near the Kremlin points to the likelihood someone in the regime knew of his

⁸⁵ Interview with Anna Artutunyan – Senior Analyst at the International Crisis Group. Former Journalist at RIA Novosti. Author of the *Media in Russia* and *The Putin Mystique*, 11/09/2016, Prague.

impending murder (Harding, 2015). The recent 2017 contract killing of Denis Voronenkov, a former communist politician, who defected to Ukraine made Voronenkov powerful enemies likely close to the Kremlin (Galeotti, 2017b).

There have been other suspicious deaths linked to the Kremlin, with the regime taking repression abroad to send signals to so-called enemies that nowhere is safe. The most famous death was Aleksandr Litvinenko, whose slow lingering death was caused by polonium-210, traced back to Moscow (Harding, 2016a), but there have been plenty of suspicious deaths, particularly of émigré Russians in Britain, as well as a number of British subjects (Blake and Leopold et al. 2017; Blake and Warren et al. 2017; Bradley et al. 2017; Warren et al. 2017; Cobain, 2014; Burns et al. 2008; Booth et al. 2018). The recent poisoning of former Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (FSB) spy Sergei Skripal in 2018 points to Russian responsibility (Galeotti, 2018b), as the Russian link is the only common denominator in all the deaths.

Although there have been deaths, like Boris Nemtsov, linked to Putin, the Kremlin prefers to target a few groups using them as examples of what could happen should others protest, allowing the Kremlin to rule unimpeded⁸⁶. This targeted repression forces society to acquiesce for fear of losing jobs, freedom or wealth (Eggert, 2018: 18-19). The Kremlin prefers fabricating crimes. The Kirovles case against Naval'niy can be resurrected, thereby restricting Naval'niy's movement (The Moscow Times, 2017c). His brother was imprisoned to control Naval'niy as Naval'niy is too well-known – especially in the West – for the Kremlin

⁸⁶ Interview with Paul A Goble – Professor at the Institute of World Politics and editor of the “Window on Eurasia” blog, 22/08/2016, Skype.

to risk imprisoning him⁸⁷. After 2015, a new tactic of Centre E has been to link opposition activists to neo-Nazi groups (Alekhina, 2016: 15).

Kompromat is also used. One example is the Kremlin using Katya Gerasimova to blackmail opposition leaders and journalists through sex videos (Fadeeva, 2010; Ioffe, J, 2010; Ivanov and Polunin, 2010; Kotova, 2010; Yashin, 2010). The Kremlin often uses Kompromat, but there are other options.

The Kremlin relies on intimidation, rather than repression⁸⁸ and makes sure others are aware it has repressive capabilities⁸⁹. Use of repression is subtle⁹⁰ “feeding some people and repressing others⁹¹.” For example, during the 2011-2012 protests the Kremlin had pro-Kremlin youth groups, like Nashi and Molodaya Gvardiya march through central Moscow to show protesters that the regime could use force when necessary (Lindele, 2011; Novaya Gazeta, 2011: 6; Sulimina, 2011; Petrov, 2011a).

But the 2011-2012 protests brought home the fact that the Kremlin’s palette of repression was ineffective. This was confirmed by the Euromaidan. The OMON were unprepared and understaffed to deal with mass protests. Many officers – drafted from outside Moscow – were poorly versed in Moscow’s nuanced repression. The Kremlin learnt that an effective, rapid response, well-equipped, well-trained and well-staffed paramilitary

⁸⁷ His brother was in jail until June 2018 (The Moscow Times, 2018).

⁸⁸ Interview with Maria Lipman – Editor-in-chief of the Counterpoint Journal, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

⁸⁹ Interview with Maria Lipman – Editor-in-chief of the Counterpoint Journal, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

⁹⁰ Interview with Vladimir Gel’man – Professor at the University of Helsinki and the European University of St. Petersburg, 17/08/2016, Skype.

⁹¹ Interview with Ekaterina Shul’man – Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

force was essential⁹². Rosgvardiya's creation was a direct lesson from the 2011-2012 protests (Konovalov, 2012: 1; Latynina, 2012: 8), but it was precipitated by 2013-2014 events in Kyiv, due to the failure of the Ukrainian paramilitary Berkut and paid thugs (Titushki) to quell protests. The Kremlin strengthened internal affairs structures after the Euromaidan⁹³ using Cossack and military veterans as alternative security structures⁹⁴.

Rosgvardiya became the mainstay of the Kremlin's repressive capacity with the authorities fearing possible protests (Endo, 2017). Rosgvardiya received the latest equipment, including systems to blind and deafen protesters (RBK, 2017; Venkina, 2018). Rosgvardiya is commanded by Putin's former bodyguard Viktor Zolotov, giving Putin a personal army (Nikol'skiy et al. 2016; Ahlberg, 2017). During protests in 2017 and 2018 the Kremlin showed its coercive capacity with police using batons and quickly arresting protesters (Gorbachev, 2017: 1; Vasil'chuk, 2017: 12; Fishman, 2017: 3; Gavrulina and Garmonenko, 2017: 1).

However, even this repression was minimal as protesters were soon released (Bulanov, 2017; Kuznetsova et al. 2017; Novaya Gazeta, 2017: 2; Kommersant-Daily, 2017: 5). The Kremlin knows the opposition is unpopular so there is little need to repress it harshly which could result in mass protests (Kashin, 2018). The regime has begun fining protesters knowing it is difficult to rally crowds against administrative fines and short sentences

⁹² Interview with Michael Rochlitz – Assistant Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow, 08/11/2016, Moscow (since the interview Michael has been at the Ludwig Maximilians Universität München and is now Professor of Economics at Universität Bremen).

⁹³ Interview with Dmitry V Goncharov – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 06/09/2016, Prague.

⁹⁴ Interview with Yury Kabanov – Lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 24/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

(Gershkovich, 2019a). The Kremlin is more concerned about the populace, as the opposition can be imprisoned and restricted, but the populace is a different matter, so the regime retains a large coercive structure⁹⁵. As the arrest of 1,373 participants at peaceful protests during demonstrations against the Kremlin not allowing any non-systemic opposition candidates on the ballot for the Moscow local elections (OVD-Info, 2019) highlights the Kremlin retains the capacity for repression, with protesters being severely beaten as the authorities decided “to shut out the opposition at any cost” fearing any spark may cause wider protests (Bershidsky, 2019c).

The Kremlin has supported other post-Soviet regimes against protesters. During the Euromaidan, the Kremlin bought Ukrainian debt and reduced gas prices (Interfax-Ukraine, 2013d; Vyshinskiy and Podolyanets, 2013; Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2013e). These deals gave Bankova the resources to survive. Meetings between Putin and Yanukovich gave Kyiv the support to crush the protests (Leshchenko, S 2014d; Kyiv Post, 2014d).

Moldova as a competitive authoritarian regime does not have the same repressive capacity as the Belarusian and Russian regimes. Rather, incumbent regimes can only use restrictive legislation. For example, the PCRM changed electoral laws to its advantage (Shapovalova and Boonstra, 2012: 61), and the Alliance for European Integration (AEI) coalition interpreted legislation to debar opposition political parties forming alternative governments (Całus, 2014b; Rebegea and Doran, 2014). During protests in 2015, Plahotniuc used control of parliament to get ally, Pavel Filip, appointed prime minister at night to reduce the chance of protesters mobilising outside parliament. But, many politicians were

⁹⁵ Interview with Ivan Grigoriev – Senior Lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 24/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

also asleep, leading to questions about the appointments legality (Kazanskiy, 2016: 1). This quick swearing in left demonstrators with a *fait accompli* and was a lesson from the Euromaidan that passing legislation at night leaves little opportunity for reaction⁹⁶.

The PCRM produced a media “landscape...characterized by attacks on investigative journalists, the closure of inconvenient media outlets and outright bias on the part of government-controlled media organizations” (Vitu, 2009: 191). Plahotniuc used his media to solidify control (Hall, S, 2016; Vladimirskaia, 2016), and closed media outlets for political affinities, like the closure of the NIT television station for its PCRM sympathies (Tkach, 2012; Batanova, 2012; Wilson, 2014c: 165). Media is controlled by oligarchs – in particular Plahotniuc – and not the state (Todua, 2011: 2; Tudoroiu, 2015: 658).

Successive Moldovan governments have failed to finance NGOs and many NGOs “serve as money making tools” (Horbowski, 2016: 68-69). While in the early 2010s the government and NGOs had a good working relationship in implementing effective policies (Lutsevych, 2013) by 2017, the government instigated legislation similar to the 2012 Russian foreign agents’ law, pointing to learning (Popșoi, 2017a). The legislation was justified as a measure to reduce Russian influence, but most Moldovan NGOs are funded by Western states and organisations (Popșoi, 2017a). This manoeuvre failed due to Western criticism and the threat of denying EU funds (Shupak, 2017; Jurnal.md, 2017e).

As in Belarus, much of the Moldovan economy is state-owned, allowing the authorities to pressure employees not to protest (Moldavskie Vedomosti, 2016c: 1). President Voronin often requested that businesses contribute to social projects, and if they

⁹⁶ Interview with Mihai Popșoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

refused then the tax inspectorate would pay an unscheduled visit and find something wrong in the accounts. Plahotniuc has copied this tactic⁹⁷.

As Moldovan regimes at least rhetorically claim to want EU integration, repression cannot be too obvious. As Moldova is small geographically the security services can easily exert control. During the 2017 protests, police set up cordons across the country and buses did not run to Chişinău⁹⁸. Agent-provocateurs were used to disrupt the 2015, 2016 and 2017 demonstrations (Vasil'eva, 2017), which was a direct lesson from the Euromaidan⁹⁹.

Through control of most state institutions, Plahotniuc governed without worrying too much about protests¹⁰⁰. Alexandru Jizdan – a Plahotniuc ally – was until recently interior minister. As it was a very public relationship it was known that if protests occurred they would be met violently¹⁰¹. By controlling law enforcement, Plahotniuc instigated politically motivated cases to keep control¹⁰². The judiciary remains tamed as an incorrect judgement results in disciplinary action, criminal conviction or removal¹⁰³. With the change of government in mid-2019 it appears that Plahotniuc is no longer in control, and at the time of writing he fled the country.

⁹⁷ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 20/04/2017; Interview with Ion Manole – Director at Promo-LEX, 12/07/2017, Skype.

⁹⁸ Interview with Dumitru Alaiba – Programme Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms Moldova (CPR) and currently Parliamentarian in the ACUM coalition, 14/07/2017, Skype.

⁹⁹ Interview with Mihai Popşoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 20/04/2017.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Mihai Popşoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

¹⁰² Interview with Vadim Vieru – Lawyer at Promo-Lex, 18/04/2017, Chişinău.

¹⁰³ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 17/05/2017.

Plahotniuc saw that Voronin's use of repression in 2009 left many injured or dead and precipitated violent protests affecting relations with the EU. Plahotniuc learnt that too much repression, especially torture, would destroy relations with the EU¹⁰⁴. Therefore, Plahotniuc relied on pressure, rather than overt repression¹⁰⁵. His control of media allowed control of what people watch and limited anti-regime messages reaching people¹⁰⁶. Plahotniuc is rich in a poor country and does not need many resources to exert his will¹⁰⁷. During Plahotniuc's period of power, the Moldovan authorities tapped the phones of opposition politicians, social activists and journalists (Balakhnova, 2019). Moldovan regimes do not have the capacity for mass repression, so they subtly exert control.

Like Moldova, Ukrainian regimes do not have the capacity for repression as the opposition – with oligarchic financing – competes for power (Karatnycky, 2005; Kudelia, 2016: 71-72; Pleines, 2016: 118; Konończuk, 2016). Kuchma tried to regulate the Internet through the Internet Coordination Council (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2003c), but Ukrainian regimes have not had Internet control resources, as in Belarus and Russia (Deibert, 2013: 91). During the Euromaidan, the SBU eavesdropped on protesters using a Russian SORM system (Soldatov and Borogan: 2015: 287), emphasising collaboration between Bankova and the Kremlin. Ukrainian media – like Moldova – is controlled by oligarchs, but governments have tried to build relations with oligarch groups. There were agreements between

¹⁰⁴ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 11/07/2017; Interview with Ion Manole – Director of Promo-LEX, 12/07/2017, on Skype.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Kamil Całus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 09/11/2016.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Ion Manole – Director at Promo-LEX, 12/07/2017, Skype; Interview with Dumitru Alaiba – Programme Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms Moldova (CPR) and currently Parliamentarian in the ACUM coalition, 14/07/2017, Skype.

television channels and the Yushchenko and Yanukovich regimes to cover-up government misdeeds (Ryabinska, 2014: 53), and the Yanukovich regime dictated to media what was to be shown (Ryabinska, 2014: 51; Kostyuk, 2011: 67-68). While Yanukovich repressed the media, Poroshenko used it to promote his interests (Kutovenko, 2014: 36-37). Similarly, Yanukovich gave NGOs little freedom, with NGOs only allowed to defend their members' rights, which affected how human rights NGOs functioned (Bilan and Bilan, 2011: 78-79, 84). Yanukovich changed tax legislation making it harder for NGOs to receive foreign money, forcing them to rely on regime funding, which starved democracy and human rights NGOs of resources (Cleary, 2016: 17). Under Poroshenko 2017 legislation forced anti-corruption NGOs to file asset declarations, which stopped NGOs working effectively (Sukhov, 2017e), pointing to learning from the 2012 Russian legislation.

Ukrainian regimes have tried to exert control. Kuchma sent signals to the opposition – like in Belarus and Russia – to think about protesting. The murder of investigative journalist Heorhiy Gongadze whose body was found decapitated in a forest near Kyiv was a clear signal to journalists and the opposition (Interfax-Ukraine, 2013c; 2014b). Yanukovich jailed opposition leader Tymoshenko, which united the opposition in preparation for the 2015 presidential elections (Kudelia, 2014: 24-25). Yanukovich with his focus on Russia followed Kremlin practices, but he was more thuggish in his application¹⁰⁸. Unlike Lukashenka and Putin, Yanukovich did not have the capability to fully repress the opposition (Kudelia, 2014: 24).

During the Euromaidan Yanukovich tried to use similar tactics to Lukashenka and Putin. The Ukrainian anti-protests laws commonly referred to as the dictatorship laws, gave

¹⁰⁸ Interview with a specialist on Ukraine who requested anonymity, 24/04/2017.

the regime *carte-blanche* to end the protests (Svyatets, 2016: 150). This package of laws consisted of ten pieces of legislation, including criminalising extremist activity; removing parliamentary immunity; providing amnesty for those who attacked protesters; allowing trials in absentia; instigating penalties for blocking government buildings; making it illegal to drive more than five cars in a motorcade; activating penalties for collecting and distributing information on the security services; defamation; increasing penalties for setting up unauthorised tents, stages and sound equipment; an anti-mask law, which prohibited the wearing of helmets; NGOs in receipt of foreign funding to register as foreign agents; obligatory licensing for Internet companies and provision for Internet censorship; and a wide-ranging definition of what constituted extremist activities. Much was copied from existing Russian and Belarusian legislation (Coynash, 2014; Wilson, 2014a; Snyder, 2014; Koshkina, 2015a: 173).

As mentioned, Svoboda was funded by Bankova and were used as agents-provocateurs to discredit the opposition (Sukhov, 2016e). During the Euromaidan Yanukovich resorted to force but lacked the coercive capabilities to see it through. Unlike the Kremlin, which placated protesters with limited reforms in 2011 and 2012, Yanukovich went for harsh repression but without the capacity to back it up. Yanukovich destroyed any residual popularity by antagonising protesters (Way, 2014).

Tactics on the Maidan emphasised that Bankova did not have the capacity for high levels of repression (Wilson, 2014c: 76). Rather it flitted between different coercive practices without sticking to one. In November, December, January and especially in February, the Berkut tried to clear the Maidan (Grytsenko, 2013; Kyiv Post, 2013; 2014a; 2014c; *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, 2014b; 2014c; UNIAN, 2014), but on all occasions the Berkut's

violence re-ignited the protests (Wilson, 2014c: 68). Unable to continually repress, Bankova resorted to off-screen repression (Wilson, 2014c: 76), attacking prominent protesters, like journalist Tetiana Chornovol and Automaidan leader, Dmitryo Bulatov away from cameras (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2013a; 2014d; 2014f). Bankova simply did not have the capacity for full repression – or even off-screen repression¹⁰⁹. The shooting of protesters on February 20, 2014, was the last desperate attempt of a regime trying to keep power, and likely facing pressure from the Kremlin to stop the protests (Makarenko, 2016).

Yanukovych ultimately failed because he chose to use repression but could not follow through (Way, 2014). Whereas Yanukovych fell back on repression readily, Poroshenko was subtler, following Kuchma-era tactics¹¹⁰, by copying practices in restricting the media¹¹¹, and reducing the powers of other political players one-by-one¹¹². Poroshenko used intimidation rather than overt repression, relying on deal-making¹¹³, and trying to gain control of repressive structures, such as the SBU¹¹⁴. While Poroshenko exerted control over the interior ministry, courts¹¹⁵ and increasingly the SBU (Ponomarenko, 2018a) he still had to make deals and intimidate rather than repress.

However, when the Poroshenko government faced criticism it reacted “in Yanukovych-like ways” (de Borja Lasheras, 2016: 58). Although the Berkut was disbanded

¹⁰⁹ Off-screen repression is coercion away from the cameras of the international media, which in the case of the Euromaidan were largely concentrated on the Maidan square in central Kyiv.

¹¹⁰ Interview with a specialist on Ukraine who requested anonymity, 24/04/2017.

¹¹¹ Interview with Maxim Eristavi – Co-founder of Hromadske International, 16/11/2016, Kyiv.

¹¹² Interview with Volodymyr Yermolenko – Director of Internews Ukraine, 26/04/2017, Kyiv.

¹¹³ Interview with Olexiy Haran – Professor at the Kyiv-Mykola Academy, 16/11/2016, Kyiv; Interview with Serhiy Kudelia – Assistant Professor of Political Science at Baylor University, 23/08/2016, Skype.

¹¹⁴ Interview with a specialist on Ukraine who requested anonymity, 24/04/2017.

¹¹⁵ Interview with a specialist on Ukraine who requested anonymity, 24/04/2017.

after the Euromaidan and replaced by the first special police regiment, many of its personnel are former Berkut officers (Roshchina, 2018), and it is led by Ruslan Tsikalyuk, who was involved in attempts to disperse protesters on the Maidan (Karyakina, 2018).

Poroshenko used his power to act against potential opposition, such as with the trial of Nadiya Savchenko, a potential presidential candidate, and the stripping of the citizenship of Mikheil Saakashvili (Fedoseyev, 2018; Rechinskiy, 2018: 2; Sukhov, 2017g; 2017h; 2017i; 2017j). Although by no means as repressive as Yanukovych, Poroshenko was averse to competition¹¹⁶. However, like Moldova, Ukrainian governments can only do so much to maintain power.

1.5. What is Authoritarian Learning?

Having defined authoritarianism and given a contextual overview of how the four case studies retain, at least, authoritarian practices, I define learning. Learning is a process that weighs the costs and benefits of a decision (Breslauer and Tetlock, 1991: 5). Regime learning involves individual and collective learning, so it is hard to differentiate what is learning and what is not (Levy, 1994: 280). A restrictive definition shows little, but a broad definition shows too much (Breslauer and Tetlock, 1991: 17; Tetlock, 1991: 22, 31). For Braun and Gilardi (2006: 299), learning is the effect A has on B and analysis of the actions of others (Braun and Gilardi, 2006: 306-307). Simmons and Elkins (2004) agree that learning happens because people learn from external actors and historical examples. But both explanations miss personal learning. Levy (1994: 296) defined learning as a “change of beliefs, skills, or procedures based on the observation and interpretation of experience.” But this is the result of learning. Learning is the *process* of engagement, leading to the

¹¹⁶ The interviewee requested anonymity for this part of the interview.

development of beliefs, skills, ideas and discernment. This definition explains learning without being broad or narrow. It is individual and regime focused, accounts for success and failure, explains knowledge from foreign and domestic experience and incorporates new knowledge.

Hall and Ambrosio (2017: 143) defined authoritarian learning as “a process in which authoritarian regimes adopt survival strategies based upon prior successes and failures of other governments.” However, it fails to account for learning from past domestic internal failures and successes. It is likely the domestic is crucial for authoritarian learning. Therefore I add both internal and external to the end of the quote by Hall and Ambrosio. Authoritarian learning is a process of engagement leading to the development and in many circumstances change of beliefs, the adaptation of skills and ideas. Authoritarian learning is concealed, as authoritarian regimes cannot openly discuss ways to repress the opposition.

There are pointers to learning in this chapter, with the Kremlin taking examples from the Belarusian regime crackdown in 2010. There is an example of support, with the Kremlin supporting Bankova during the Euromaidan. Although, “90% of what to do can be found on Google¹¹⁷,” it appears authoritarian learning involves an extensive network of dialogue and sharing of best practices, rather than a simple Internet search or watching YouTube videos. Authoritarian learning is about how these regimes adapt and the processes contributing to updating or changing elite beliefs. By defining authoritarian learning this

¹¹⁷ Interview with Aleś Łahviniec – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Aliaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

thesis provides innovation¹¹⁸, as there is no comprehensive definition of authoritarian learning in existing literature.

1.6. Thesis Plan

Chapter two investigates literature on the theories of experiential and social learning, as well as lesson-drawing, diffusion, linkage and policy-transfer. Investigation of these areas provides a clearer picture of what authoritarian learning is.

Chapter three analyses the methodology used to investigate authoritarian learning. I start by analysing my field work and the issues I had and how they were overcome. I analyse the black box of authoritarian regimes, before detailing case selection. After I address the research methodology of process-tracing, interviews and case studies, explaining how I use each.

Chapter four through chapter seven analyses examples of learning from the four case studies, and the period of analysis begins in 2000 and in February 2019. 2000 appeared the most appropriate year as an analysis from the break-up of the Soviet Union to the present would be too long. Rather 2000 is when Putin became President in Russia, and with Russia being the regional hegemon this seemed the most appropriate year to begin analysis. To best explain learning in the four case studies, I analyse examples thematically, rather than chronologically as this better explains authoritarian learning in the four case studies.

Chapter four investigates whether authoritarian regimes learn from external and internal failure. Starting with learning from external failure I assess the Euromaidan and how Belarus, Moldova and Russia drew lessons from it and then consider how the weakening of EU democracies is an example for regimes in Moldova and Ukraine. An internal example is

¹¹⁸ See footnote 1.

how the Kremlin and the Belarusian regime learnt from the Soviet collapse and the failure of the 1990s.

Chapter five analyses if authoritarian regimes learn from external and internal successes. External examples are learning from democracies and China as a model. Internally, I analyse whether Yanukovich's learning from the Orange Revolution, Poroshenko's learning from Yanukovich's failures during the Euromaidan and Viktor Plahotniuc's lesson-drawing in Moldova.

Chapter six analyses the external networks of authoritarian learning. Analysis of regional organisations across the post-Soviet states and interlinkage between elites of the four states emphasises the close links between regimes. By analysing Russian influence in Moldova and Ukraine I show that interlinkage is acute, making learning likely.

Chapter seven investigates internal interlinkage in each regime, investigating close links between political elites and where learning practices originate. The four cases have close intra-linkage among elites.

Chapter eight brings all the findings together, answering the propositions and the research questions. It shows that the aims of authoritarian and democratic learning are diverse, and how the West can counter this trend.

Chapter Two:

Understanding the State of Current Authoritarian Learning

Literature

Learning in authoritarian regimes is probably different to democracies¹¹⁹

2.1. Introduction

During the Colour Revolutions, the Belarusian regime began learning from the failure of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia (2000) and particularly after the Orange Revolution (2004) to restrict a potential Colour Revolution in Minsk. Belarus became a testing-ground for devising practices to improve the survival chances of authoritarian regimes. The Belarusian preventive counter-revolution, beginning in 2001, provided the Kremlin with ideas for its own preventive counter-revolution. The close ties between the Belarusian and Russian regimes made it easier for policy transfer to occur between both governments. Examples of Russian learning from Belarus was the creation of Nashi – the Kremlin’s anti-Colour Revolution youth movement – after the Belarusian regime had formed the Belaruskі Respublikanskiy Sayuz Moladzi (BRSM) with the exact same role, learning from Belarusian legislation restricting the foreign funding of NGOs, and the replacement of independent NGOs with GONGOs (Hall, S, 2017b).

The Belarusian regime in its learning from the fall of Milošević and the Orange Revolution, constantly devised methods to maintain the three pillars of authoritarian

¹¹⁹ Conversation with Thomas Ambrosio at a workshop at Aarhus University on Authoritarian stability and breakdown in Russia and its neighbour countries, 02/12/2016, Aarhus.

stability. For instance, in 2006, protests were likely after the presidential elections, so the government devised tactics to stop protest. It published its own exit polls, to confuse the public, and cloud the opposition's argument that electoral fraud had occurred. The regime created a controlled competitive election, creating the smokescreen of a democratic electoral process, with Sergei Gaidukevich playing the 'independent' candidate (Frear, 2015). Aliaksandr Kazulin may also have been a pro-regime candidate acting as opposition, as he suddenly became the leader of the Social Democrats (Assembly) – a party often manipulated by the regime – without any political experience (Wilson, 2011a: 212). Kazulin and Gaidukevich's candidacy reduced the vote for the only definite opposition candidate, Alyaksandr Milinkevich. The 2006 protests allowed the authorities to hone repressive tactics as police brutally dispersed protesters congregating in central Minsk (Wilson, 2006).

The Belarus example highlights two aspects of authoritarian learning that of policy transfer and the likely networks authoritarian regimes have established to aid learning. Having defined authoritarianism – where authoritarian regimes do not just manipulate elections, but also restrict freedom of expression, information and the rule of law – provided a contextual overview of the four case studies, defined learning as a *process* of engagement, leading to the development of beliefs, skills, ideas and discernment, and classified authoritarian learning as a process in which authoritarian regimes implement survival strategies based on previous external and internal successes and failures, I analyse how authoritarian learning fits into the wider learning literature.

I compare authoritarian and democratic learning to ascertain whether authoritarian learning is different from its democratic equivalent. I investigate theories of learning, to ascertain whether theoretically, authoritarian learning is distinct from democratic learning.

While theoretically, both are similar the aims of each are distinct, with the key aspect of authoritarian learning centring on survival. I analyse various areas of political learning relevant to authoritarian learning, which are policy transfer, diffusion, linkage and lesson-drawing. This increases understanding of authoritarian learning and determine whether there are differences between authoritarian and democratic learning. As well as placing authoritarian learning in the wider learning literature I perform a similar task with the wider authoritarian literature by linking authoritarian learning with existing literature on authoritarian regimes. Afterwards, I ascertain whether there are different types of authoritarian learning to determine if authoritarian learning is a singular phenomenon or not.

2.2. Learning Theory and Political Learning Types

2.2.1. *Theories of Learning*

Having defined learning as a *process* of changing beliefs and the gathering of new information, I analyse existing learning theories to develop an understanding of authoritarian learning. While existing learning theories come from education literature, they help develop a theoretical overview of authoritarian learning. Separately, Bank and Edel (2015) and Hall and Ambrosio (2017) have touched on theorising authoritarian learning, but currently the literature has not provided a comprehensive theory of authoritarian learning. By theorising authoritarian learning, this thesis is innovative¹²⁰. Rather than assessing all learning theories (cognitive, holistic, humanistic, experiential and social), I analyse humanist, experiential and social theories in detail as these are crucial to understanding democratic and authoritarian learning.

¹²⁰ See footnote 1.

While, cognitive theory appears relevant by focusing on past learning (Carnell et al. 2002: 1530) and problem-solving to get best results (Burns, 1995: 112), it excludes learning from success (Park Woolf, 2009: 110; Pezzulo et al. 2009: 2). As Bank and Edel (2015: 21) argue authoritarian regimes learn from failures *and* success, therefore, cognitive theory is not applicable. Similarly, holistic learning focuses on “personal experience, and emotional affection with outside objects and situations” (Yang, 2004: 242) combining the spiritual, mental and physical for learning (Merriam and Sek Kim, 2008: 77). This focus on spiritual enlightenment is not applicable as it is unlikely that Lukashenka and Putin learn for spiritual enlightenment.

Humanistic, experiential and social learning are relevant for democratic and authoritarian learning, although humanistic learning is only applicable to democratic learning. Humanistic learning analyses freedom, dignity and potential, perceiving people as moral and free-thinking (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994; Huitt, 2009). For example, Erasmus of Rotterdam and Thomas More by questioning the stranglehold of religion on 16th Century European life paved the way for works by Martin Luther and John Calvin (Loughlin, 2014: 64). While Luther and Calvin were religious leaders, Luther for instance, believed in the importance of educating the individual, although, of course, for Luther, this was to be done through the bible (Rosin, 2014). Humanistic learning places the individual front and centre.

Experiential learning acquires knowledge through “grasping and transforming...experience” (Kolb, 1984: 41), so the learner devises questions and then investigates and experiments to construct meaning to a particular situation (Marin, 2015: 855). Experiential learning requires a four-stage process of concrete experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualisation; and active experimentation (Brookes, 1995: 66). It

incorporates learning from failure and success (Marin, 2015: 855), allowing a learner to test hypotheses (Beard and Wilson, 2006: 19) and draw appropriate lessons. Experiential learning synthesises all knowledge allowing a person to learn and test hypotheses. In a regime context, governments improve their capabilities by learning from external and internal success and failure. Experiential learning is useful as it “*aims to achieve policy change*”, but “*does not inevitably result in it*” (Bank and Edel, 2015: 6).

Social learning theory shows how a person learns from their social environment. People observe others and learn from their actions about what to do (success) and what not to do (failure) (Bandura, 1963). People learn by getting rewards or receiving punishment (Bandura, 1971: 3). Diffusion is integral to social learning (Lobel and Sadler, 2015) allowing for information lag where ideas only reach a few people before the idea is rejected, countered or superseded by others (Munshi, 2004: 185-186). Observation is conducive to learning as people only need see what is happening to learn, rather than getting involved (Webler et al. 1995: 445). States react to what others do and shape policies from their examples. Social learning theory uses diffusion, emulation and adaptation which are important aspects of learning. While it focuses on learning from the successes and failures of others it is not a significant leap to see applicability in explaining learning from domestic experience. Domestic learning shapes how individuals learn and it is relevant for understanding authoritarian learning.

Habitus involves people using past experience in the present (Bourdieu, 1972; 1992; 2000), and although separate to social learning theory it fits with it, as habitus assesses the importance of learning from past experience (Marden, 2016: 205). A person’s ideas are formed by the habitat in which they live and grew up in, and that habitat shapes

their learning and how they react to everyday issues (Flach et al. 2010: 9). To survive in a particular environment, a person orientates themselves to the rules-of-the-game (Silva, 2016: 84). Many of the elites in power in the four case studies were born and raised in the Soviet Union. It is likely that having grown up in the Soviet Union, Belarusian, Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian elites internalise experiences from this period, reverting to authoritarian experiences in the present. It is hard to show this, but it is a likely explanation for why authoritarian practices remain.

Communities of practice, which is another aspect of social learning, see people learning with and from others. According to Wenger (1998: 4) communities of practice allow for dialogue, helping people learn. Literature on communities of practice analyses how businesses learn (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al. 2002). For example, in the 1990s Daimler Chrysler having recorded losses for many years radically changed operations. Instead of having separate departments of engineers, designers and accountants, each car in the range had a single unit combining all three types of personnel. This improved learning between different groups and the engineers created an informal group to share experience and ensure no two cars were designed the same way, all of which enhanced learning (Wenger et al. 2002: 2). There is evidence from the Commonwealth of Independent states (CIS) that such bodies as the Council of Heads of State (CHS) hold informal meetings, although it is unknown what these informal networks entail, or who attends. Therefore, I refer to networks of learning, rather than, informality as such, although it is likely that these networks consist “of friends” and allies, which points to informal networks as argued for by Krackhardt and Stern (1988: 123).

Communities of practice is an everyday occurrence, with people belonging to at least one (Wenger, 1998: 7; Lave and Wenger, 1991: 29). Put simply communities of practice is about networks to which people belong, allowing them to come together and share best practices and learn from what worked or did not. While communities of practice focus on businesses and everyday social learning it could be reinterpreted to understand authoritarian learning. As seen in later chapters, authoritarian learning is networked with extensive dialogue occurring, sharing of best practices and learning. Communities of practice is a good representation of the networks within authoritarian learning.

As a person's life is shaped by their environment, political psychology is another field linked with social learning theory, as politicians are shaped by their environment. Understanding their psychology determines how they act in certain situations. By using political psychology one can clearly show an actor's actions in a particular situation, as political psychology analyses an agent's political behaviour and how the conduct in question was shaped by their social environment (Tileagă, 2013: 5). By studying a person's actions, political psychologists better understand their motivations and what could lead them to repeat the same actions (Elster, 1993: 10). What drives a person can be both conscious and unconscious, but it is possible to detect mechanisms which can be traced back to explain actions (Elster, 1993: 11-12). Political psychology attempts to provide incontrovertible evidence, which affects understanding of political behaviour (Marková, 2012: 113; Potter, 2012). Although the need for incontrovertible evidence is pressing, political psychology provides a framework for understanding how political actors operate in a particular political system (Huddy et al. 2013: 3), making political psychology relevant for authoritarian and democratic learning.

2.2.2. Political Learning Types

The literature on political learning remains a terminological mess with researchers using idioms interchangeably from policy transfer to policy adaptation and policy learning. However, these terms are similar with only moderate distinctions between each. While the political learning literature has concentrated on democracies it is relevant for understanding authoritarian learning, particularly policy transfer, diffusion, linkage and lesson-drawing.

While isomorphism is a “process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 149) seeing developments in societies occurring not because of learning but because similar circumstances happened, leading to comparable conclusions being drawn (Runge, 2014: 28), Max Bader (2014) found that most post-Soviet states copied Russian electoral legislation, pointing to learning. While these electoral systems share similarities in “shape, structure, or form” (Hasmath and Hsu, 2014: 940) pointing possibly to each state reaching the same conclusion, that the words in legislation come directly from Russian laws shows learning.

Haas (1991: 63) defines political learning as “any change in behaviour due to a change in perception about how to solve a problem.” But *in a political situation* should be added to the end of the quote. This definition includes learning from failure or success. While learning is difficult to measure (Gross Stein, 1994: 156; Zito and Schout, 2009: 1104) there are ways to do it, such as looking at when legislation was passed, what was included in the legislation and if it shares similar characteristics to other laws in other regional states. The Ukrainian dictatorship laws taken from Russia and Belarus and adapted to the Euromaidan protests in January 2014, is one example.

If one state changes legislation to resemble another, then it can be inferred that learning occurred (Hall, P, 1993: 278). The tracing of electoral system laws across the post-Soviet space by Max Bader (2014) showed that such laws originated in Russia, pointing to learning by other post-Soviet states from Russia. Currently, political learning focuses on democracies with Hecló (1994: 305-306) arguing that it is about “collective puzzlement on society’s behalf”. Authoritarian regimes are less worried about improving societal welfare, only being concerned with understanding what could lead to protests. Therefore, it is perhaps understandable why, currently, there is limited focus on authoritarian learning in existing learning literature.

Policy transfer is about policy transmission between states with policy originating in state A and then being transferred to state B who perceives the policy as successful (Zito and Schout, 2009, 1114). Policy transfer explains how policies are developed between states using administrative actions, policies, institutions and ideas from another state, or from the past or present (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 5). Six groups of people can begin policy transfer: elected officials, political parties, civil servants, pressure groups, policy experts and supra-national institutions (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996, 344-345), although it is mainly politicians and civil servants who import policy. A shared cultural past between states enables “policy change” (French et al. 2014: 387). As all states engage in policy transfer it is hard to gauge where an individual policy originated, making assessment difficult (Dibeh, 2009: 12). However, as the 2014 Ukrainian dictatorship laws show it is possible to find where legislation originated.

Diffusion emphasises that states are affected by others. Policies and knowledge diffuse across borders (Zito and Schout, 2009: 1107) and involve policy innovation, adoption

and examination (Volden, 2006: 310; Zito and Schout, 2009: 1108). Regimes emulate and are influenced by others (Gilardi, 2010: 660; Strebel, 2011: 469). Policies are not alone in spreading between states with ideas, tactics, methods and best practices also spread (Strang and Soule, 1998: 266). State structures and institutional support affect how successful diffusion will be (Sikkink, 1991: 21). Diffusion commonly occurs between states but it can happen inside states (Gilardi, 2012: 454). It explains a range of ideas from social learning to mimicry and contagion (Strang and Soule, 1998: 266).

Diffusion is a process and not the end result (Gilardi, 2012: 455). Many things can be diffused between states – or international organisations – but often it is policies, instruments, methods and ideas (Gilardi, 2012: 459). The first state, or international organisation, attempts to entice others to follow its norms and once enough have done so the norm becomes accepted (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 895).

The linkage and leverage states have with one another is important (Braun and Gilardi, 2006: 299) as it is likely states with strong linkage and leverage with each other will emulate policies. But with increasing global communication, governments look for any policy incentives (Weyland, 2006: 2; Braun and Gilardi, 2006: 299). Diffusion is hard to measure but simple to evaluate as one need only check the news. The relationships that states have with one another can be monitored making it easier to trace diffusion (Gilardi and Füglistler, 2008: 418).

Lesson-drawing is where policymakers draw lessons to achieve best results (James and Lodge, 2003: 180). A regime learns from others about what to do and what not to do (Tosun, 2013: 19). Governments draw lessons from other policies to “apply to their own political system” (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 344). Often elites rely on policymakers or non-

state actors to find and formulate policy (Rose, 1991b: 4, 6, 15-17). Lesson-drawing helps people gain knowledge and adapt (Rose, 1991b: 7).

There are four processes in lesson-drawing. Copying involves replicating an entire policy (Benson and Lorenzoni, 2014: 205). A hybrid combines two or more policies. Synthesis involves many policies, combining them and implementing the best parts. Inspiration borrows one policy and develops it in a new way (Rose, 1993: 30; James and Lodge, 2003: 180). Regimes geographically, culturally or linguistically close are likely to lesson-draw from each other (Asare and Studlear, 2009: 376) and successful or failed lessons can be drawn from domestic experience (Reiter, 1995; 1996: 37).

For all political regimes, it is easier and cheaper to persuade the population of the government's right to rule than use coercion. Persuasion is done by controlling the discourse rather than resorting to domination (Buttigieg, 2005: 37). Gramsci argued that the bourgeoisie had "through leadership and persuasion" gained working-class support, rather than imposing control (Buttigieg, 2005: 38), and the working class allowed themselves to be dominated by accepting bourgeois rhetoric (McLaren et al. 2002: 156). The state should have the capabilities to use force but as generations come and go the necessity of force diminishes as the state gains consent through persuasion (Fontana, 2008: 101). Governments construct institutions to enforce their rhetoric and educational establishments, mass media and religion are important for maintaining consent (Mayo, 1999: 36). Persuasion is relevant to all regimes as it is easier to coax than resort to coercion.

2.3. Authoritarian and Democratic Learning Compared

Theoretically, there are very few differences between authoritarian and democratic learning but each has distinct aims. When an authoritarian regime collapses it tends to be

terminal for elites, whereas politicians in democratic systems have the opportunity to retain power – however limited – or return to power later. Both authoritarian and democratic learning will be theorised and political learning analysed. There have been attempts to theorise authoritarian learning (Bank and Edel, 2015; Hall and Ambrosio, 2017), but they do not provide a full picture. Even democratic learning remains under-theorised as most researchers (O’Donnell and Schmitter, 2013; Huntington, 1991) concentrate on how regimes democratise, rather than on how they learn.

2.3.1. Democratic Learning

2.3.1.1. Democratic Learning Theories

Humanistic theory perceives humans as capable of determining their own goals and is interlinked with democracy. For example, early democracy initiatives by USAID in Latin America tried to educate the populace to make them good citizens capable of making informed choices (Carothers, 1999: 25). At least in rhetoric, democracies rely on an informed public able to make knowledgeable choices. As democrats rely on the public to get elected it is likely that part of their decision-making accounts for voters’ wishes, even if it is just the question “what will get me (re)-elected?”

Experiential learning analyses learning by implementation, and is useful in understanding democratic learning, as citizens learn by doing, thereby improving their lives (Fletcher, 2013: 106). It is likely regimes use experiential learning by implementing policies and gauging which strategies work. While experiential learning as an internal process is hard to measure (Bank and Edel, 2015: 6) often democrats talk about where they took policy from or its source is traceable, as seen with David Cameron copying ideas from the Swedish Moderate Party (White, 2012; Brown, 2014).

Social learning theory focuses on learning from success and failure in a social environment (Bandura, 1963), and is useful for understanding democratic learning. Elites learn by analysing successes and failures of other states and previous domestic experience. Habitus is useful for democratic learning, as a person uses previous experience to make decisions in the present. If a person grew up in a democracy then it is plausible that they use those values when evaluating current issues. After all, as Feldman and Johnston (2014: 337) contend “political attitudes may have substantial heritable components”.

Communities of practice is about learning from meeting and talking to like-minded people (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Through meetings, democrats exchange ideas, thereby enhancing their learning and bolstering one another to protect democratic ideas. For example, members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), who are mostly democratic states, often meet to discuss common strategies for enhanced defence. Through member meetings, NATO adapted to the end of the Cold War and reinterpreted its *raison d'être* (Adler, 2008). The EU uses the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to speak with non-democratic states hoping that exchanging ideas help their democratisation (Adler, 2008: 207).

Political psychology is linked to social learning theory and elites in democracies engage in bargaining and communication to agree on an outcome. However, regarding democracy and political psychology there has been little analysis on the political psychology of democratic politicians, other than analysis of a person's acceptance of democratic values (Mondak, 2010: 16). It is likely that four of the big five traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness (Mondak, 2010) fit the behavioural characteristics of

democratic elites, with only neuroticism not being a part of the social appearance of democratic politicians.

The American Revolutionary War against Britain is an example of democratic learning. The thirteen colonies rose up against Britain because Britain refused the colonists representation at Westminster. Books like the Rights of Man provided the ideology and the slogan 'No taxation without representation' became the rallying cry. The American revolutionaries believed that a monarch – even a constitutional one – was not the best form of government. They advocated rule by the people, representation for the people and parliament as sovereign. This is a humanistic perception of learning, seeing the people as enlightened and free-thinking. It is an example of experiential learning because the Americans learnt from British colonial mistakes. There was little neighbour emulation as Canada and Mexico remained under British and Spanish control so it was a process of trial and error. The best example of this is *The Federalist Papers* which show arguments between American elites on how to form the new state. This fits social learning theory.

2.3.1.2. Democratic Learning Types

Democratic states with common histories, cultures and languages often transfer policies. Tony Blair chose the American New Deal as the framework for his Welfare to Work policy – rather than a European policy – because of closer British ties with America (Obinger et al. 2013: 121). Policy transfer increases as globalisation enhances communication capabilities (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996) and policy transfer incorporates policies from other states into state institutions (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 6, 14) and is used at the EU level (Radaelli, 2000; Padgett, 2003; Sissenich, 2008). Bulmer et al (2007: 11) argued that there are three types of EU policy transfer. Uploading is when the EU takes policy from a member

state. Downloading is when a member state takes policy from the EU, like the membership *acquis communautaire*. Horizontal policy transfer involves “reciprocal policy learning between member states.” Policy transfer is normally a process taking place in democracies.

Lesson-drawing is an important aspect of learning in democracies. Plato remarked in his *Laws* that people should analyse other states’ legislation to see if laws could be transferred (Kelemen, 2015). Two historical examples highlight how lesson-drawing works in democracies. After the American Revolutionary War, the founding fathers analysed British law, taking legislation they agreed with and rejecting those they disagreed with. In his book *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville argued that France would have a better political system if it incorporated the American system (Rose, 1991a: 1).

2.3.1.3. Democratic Diffusion

Diffusion analyses how ideas spread across borders (Di Palma, 1990: 14, 24) but it is more than that. Strang (1991: 325) defined diffusion as “any process where prior adoption or practice in a population alters the probability of adoption for remaining non-adopters.” This definition explains how if one entity appropriates something it is likely others will follow. Diffusion can be measured by investigating how ideas spread from one entity to another (Strang and Brandon Tuma, 1993: 637). External factors – like economic linkage – allow diffusion to operate across regions, percolating states and affecting their governance. Increasingly a democratic state in a region leads to the democratisation of others as democratic ideas spread. International organisations require that a state is democratic for membership, making democracy the only-game-in-town forcing would-be authoritarians to cloak their regimes in a democratic guise (Wejnert, 2014: 21). Elkins (2011: 1654) showed that when one state became democratic neighbouring states quickly democratised, which

has been quantified repeatedly (Brinks and Coppedge, 2006; Doorenspleet, 2004; Fordham and Asal, 2007; Gleditsch, 2002; Gleditsch and Ward, 2006; O’Loughlin et al. 1998; Starr, 1991; Wejnert, 2005). Gleditsch and Ward (2006: 916) found that “since 1815, the probability that a randomly chosen country would be a democracy is...0.75 if the majority of...neighbours are democracies, but only 0.14 if the majority of...neighbours are non-democracies.” According to Kopstein and Reilly (2000: 12) “diffusion...is a complex process that involves information flows, networks of communication, hierarchies of influence and receptivity to change.” Diffusion relies on linkages and state interdependencies to assist idea spread (Starr, 1991: 379).

Democratic diffusion received academic attention with the democratisation of Greece, Portugal and Spain. While diffusion certainly played a role in these democratic transitions the prize of membership of the European Community (EC)¹²¹ focused the attention of Greek, Portuguese and Spanish elites (Whitehead, 1986: 23) and elites were linked. But, this helped diffusion, making it easier for ideas to spread (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 76).

The concept of diffusion as conducive to democratisation came to the fore again with the 1989 revolutions and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. Mikhail Gorbachev retracted the Brezhnev Doctrine¹²², which weakened these regimes. Gorbachev’s perestroika (economic reform) and glasnost (political opening) reforms weakened these governments further (Hayden, 2006: 3-4). The 1989 Polish elections, brought the first non-Communist government to power in 40 years, beginning a wave of change which saw the

¹²¹ Precursor to the EU.

¹²² This policy allowed the Soviet Union the right to intervene in the Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe. It was expounded by Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev after intervention in the 1968 Czechoslovak Prague Spring.

Hungarians open their border; East Germans use it to escape to West Germany and the collapse of the Czechoslovak regime (O'Loughlin et al. 1998: 545). The collapse of communism across Eastern Europe was a clear example of "emulation, demonstration, or modelling effects" (Starr, 1991: 357). The communist regimes were interlinked with common institutions and government practices and were unable to adapt to the contagion of democratic ideas (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006a: 10-11).

Revolutions from 1997 to 2005 increased the literature on democratic diffusion. Bunce and Wolchik (2006b: 284) charted diffusion processes across Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Like Eastern Europe in 1989, ideas spread. Activists from early revolutions offered support (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006a: 5; Beissinger, 2007: 261). For example, the youth group, Pora, which was prominent in the Ukrainian Orange Revolution took ideas from Otpor after Otpor helped oust Milošević in 2000 (Collin, 2007: 68-69).

Diffusion allows researchers to pinpoint ideas, emphasise their importance, highlight how learning occurs and show diffused methods (Beissinger, 2009: 75). Democratic diffusion and by association democratic emulation are less about states and more about people. Democratic ideas are spread or emulated.

But at times it is an assumption that because similar tactics occurred in two revolutions the protagonists must have learnt. Way (2008b: 57) uses the analogy of drivers pulling into a petrol station not because they emulate others, but because they need petrol. Diffusion does not account for wider issues, only concentrating on learning. Without the retraction of the Brezhnev Doctrine and Gorbachev's reforms (Hayden, 2006: 3-4) the East European Communist regimes would likely have survived. In the Georgian (2003) and

Ukrainian (2004) Colour Revolutions, both Eduard Shevardnadze (Georgia) and Leonid Kuchma (Ukraine) were weak presidents in their final presidential terms. In Serbia, Milošević was weakened by Western sanctions and a NATO bombing campaign (Way, 2008b: 57).

Nor does diffusion adequately account for why the Belarusian 2006 revolution failed when activists adopted practices used elsewhere (Way, 2008b: 59). Diffusion focuses on idea spread, failing to account for factors, like a weak incumbent regime (Way, 2008a: 91). It fails to explain why some regimes are impervious to diffusion. One is left believing only ideas matter (Silitski, 2009: 87). States should be assessed individually to analyse causes (Way, 2008b: 55; Whitehead, 2001: 6).

But diffusion explains a clear trend during the Colour Revolutions. Tactics, groups, symbols and practices were too similar to have occurred individually (Silitski, 2009: 87). Structural factors are important, but it is unlikely elites, groups or individuals did not look at other examples for a solution (Silitski, 2009: 87). Diffusion will not work if the society being diffused to is unreceptive, which explains why attempted revolutions have failed like in Belarus (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006b: 301). Linkage is important as linked states are more receptive to the spread of ideas (Brinks and Coppedge, 2006: 482).

2.3.1.4. Democratic Linkage and Leverage

The terms linkage and leverage assess links that authoritarian regimes have with democracies and the leverage democracies exert over the former. Linkage can be political, economic, or cultural (Levitsky and Way, 2005a: 23, 26; 2006b: 379). Levitsky and Way (2010: 87-88) contended that Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia democratised because of increased trade linkages with the EU allowing the EU to exert

leverage on them to democratise. Leverage is the pressure exerted by the West, whereas linkage is “the density of ties to the Western world” (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 43).

For example, the linkage ENP states have with the EU has led to increased EU leverage to democratise (Fedorová, 2011: 15; Sasse, 2008). Spain is another example as under Francisco Franco, Spain’s linkages with the EC increased, allowing the EC to demand that further affiliation was preconditioned on Spanish democratisation (Calderón Martínez, 2015: 533). To hide the authoritarian nature of a regime, elites construct a democratic façade (Levitsky and Way, 2005b: 520; 2006a: 207-210). Hughes and Sasse (2016) discussed the importance of power ideas, where elites decide on a political position and espouse these views. Therefore, authoritarian regimes claim that they are democratic to hide authoritarian consolidation behind the frontage of a ‘democratic’ system.

Levitsky and Way’s (2005a; 2005b; 2006a; 2006b; 2010) comprehensive analysis of linkage and leverage provided a clear framework, but it is inflexible and static. As Tolstrup (2014: 10) argued linkage is not purely “fixed...by geography or history but can be altered to some degree.” Political actors shape linkage with external actors, contributing to leverage exerted on them. Gatekeeper elites in a country choose who they ally with and the linkages they have with others. This is important to understand democratic linkage and leverage. External actors provide an example that elites see benefits them (Tolstrup, 2014: 38). Gatekeepers are split into political, economic and cultural elites, with each having different opinions on which external entities to support (Tolstrup, 2014: 38). I use this fluid approach to linkage and leverage, as it explains competition between elites in the four case studies.

Leverage is effective if the state being leveraged to is “economically and militarily weak and dependent”. To make leverage successful no alternative model should exist. The

leveraging state should not be seen to be enforcing its will (Burnell and Schlumberger, 2012: 6). Without linkage, leverage does not achieve democratisation. Leverage relies on coercion, however mild, which regimes resist so without the diffusive element of linkage, leverage fails (Levitsky and Way, 2005a: 22; 2006b: 379). When the West has significant linkage over states, leverage, which involves sanctions, political conditionality, “diplomatic pressure, and military intervention,” aids democratisation (Levitsky and Way, 2005a: 21).

In regions where the West has limited linkage, leverage is partial, and if the West is faced by another external model, the ineffectiveness of Western linkage and leverage increases. Russia has an alternative model and exerts linkage and leverage, as in Moldova and Transnistria, continuing the status-quo and creating competition for external influence in Moldova (Beyer and Wolff, 2016: 336). The Kremlin uses its influence in Transnistria to maintain influence on the Chişinău governments. With the conflict in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea and the emergence of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR) Russia exerts further leverage over Ukraine (Broers, 2016: 379), although it is not certain that Ukraine wants the territories back.

2.3.2. *Authoritarian Learning*

Having analysed democratic learning I turn to investigate authoritarian learning. Firstly, I assess existing authoritarianism literature to investigate authoritarian learning and place it within the authoritarian literature. Secondly, I address the theoretical aspects of authoritarian learning, analysing social and experiential learning. Thirdly, I analyse different learning typologies relevant to authoritarian learning, including policy transfer, diffusion, linkage, emulation and lesson-drawing.

2.3.2.1. Authoritarian Learning and Authoritarian Literature

While, no two authoritarian regimes are the same as they rely on different sectors of society for support and have different institutions and ways of replacing elites (Geddes, 1999: 121) subsets of authoritarian regimes can be delineated, which share common characteristics, as to an extent the four case studies do. As mentioned in chapter one, authoritarian regimes are concerned with survival. Cheibub et al (2010: 84) found that authoritarian regimes “frequently succumb to internal disputes over leadership succession.” To alleviate this potential for violence, authoritarian regimes often renege on absolute power for some form of power-sharing, although violence is never far below the surface (Svolik, 2012: 2; Geddes, 1999: 121). Institutions help authoritarian survival, and are a way to co-opt others and legitimise the regime. Since the Cold War, the numbers of authoritarian regimes holding elections have “increased dramatically” (Wahman et al. 2013: 26).

Since the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union non-democratic states began a democratic transition, however, this quickly slowed and democratic transitions often never materialised, leaving many states in a “grey zone” (Carothers, 2002). The four case studies are in this zone, although Belarus and Russia as established authoritarian regimes are leaving this zone of indeterminacy. As seen in chapter one, the four case studies retain authoritarian practices and try to create institutions to keep power. As Gerchewski (2013) contended the key to the preservation of an authoritarian regime is legitimisation, co-option and if necessary, repression.

Authoritarian regimes do not need to repress all the time, as this takes enormous capacity which few regimes have. Rather the monopoly on repression, rather than the

repression itself gives regimes legitimacy and a cadre willing to serve as security personnel. Similarly, authoritarian regimes look to improve the economy to allow the citizenry to get richer and, therefore, support the regime (Gandhi, 2008: 76). The fourteen security services¹²³ in Belarus, for example, highlights that the Belarusian regime has the repressive capacity and the support of enough people to act as security service personnel. Although the Russian economy is increasingly state-owned¹²⁴, the Kremlin has allowed people to get richer, travel and spend their earnings on the latest technology and fashion, thereby increasing regime legitimacy¹²⁵.

Institutions in authoritarian regimes serve as legitimation and co-option structures and are a controlled arrangement, allowing the authorities to regulate which groups are allowed entry (Brownlee, 2007: 3). For instance, parliaments provide a democratic façade, while giving supporters rent access and patronage, allowing these groups access to power (Gandhi and Przeworski, 2007; Lust-Okar, 2005). As well as being useful for bringing in more supporters, institutions induce trust between elites as there is regular interaction. It is easily seen if there is non-compliance by factions in implementing policies (Svolik, 2012: 87). While institutions like parliaments reduce the power of a leader, these structures increase power-sharing giving others a stake in regime survival. Institutions invoke trust, a necessity if the leader is to survive and not suffer a palace-coup (Svolik, 2012: 2). Parliaments are ideal for increasing regime survival as the authorities can select those permitted to enter (Gandhi,

¹²³ Interview with Dzianis Melyantsou – Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Coordinator at the Minsk Track-II Initiative, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

¹²⁴ Interview with Maxim Trudolyubov – Editor-at-large for Vedomosti and Senior Fellow at the Kennan Institute, 05/04/2017, Skype.

¹²⁵ Interview with Irina V Soboloyeva – Lecturer at Columbia University, 01/11/2016, Skype.

2008: 78). The Russian regime has been proficient at co-opting outside groups into parliament and offering them patronage.

However, by allowing other factions into power, the regime has to accept policy concessions, which can lead to a change of stance on an issue (Gandhi, 2008: 78). To reduce “threats within the ruling elite” (Gandhi and Przeworski, 2007: 1288), authoritarian leaders often set-up “inner sanctums where real decisions are made” away from the trappings of a parliament, and where the leader can rely on trusted allies to help make key decisions. An inner sanctum reduces the possibility of other elites taking control (Gandhi, 2008: 20), and allows the leader and key allies to keep power while giving other elites a say in the running of the state (Svolik, 2012: 54). As seen in chapter six, the presidential administrations in Belarus and Russia serve as inner sanctums, proposing legislation that the parliaments pass. Putin has a close coterie of allies who retain power and while Lukashenka does not have such associates, people remain close to him.

Elections provide legitimacy and co-option, thereby ensuring regime survival. By controlling a political party the leader protects his position, as a political party comes with supporters willing to shield the leader (Geddes, 2006). Elections allow the regime to test its survival skills, as authoritarian regimes can ascertain how popular the regime is over the course of a number of elections. Elections can show how effective the regime’s get-out-the-vote tactics are, and establish how popular the opposition are among the wider populace (Gandhi, 2008: 167). As seen in chapter one, all four case studies have attempted to co-opt others through elections.

Hadenius and Teorell (2007) found that authoritarian regimes holding multi-party elections were likely to collapse. However, they do not explain whether those multiple

parties are regime-controlled or not. If a regime is competing with independent parties then it is likely to be unable to control the electoral system and stifle non-regime parties. Few regimes unable to control the opposition and elections would survive. This explains events in Moldova and Ukraine where regimes compete with a viable opposition, thereby failing to consolidate power. In regimes capable of controlling elections and running the façade of multi-party elections, like the Kremlin, elections help reduce tensions over power-sharing, helping authoritarian regimes survive (Svolik, 2012: 97). Those authoritarian regimes with institutions like parliaments are likely to have a long tenure (Svolik, 2012: 111). It is why authoritarian regimes risk holding elections and allowing other factions into the regime as it alleviates tensions.

Patronal politics is relevant to understanding how the four case studies work. Hale (2015: 9-10) saw patronal politics as “where individuals organize their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishment through chains of actual acquaintance.” Power resides with persons who have the capacity to enforce it, and these people act as patrons to “a large and dependent base of *clients*” (Hale, 2015: 10). Within patronal societies, politics “revolves chiefly around personalized relationships joining extended networks of patrons and clients, and political struggle tends to take the form of competition among different patron-client networks” (Hale, 2015: 21).

Patronal politics is relevant to understanding the four case studies as it explains the structures in each state and accounts for why regimes in Belarus and Russia have been better at maintaining power than in Moldova and Ukraine. Hale (2015: 64) finds that in some states where patronal politics exists there is a single pyramid, with a chief patron –

usually the state leader – in power, and with other pyramids marginalised or eradicated. By contrast, other countries have competing pyramids where there are multiple pyramids all competing for power.

Lukashenka has developed a single level pyramid with himself as the ultimate arbiter. With the Belarusian regime having a high coercive capacity and relying on repression to maintain power¹²⁶, the authorities enforce a single regime pyramid. As seen in chapter one, the regime by using disappearances, opposition co-option and the promotion of mistrust among opposition activists (Tretyuk, 2001; Radio Svoboda, 2016; Shraibman, 2016d) has eliminated alternatives to Lukashenka's single pyramid. Within the regime, Lukashenka moves people from role to role to reduce their ability to build separate power bases. This promotes loyalty as Lukashenka is the final arbiter, so elites remain loyal hoping that they get a new role¹²⁷.

The Kremlin also has a single pyramid structure, although there is more obvious factionalism in the Kremlin than in Belarus. There is a reason there has been much work on describing the competing factions in the Kremlin, from the factions representing the Kremlin's towers (Pribylovskiy, 2007), to a planet model (Ledeneva, 2013: 60), to a Politburo 2.0 (Minchenko Consulting, 2017), or finally a royal court (Haase, 2012). Russian elites congregate around a particular resource, say oil, and compete for power, with Putin acting as the final arbitrator¹²⁸. The 2018 jailing of Aleksei Ulyukayev appeared to be a factional

¹²⁶ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

¹²⁷ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

¹²⁸ Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man – Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

war between the Siloviki and modernisers, with the Siloviki¹²⁹ led by Sechin moving against the modernisers fearing that the Kremlin may instigate modernising economic reforms, which would reduce the business empire of the Siloviki (Galeotti, 2018c). Similarly, in 2019 groups in the FSB were arrested on corruption charges, and for attempting to exert control over businesses, which was a turf war between different factions (Lenta.ru, 2019), and emphasises that different groups close to the regime engage in maintaining their own interests. However, the Kremlin has remained a single pyramid regime (Hale, 2015: 291), although factions within the government look after their own interests.

Although Moldova is geographically small, with elites knowing one another for decades, elites are heavily factionalised in what appears to be a number of clans¹³⁰. In Moldova, the concept of cumătrism is how ‘godparents’ help those in their ‘family’ (Getmanchuk et al. 2012). Clients are promoted by their patrons to important positions in the state. They run these institutions not in the interests of the state, but in the interests of their patron. Cumătria networks infect the state and shape state institutions (Knott, 2014). Although President Voronin tried to construct a single pyramid, competition in Moldovan politics meant that other pyramids could operate and deny the dominant patron power (Hale, 2015: 409). Plahotniuc also tried to create a single pyramid using his financial resources to buy other politicians¹³¹ and creating a cartel with President Dodon¹³² having

¹²⁹ These are people mainly from the force ministries, such as the Soviet KGB, Russian FSB, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Foreign Intelligence Service, Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), Federal Guard Service and the Federal Drug Control Service.

¹³⁰ Interview with Kamil Całus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017 Warsaw.

¹³¹ Interview with Viorel Cibotaru – President of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova and Executive Director for the European Institute for Political Science, 11/11/2016, Chişinău; Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 09/11/2016.

worked with Dodon since the 2000s under the PCRM (Jurnal.md, 2016b). However, it appears that it was a cartel of convenience (Caľus, 2018b). Plahotniuc’s growing control, and attempts to control elections (Caľus, 2018b), resulted in an unlikely coalition between ACUM and the PSRM, which ousted the PDM. After attempts to ignore the loss of power, the PDM finally moved into opposition (Negura, 2019), with Plahotniuc leaving Moldova (Cezar, 2019). In Moldova, there are periods where regimes try to create a single power pyramid, but they cannot reduce other pyramids.

As in Moldova, Ukraine has competing pyramids and patrons. Kuchma established a dominant pyramid, although there were alternatives. In the run-up to the 2004 presidential election, Kuchma who had served his constitutionally limited two terms as president had to nominate a successor. By naming Yanukovych his successor, Kuchma alienated other supporters who felt that Yanukovych would take their rents. Kyivan and Dnipro elites had long competed with the Donetsk clan which had Yanukovych as its political head. Fearing that Yanukovych would give greater power and resources to others in the Donetsk clan, the other factions began supporting Yushchenko (Hale, 2015: 184-185). This weakened the regime enough to make the 2004 Orange Revolution successful.

Yanukovych did become president in 2010 and began creating a ‘family’ of allies and actual family members (Motyl, 2012; Korrespondent.net, 2013; Konończuk, 2016). The creation of the ‘family,’ its propensity to enrich members to the detriment of other clans (Wilson, 2014b), and the violence exerted by the Yanukovych regime alienated other

¹³² Although it is speculation such a notion was referred to by three interviewees who stated that while there is no obvious proof, the closeness of Moldovan politics makes it likely. Interview with a researcher on Moldova who requested anonymity, 11/07/2017; Interview with Dr. Mark Mazeranu – Researcher at Rutgers University and the Universität Mannheim, 14/04/2017, Chişinău; Interview with Mihai Popşoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

factions (Hale, 2015: 235). Having reduced the number of pro-regime clans from eleven to two (Åslund, 2012), other factions who had been in the regime began supporting protesters during the Euromaidan (Neef, 2014). If Yanukovich had built his pyramid subtly as Kuchma did, then it is likely he would have survived the 2013-2014 protests, but his impatience and thuggery led to his fall (Hale, 2015: 238). Yanukovich may well go down in history as the only leader to lose power twice during revolutions.

Although, Poroshenko began creating a ‘family’ (Politeka.net, 2016), he was subtler than Yanukovich, attempting to exert control over others one-by-one¹³³. Poroshenko was unable to create anything resembling a single pyramid as Kuchma had nearly achieved, as unlike Kuchma, Poroshenko was never seen as a “godfather” by other patrons. Kuchma was perceived as the final arbiter between competing factions, but Poroshenko was never viewed as the final mediator¹³⁴.

Patronal politics and its analogies of single or competing pyramids provides a relevant framework for understanding the four case studies and why these four states are not as authoritarian as each other. Moldova and Ukraine have competing pyramids with different factions contending for power. This creates what Way (2015a) calls pluralism by default, where there is significant competition for power, but democracy is lacking. This is why I classify both regimes as competitive authoritarian, as there is always a possibility, especially during elections, that the incumbent regime may lose power.

¹³³ Interview with Volodymyr Yermolenko – Director of Internews Ukraine, 26/04/2017, Kyiv.

¹³⁴ Interview with Tadeusz Iwański – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw. At the time of writing (2019) the richest oligarch remains Rinat Akhmetov, having successfully managed to recoup many of his losses from the loss of his business heartland around Donetsk remains the richest man in Ukraine (Sazonov, 2018).

By contrast, Belarus and Russia have more established authoritarian regimes, with elections as merely vote getting exercises for the regimes. Elections help each regime test their capabilities, and act as legitimisation exercises. Both Belarus and Russia fit into the rubric of electoral authoritarianism, where regimes have institutions which maintain state repression and structures that are representative. Both sets of institutions are strong and help the regime ensure it not only survives but thrives (Schedler, 2013: 54-55). Electoral authoritarian regimes hold elections, but these are violated so profoundly that any democratic content “of freedom and fairness” are impeded (Schedler, 2002a: 3). Electoral authoritarianism is by definition a “stage performance” (Schedler, 2013: 102). By holding elections, electoral authoritarian regimes hope to gain legitimacy both internationally and domestically. Legitimacy means that regimes do not need to rely on repression, and if legitimacy can be gained without needing a competitive election than even better (Schedler, 2002b: 36-37). For instance, in Russia, elections allow the regime to ascertain whether the power vertical is effective, whether regional elites are efficient at getting the regime victory, especially in national contests, and for the promotion of promising cadres (Krastev and Holmes, 2012: 37). Electoral authoritarianism can be split into two types: hegemonic and competitive electoral authoritarianism. The distinction is minimal between both, especially as Belarus and Russia’s democracy scores, as seen earlier, have recently coalesced. However, hegemonic authoritarian regimes are those that “are invincible” and where the electoral setting is useful “for the self-representation and self-reproduction of power” (Schedler, 2002b: 47). By contrast, competitive electoral authoritarian regimes are those that hold competitive elections, but only opposition parties lose (Schedler, 2002b: 47). Increasingly the distinction between what Belarus and what Russia are is becoming blurred, but historically the Belarusian regime was closer to a hegemonic electoral authoritarian

regime and the Kremlin was more akin to a competitive electoral authoritarian regime. However, there is a distinction between competitive electoral authoritarianism and competitive authoritarianism as in the latter the regime face the possibility of losing power, whereas in the former it is only the opposition that loses. Therefore, Belarus and Russia are different types of electoral authoritarian regimes, although the distinction is becoming increasingly distorted, and Moldova and Ukraine are competitive authoritarian regimes.

Much of the authoritarianism literature has centred on ways that authoritarian regimes survive. The creation of institutions, like parliaments, is a way for authoritarian regimes to establish power-sharing mechanisms which reduce the likelihood of competition for power and possible regime collapse. Parliaments allow authoritarian regimes to spread rent access, co-opt others and offer regime legitimacy. Elections serve a similar purpose, acting as a tool of co-optation and legitimacy. Authoritarian learning is another survival strategy. Through learning from external and internal examples, authoritarian regimes are better able to ensure their survival. However, because not all authoritarian regimes are as authoritarian as others they do not control institutions, making holding onto power harder. While this is the case, these regimes do learn, and as the Freedom House data in chapter one showed, there are periods in Moldova and Ukraine of attempted authoritarian consolidation. It is likely that learning is a key part of these periods as regimes look to external and internal examples for support.

2.3.2.2. Authoritarian Learning Theories

Unlike democratic learning which incorporates humanistic theory, authoritarian learning is less concerned with humanistic learning because of the power it gives the public and the theoretical requirement in humanistic theory that the populace is allowed to make

informed decisions. It is unlikely that an authoritarian regime concerned with survival would countenance a free election where voters could be the decision-holders. As mentioned in chapter one, the Kremlin is worried about the populace becoming disaffected, which is why the authorities retain a large repressive structure¹³⁵. It is likely that other authoritarian regimes have similar concerns, and so other than worrying what may cause mass protests, authoritarian regimes do not take public opinion into account. Therefore, I do not include humanistic theory, analysing only experiential and social learning theories.

Experiential learning is relevant to authoritarian learning as it allows governments to test methods to see which work. To keep control, authoritarian regimes use resources to analyse the best ways to keep power. The Belarusian preventive counter-revolution that began after 2001 is a good example of testing, with Belarus being the post-Soviet testing-ground for best practices (Wilson, 2011a: 209), which other regimes then copied.

Social learning theory is applicable because it analyses learning from observing the failures and successes of the past, both internally and externally through discerning the social environment. For example, the Kremlin learnt from observing the Soviet collapse, ascertaining that the Soviet economy had failed, while the Soviet authorities had not made necessary reforms at the right time, and the promotion of nationalism in the Soviet republics also contributed to the collapse (Gazeta.ru, 2016b).

Habitus which fits with social learning is about how people react to the present from memories of their past. Hill and Gaddy (2015: 89) show that Putin was involved in gangs during his youth in Leningrad, and during that time learnt sambo and then judo, using

¹³⁵ Interview with Ivan Grigoriev – Senior Lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 24/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

these to survive a difficult youth and the St. Petersburg of the 1990s (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 7, 78-79). It is why Putin today retains a close group of allies, many of whom he grew up with or worked with, and who between them control many state structures and businesses (Ledeneva, 2013; Glazunov, 2016; Dawisha, 2014). Similarly, in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine where elites were shaped by the Soviet period and the 1990s, the authorities consist of small close-knit groups¹³⁶. In Ukraine, Poroshenko made decisions with a close circle of allies, relying on them and wanting absolute loyalty (Butkevych, 2016a; 2016b)¹³⁷, and Yanukovych also created a close-knit ‘family’ of allies, placing personnel from Donetsk and especially from the towns of Yenakiyev and Horlivka in positions of power across the state. As Yanukovych was raised in Yenakiyev and Horlivka, he trusted cadres from there (Wynnyckyj, 2019: 45). In Belarus, the original clan from Mahileu (Mogilev) who came with Lukashenka have been replaced by a small clique around Sheiman¹³⁸. Likewise, in Moldova, each regime has relied on allies of the leader, although elites move between regimes, reducing loyalty¹³⁹.

Another area of importance is political psychology for understanding authoritarian learning. While a person’s consciousness is shaped by social and cultural factors, politics does shape personality (Tileagă, 2013: 48), although societal and cultural factors are more crucial for shaping political disposition. Fromm (1941) found that people when facing an

¹³⁶ Interview with Tadeusz Iwański – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw; Interview with Kamil Całus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw; Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

¹³⁷ The concept of Poroshenko’s loyal yes-men is from an interview. The interviewee requested anonymity for this part of the interview.

¹³⁸ Interview with an expert on Belarus and Ukraine politics who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016.

¹³⁹ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 17/05/2017.

unclear world want a strong hand and are more willing to accept an authoritarian regime. Rokeach (1960) and Wilkinson (1972) found that people who were anxious about the modern world were likely to have authoritarian characteristics. It is threat perception that contributes to a person becoming more authoritarian in their behaviour, with those already considered authoritarian becoming ever more punitive (Feldman and Stenner, 1997: 746, 761-762). When facing a threat though authoritarians increase “the connections between their predispositions, and their political and social attitudes,” with categories like intolerance increasing when there is the perception of a threat (Feldman and Stenner, 1997: 764-765). Although discussing Hungary, Todosijević and Enyedi (2008) are right to argue that the 1990s created dislocation in public perception that made some susceptible to supporting an authoritarian leader. However, this harks back to the surveys mentioned in chapter one with the political psychology literature concentrating on public authoritarianism, rather than authoritarian leaders.

However, it is possible to use political psychology to understand authoritarian learning. As seen, authoritarian learning is ultimately about survival, as regimes look to make certain their persistence. Therefore, it is likely that authoritarian leaders display aggressive and anxious tendencies (Todosijević and Enyedi, 2003). While the latter is difficult to show here, Lukashenka retains close ties to the KDB and the interior ministry because he trusts many of its top personnel. He even receives advice on economic policy from both structures¹⁴⁰, highlighting an anxious tendency and attempts to reduce it through support from trusted groups. Chapter one showed that the Belarusian and Russian regimes

¹⁴⁰ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

especially have a high repressive capacity, which is similar to the aggressive characteristic. Authoritarian regimes rapidly mobilise when facing a threat (Feldman, 2003: 67).

Measuring what constitutes a threat is outside the remit of this thesis, but authoritarian regimes likely perceive the majority of circumstances as threatening which induces learning to improve the survival chances of the regime. Although it is difficult to pinpoint an authoritarian personality and differentiate it from personality, history and the “personal and organisational context” (Tileagă, 2013: 54) psychology likely plays a role, although it remains a topic needing further analysis.

In order to explain the relevance of political psychology I investigate the example of Putin. Hill and Gaddy (2015) produced an excellent analysis of Putin that assesses his biography and how Putin’s past shapes Putin’s present actions. This fits with the wider literature on habitus. Taylor (2018) has advocated that there is a code of Putinism and understanding the psychology of Putin – and his close allies – determines the current actions of the Kremlin. Putin met many of his close associates during his Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (KGB) days or in the dojo in Leningrad. Many of the key personnel in the regime have a strong “desire to establish control” (Taylor, 2018: 23) at all costs. It is why the regime has struggled “for total control” over state institutions and the media and civil society while restricting the non-regime opposition (Kynev, 2015: 7). It is why the system has built in protections to limit the chances of non-regime approved people standing in and winning elections and the Kremlin can “manually regulate election results by cutting off unwanted candidates” (Rybakova, 2015: 1). On top of the KGB role, Putin was a bureaucrat in the 1990s and early 2000s and so order and stability remain important in his thinking. It is why Putin instigated the power vertikal’ almost immediately after coming to

power in 2000. It is also why the Kremlin has been so averse to revolutions, as these threaten order and stability (Taylor, 2018: 25). As early as 2001, Putin (2001a) stated that he did not want any further revolutions in Russia. During the Euromaidan, Putin (2014d) spoke of “terror,” “chaos” and “bacchanalia” when describing events in Ukraine, portraying the protests as an “unconstitutional coup and seizure of power by force of arms.” As this example shows, stability and order are important in Kremlin thinking. This example of the psychology of personnel in the Kremlin and in particular Putin emphasises the extent of authoritarian characteristics in the Russian regime, with the need for control, stability and order.

Communities of practice remain under-analysed regarding authoritarianism, but if they operate in democracies then they exist in authoritarian regimes. Communities of practice is about groups consisting of like-minded individuals discussing ideas. It is not too difficult to imagine authoritarian elites doing this. If authoritarian leaders want to maintain power at all costs then it is likely they talk to one another.

Although, Wenger et al (2002: 15) wrote about short and long-term necessities of communities of practice in business their argument is a check-list for authoritarian regimes. An authoritarian community of practice helps members with pressing issues. Each can spend less time finding a solution by sharing ideas. As they have support from a like-minded community they can be daring in crushing dissent. It is likely that authoritarian learning is networked with authoritarian regimes collaborating with one another, engaging in dialogue and training methods, sharing policies, best practices, and learning from one another. Therefore, authoritarian learning involves agency with actors working independently and making their own choices.

2.3.2.2. Authoritarian Learning Types

Authoritarian regimes transfer policies. The Kremlin took parts of the German and New Zealand mixed-majoritarian electoral systems to create an electoral system that retained the current system in power¹⁴¹. The 2014 Ukrainian dictatorship laws are another example of policy transfer as much of the legislation was taken from earlier Belarusian and Russian legislation (Coynash, 2014; Wilson, 2014a; Snyder, 2014; Koshkina, 2015a: 173). Although policy transfer in authoritarian regimes remains little studied, authoritarian regimes take policies from other states to consolidate power. If reinterpreted from its democratic-centric analysis policy transfer is useful for understanding authoritarian learning.

2.3.2.3. Authoritarian Diffusion

Although authoritarian learning is networked with elites collaborating with one another, sharing best practices and experience, learning and with the security services training together there is also significant diffusion. Strang (1991: 325) defined diffusion as “any process where prior adoption or practice in a population alters the probability of adoption for remaining non-adopters.” While, a minimalist definition it focuses on the process by which diffusion occurs. Put another way, without X there would not be Y (Ambrosio and Tolstrup, 2019). This is important for understanding authoritarian learning, which is inductive with the inference that X, or Xs, leads to Y. If for example, one regime passes restrictive NGO legislation the probability that other authoritarian regimes will pass a similar laws increases. Since 1992, there has been increasing restrictive NGO legislation

¹⁴¹ Interview with Yuri Kabanov – Lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg, 24/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

across the globe, pointing to the diffusion of restrictive legislation¹⁴². It is likely that the 2012 Russian foreign agents law was diffused, as restrictive NGO legislation occurred later in Azerbaijan (2013), Tajikistan (2014), Kazakhstan (2016), Ukraine (2017) and China (2017). According to McAdam et al (2001: 333), diffusion “involves the transfer of information along established lines of interaction.” In understanding authoritarian learning, diffusion spreads ideas down a network and actors connected through networks copy ideas from others (McAdam et al. 2001: 335).

Researchers have begun to investigate the authoritarian reaction to the Colour Revolutions (Ambrosio, 2007; 2009; Ó Beacháin and Polese, 2010; Polese and Ó Beacháin, 2011; Finkel and Brudy, 2012a; 2012b; Horvath, 2013; Koesel and Bunce, 2013). Gel'man and Lankina (2008) started the analysis by investigating authoritarian diffusion in Russian regions. They found that regions bordering established authoritarian regimes became authoritarian. By contrast, those that bordered EU Member states were fairly democratic (Gel'man and Lankina, 2008: 56).

After this sub-national level analysis, Ambrosio (2010) assessed the national level arguing that authoritarian regimes use diffusion, rather than, conditionality or integration. If diffusion is where “policy decisions of one government alter the conditions under which other governments base their decisions” (Elkins and Simmons, 2005: 7) then it is probable authoritarian regimes diffuse ideas and seek models to copy (Ambrosio, 2010: 382). This location is done through appropriateness and effectiveness. Appropriateness is based on norms “in which certain ideas and practices are legitimized.” Effectiveness is how regimes

¹⁴² Email correspondence with Marlies Glasius (23/07/2018), who kindly sent a draft article which may appear in *International Studies Quarterly*.

gauge previous models using “the experiences of others as the foundation for choice” (Ambrosio, 2012: 383).

Authoritarian diffusion like its democratic counterpart is largely regional. But due to the Internet, authoritarian regimes are learning from others (Bank, 2017: 2). However, authoritarian diffusion remains largely limited to a state’s geographical region and close neighbours (Bank, 2017: 7). Weyland (2016: 221) showed that even in the 1848 revolutions the Prussian Kingdom learnt from the failure of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and how other states reacted through letter writing. De la Torre (2017: 1280) showed that Hugo Chávez’s attempts to export Venezuelan Bolivarianism largely failed apart from Bolivia and Ecuador which were more susceptible to these ideas as incumbent regimes had similar outlooks. During the Cold War authoritarian regimes collaborated and diffused ideas to ideologically compatible regimes and this continued with post-Cold War authoritarian regimes (Weyland, 2017a: 1236; 2017b).

This focus on the regional is important to understand authoritarian diffusion. As seen with democratic diffusion, various scholars have shown that once one state in a region becomes democratic, others follow (Elkink, 2011: 1654; Brinks and Coppedge, 2006; Doorenspleet, 2004; Fordham and Asal, 2007; Gleditsch, 2002; Gleditsch and Ward, 2006; O’Loughlin et al. 1998; Starr, 1991; Wejnert, 2005). Authoritarian regimes are likely to be wary of such an eventuality and so collaborate to eliminate democracy taking hold in a region. They construct regional institutions allowing them to cooperate to bolster their regimes.

Kneuer and Demmelhuber (2016) and Kneuer et al (2019) contended that authoritarian regimes practice this institutional construction to support each other. By

creating what they term authoritarian gravity centres, one authoritarian regime acts as a source of reference for others, creating a cluster of authoritarian regimes. As Bader et al (2010: 84) argued authoritarian regimes have become a source of inspiration for others. Authoritarian gravity centres are important models, which is relevant for the four cases as with two authoritarian regimes in Belarus and Russia, it is likely other regimes have a model of reference and support if required.

In the post-Soviet space, the literature concentrates on how the Kremlin tries to limit the spread of democratic ideas (Ambrosio, 2007; Koesel and Bunce, 2013) with a focus on ideas spread by trade (Obydenkova and Libman, 2012; 2015) and diffusion proofing (Koesel and Bunce, 2013). However, there has also been analysis away from Russia with Max Bader (2014) showing that other post-Soviet states copied Russian electoral legislation, and Hall (2017b) highlighting that the Kremlin diffused ideas from Belarus in the 2000s to counter a possible Colour Revolution in Moscow. On the one hand, the literature shows how authoritarian regimes copy other's successful consolidation. On the other hand, authoritarian regimes want to limit the spread of outside ideas. Authoritarian regimes are involved in diffusion and stopping counter-diffusive ideas.

With diffusion, there is the potential for citing spurious examples, where regimes arrived at the same conclusion independently of one another. However, there are a number of areas that can be utilised to ignore spurious cases and concentrate on genuine examples. Existing focus on authoritarian diffusion has analysed "convergent outcomes between two or more political units" and "connections between elites and later adopters" (Ambrosio and Tolstrup, 2019). For instance, Max Bader (2014) analysed the convergence and connection aspects of diffusion when investigating electoral systems, but failed to assess mechanisms

for diffusion, on which there has been limited focus (Ambrosio and Tolstrup, 2019). To improve our understanding of authoritarian diffusion and learning there are a number of methodological areas that need addressing, such as strong case selection, better causal process, acceptance that some data may be missing and the use of process-tracing (Ambrosio and Tolstrup, 2019). These shall be returned to in chapter three.

There is debate as to the strength of diffusion, and whether it is a concrete phenomenon. Ambrosio and Tolstrup (2019) argue that diffusion does not require “any intentionality on the part of the policy innovator and can occur through simple demonstration affects.” This is similar to the notion of “90% of what to do can be found on Google¹⁴³,” which while indeed true, does not provide a full picture. While, authoritarian regimes do look at others, copy other policies, legislation, and engage in Internet searching, there is clear evidence of meetings at summits to discuss “best practices and learn new policy solutions to common governance problems such as corruption...social unrest, and dealing with international NGOs and media organizations” (Teets, 2014: 177). Therefore, authoritarian learning involves a far stronger process than just diffusion.

Agency is an important aspect of authoritarian learning, with elites deciding what they learn. Consequently, an important aspect of agency is emulation. Through observation, people learn about the environment in which they live. McAdam et al (2001: 335) contends that actors are aware of earlier actions by others but make a conscious decision whether they implement that action or not. Stroschein (2012) found that Romanian elites had difficulty mobilising their different publics for protests because the public refused to demonstrate. Although, Karimov may be a hero for Putin (Zygar, 2016: 107) because of his

¹⁴³ Interview with Aleś Łahviniec – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Aliaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

actions in crushing protests in Andijon, only one other post-Soviet state has resorted to mass violence since 2005. Other post-Soviet regimes have used violence to crush dissent, but they have not shot protesters. Even the Kremlin has refrained from this, as even in 2019 it worries about its perception in the West, although that is decreasing¹⁴⁴. Until February 2014, Karimov's actions in 2005 were an outlier; however, the possible pressure exerted by the Kremlin on Bankova explains why Yanukovich ordered the Berkut to open fire on protesters (Makarenko, 2016). Currently, in the post-Soviet space, there have been few takers for the Karimov model of crushing dissent, emphasising that actors make choices about what they learn. Therefore, emulation helps explain why actors do not all make the same decisions, partially accounting for why Moldova and Ukraine are not as authoritarian as Belarus and Russia.

2.3.2.4. Authoritarian Linkage but not leverage...

As seen earlier, the greater the linkage democracies have with authoritarian regimes, the increased likelihood that the democratic state exerts leverage over the authoritarian polity. Linkage can be political, economic and cultural (Levitsky and Way, 2005a: 23, 26; 2006b: 379). These linkages allow the democratic state to exert leverage over the authoritarian regime, resulting in the latter's democratisation (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

The focus of linkage and leverage has centred on the role democratic states play in democratising authoritarian states. However, Tolstrup (2014) by focusing on gatekeeper elites, provides a good framework for understanding how linkage and leverage operate between authoritarian regimes. Gatekeeper elites choose external actors and select

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man— Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

authoritarian external actors due to incentives and common linkages. Tolstrup (2014: 38) divides gatekeeper elites into political, economic and cultural groups, meaning they could be divided between partnering with authoritarian or democratic external actors. This is relevant to the case studies, as Moldova and Ukraine have elites divided into Kremlin supporters on the one side and EU supporters on the other. These divisions allow external actors to exert linkage and leverage and shape how the state functions.

Russia is the prominent actor in the post-Soviet region. There is linkage, but not necessarily leverage which implies coercion. Authoritarian regimes concerned about losing power will not willingly be coerced. The Belarusian and Kazakh regimes have fought Russian attempts at political integration in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Strzelecki, 2016).

Cameron and Ornstein (2012) assessed Russian linkage and leverage, but future analysis needs to delve deeper. Like democratic linkage and leverage, its authoritarian equivalent assesses links between states through economic, diplomatic, cultural, historical ties, geographical proximity, trade relations and migrant flows between states. Schmotz and Tansey (2018) contend that in regions with many authoritarian regimes there will be significant political, economic and social ties, leading to learning and dialogue. These ties bind and create vested interests which help diffusion and cooperation, leading to authoritarian consolidation (Koehler et al. 2016; Tansey et al. 2017: 1228).

Linkage is more important than leverage as linkages between states are conducive to reinforcing the present system. It leads to diffusion, copying and sharing. As Brownlee (2017: 1335) contends, the greater linkages authoritarian regimes have with one another the greater chance ideas will spread and aid regime survival. Authoritarian regimes have increased trade and linkages with one another in “an intentional move to close ranks

internationally” (Tansey et al. 2017: 1231). Geographical proximity is important as regimes look to what is occurring regionally and diffuse best practices to protect themselves (Weyland, 2010: 1165).

Some authoritarian regimes protect others from democratisation. Russia has acted as a counter-hegemon to the West in the post-Soviet space (Beyer and Wolff, 2016: 336; Broers, 2016: 379) and bolstered other regimes against Western influence (Ambrosio, 2009; Lebanidze, 2014: 204). Support often happens during elections helping the incumbent show invincibility, maintain elite unity and weaken possible protests. By protecting other regimes a possible domino effect leading to the collapse of authoritarian regimes in a region is averted (Tolstrup, 2015a: 674).

In the 2006 Belarusian presidential election, the Kremlin supported Lukashenka as it feared a new Colour Revolution. It offered Lukashenka financial support, showing Belarusian voters that the Kremlin supported Minsk. The Russian security service, the Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (FSB), collaborated with the KDB to restrict opposition information reaching Belarus. The Kremlin countered Western calls for free elections, stating that the West should not meddle in Belarusian internal affairs (Tolstrup, 2015a: 684-685). Tolstrup (2015b) showed that authoritarian governments use secessionist regions in neighbouring states to maintain influence. The Kremlin does this in Moldova and Ukraine (Broers, 2016: 379; Beyer and Wolff, 2016: 336).

Silitski (2010: 341) argued that there was an authoritarian international between Belarus and Russia, but this sounds too much like the ideological communist international. Other researchers have advocated the concept of authoritarian promotion (Brady, 2016: 190; Burnell, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2013; Lankina et al. 2016: 1603; Melnykovska et al. 2012;

Vanderhill, 2013; 2014; Yakouchyk, 2016). But if it exists it is “more opportunistic than strategic” (von Soest, 2015: 624). Yakouchyk (2016) writes about active and passive autocracy promotion. Active autocracy promotion involves measures to weaken democracies or strengthen authoritarian incumbents. Passive promotion uses economic, financial and diplomatic means to help other regimes (Yakouchyk, 2016: 200). Melnykovska et al (2012: 750) argue that the Central Asian states are susceptible to Russian and Chinese autocracy promotion because they are fully consolidated autocracies. Vanderhill (2013: 76) contends that Putin helped Lukashenka consolidate power.

However, examples like these highlight the problem of authoritarian promotion. Melnykovska et al (2012) fail to explain how the fully consolidated authoritarian regimes of Central Asia require Russian authoritarian promotion. Rather than promotion – which is unlikely to occur in fully authoritarian states – the Kremlin offered support to keep authoritarian regimes in power in these states. It is a similar misconception for Vanderhill (2013: 76). With a focus on Putin, she misses the point that the Belarusian regime had consolidated before Putin became president. Certainly, there remained a threat in 2006 that the Belarusian regime might collapse, but rather than promotion, the Kremlin bolstered Lukashenka. Russia engages in the bolstering of other regimes, not promotion (Ambrosio, 2010). Promotion relies on someone knowing that they are doing it, which makes passive promotion an oxymoron (Tansey, 2016b: 147-148). Authoritarian promotion literature fails to explain promotion aims. The Kremlin is more concerned with influencing neighbours than promoting authoritarianism (Way, 2015b: 692). In contrast to the foreign policy of some Western states which has been driven by democracy promotion, this is not true for the

Kremlin which may support authoritarian regimes (Babayan, 2015: 439-440; Tansey, 2016a: 11), but this is not authoritarian promotion (Way, 2015b: 694-695).

Existing literature on authoritarian promotion is vague, leading to “conceptualizations...so loose that the utility of the concept begins to wash away” (Tansey, 2016b: 143). As Brownlee (2017) showed, while authoritarian resurgence and promotion is a possibility and in some circumstances a real phenomenon, when speaking about authoritarian promotion into established authoritarian regimes it is an inaccurate label. While states have backslid on democracy this is not because of authoritarian promotion but because these states had weak institutions and fell below the “established economic threshold for sustained democracy” (Brownlee, 2017: 1340). Instead of authoritarian promotion, one should refer to authoritarian regimes bolstering each other (Ambrosio, 2009), or offering support (Yakouchyk, 2018)

In the wider context, international organisations and states engage in democratic conditionality. There are no international organisations or states openly advocating authoritarian conditionality (Tansey, 2016a: 30), although as investigated in chapter six, post-Soviet regional organisations while not openly advocating authoritarian conditionality do support members. While some authoritarian regimes counter external pressures they do not actively promote authoritarianism as fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union did (Tansey, 2016a: 52-53). As Bader et al (2010) argue autocracy promotion is opaque.

It is hard to argue that linkage and leverage explain authoritarian learning due to reliance on some form of coercion but there are relevant aspects. Babayan (2015: 441) is correct that neighbouring regimes passively learn from Russia – or through contagion – rather than coercion. After the Russo-Georgian (2008) and current Ukrainian war (2014-)

other post-Soviet regimes are wary of Russian linkage. Linkage is integral to learning but leverage relies on soft coercion, which is not conducive to learning as people do not learn when coerced.

2.3.2.5. *Authoritarian Persuasion*

Persuasion is crucial to authoritarian survival, as getting the majority of the public onside reduces the necessity to revert to mass repression at every eventuality isolates the actual opposition and gives the regime legitimacy and a large support-base. As stated in chapter one, the Belarusian and Russian regimes initiated social contracts to increase their support among the populace. In Belarus, the regime tries to maintain near-universal employment, giving jobs on the understanding that the public do not protest (Pranevičiūtė-Nelipšienė and Maksimiuk, 2012: 114; Artsiomenka and Charvonenka, 2013), which reduces the need to rely on repression (Ioffe, G, 2014: 54). A regime-sponsored ideology uses partisan tropes from the Second World War, while portraying Belarus as sovereign and unique, with the regime as the best option to improve Belarus's stature in the world while defending Belarus from Russian expansion (Leshchenko, N, 2008: 1420-1422; Wilson, 2011a: 205; Ioffe, G, 2008: 79). The latter has become pertinent after the Russian annexation of Crimea and intervention in the Donbas, with the Belarusian regime worried about overreliance on Russia (Wilson, 2018).

The Kremlin after 2012 re-designed the social contract from an agreement similar to that in Belarus with nearly full employment and ever higher wages and pensions (Miller, Chris, 2018: 100) to include "the maximum number of people" (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 254), with Putin as a father-of-the-nation figure (Sakwa, 2014: 177-178) and a greater role for nationalism and orthodoxy (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 251-256).

The new social contract of nationalist fervour can be traced back to the annexation of Crimea (Teper, 2016: 394), with Crimea being the concession for reduced freedom and economic prosperity (Kolesnikov, 2015; Rutland, 2016: 358). Increasingly, the Kremlin portrays itself as the defender of Russia against both the West and a fifth column (Gel'man, 2015a: 103). The Kremlin is worried that the Crimea bribe has only a short shelf-life and people will begin to protest. Farchy (2016) argued that the creation of RosGvardiya showed that the Kremlin was wary of future protests. In recent years, there have been a number of protests from rubbish collection to pension reform and church building which have resulted in growing dissatisfaction from segments of the populace and the regime has resorted to violence (Plyushev, 2019; BBC Russian Service, 2018; 2019; Radio Svoboda, 2019; Ovsyannikov, 2019; Barysheva, 2017; 2018). During the 2017 Platon¹⁴⁵ and 2017 anti-corruption protests the Kremlin used the Rosgvardiya to crush dissent (Bushuev, 2017; Vedomosti, 2017a; 2017b). Although Aleksei Kudrin is not part of the Kremlin, he remains an economic advisor and a close associate of Putin (Hille, 2018), and while Kudrin and Putin may not agree on economic issues (RBK, 2012), his warning that there will be future protests, unless the economy improves, will worry the Kremlin (The Moscow Times, 2019).

2.4. Towards Authoritarian Learning?

Authoritarian learning has many similarities with its democratic equivalent except that democratic learning incorporates humanistic learning. Policy transfer, lesson-drawing, diffusion and linkage and leverage are relevant to both. While most existing literature on these topics has concentrated on democracies, they are relevant to authoritarian learning.

¹⁴⁵ The Platon protests have been a number of demonstrations by truck drivers across Russia at the tax for load-bearing lorries, and has been added to the existing fuel and transport taxes (Olimpieva, 2017).

Authoritarians are unlikely to return to power once they lose it. They may end presidential term limits like Lukashenka, or find a replacement and return when allowed constitutionally, like Putin. Authoritarian leaders like Heydər Əliyev¹⁴⁶, Islom Karimov and Saparamryat Nyýazow¹⁴⁷ remained in power and left office only upon death. But when it goes wrong for authoritarians it goes spectacularly wrong. Democrats generally leave office after losing an election and only face retirement. Lucky authoritarians die in office but some have a violent end or are forced to flee. The escape of Yanukovich at night from his Mezhirya Residence outside Kyiv to Kharkiv and then to Russia via Donetsk, Berdyans'k and Crimea was a gloomy end to his presidency and emphasises the turbulent hold on power for authoritarian leaders. Authoritarian learning is learning from successful and failed external and domestic experience. Theoretically authoritarian and democratic learning are similar, but the aims are different.

While political elites in democracies want to remain in power for as long as possible, the system provides more opportunities to keep a semblance of power. Although, authoritarian regimes are increasingly using parliaments, and in some cases elites change identity when necessary, a democratic political system allows politicians to hold some power. A government may be removed and a politician may lose a position say as minister of health, but unless there is an electoral disaster it is likely the politician will remain in parliament. They also have the chance of being re-elected if they do lose their parliamentary seat. This is less likely in authoritarian regimes. While, democracies do resort to repression, using such methods as kettling, the opprobrium that has followed these practices means that the practice is rarely used. By contrast, authoritarian regimes resort to repression

¹⁴⁶ This is his name in Azeri, it would commonly be transliterated as Heydar Aliyev in English.

¹⁴⁷ This is his name in Turkmen, it would commonly be transliterated as Saparmurat Niyazov in English.

quickly because survival is essential. Simply put, survival is less of a concern for political elites in democracies because the system allows them to hold some power.

Authoritarian regimes are ultimately concerned with their survival and retaining power at all costs. One important survival strategy is the ability to learn from past experiences, both externally and internally. To enhance survival chances authoritarian regimes engage in learning and are likely to constantly adapt and learn to establish best practices for keeping power. This chapter has detailed some key aspects of authoritarian learning. Policy transfer is about the transmission of legislation from one polity to another, and it is crucial to authoritarian learning as authoritarian regimes analyse legislation in other states to assess whether it is appropriate to be implemented. The dictatorship laws are a good example of policy transfer. Diffusion, networks and linkage are important aspects of authoritarian learning. Authoritarian regimes see what other regimes are doing and act accordingly without the need for engagement. However, what is likely occurring with dialogue, sharing of best practices and networks is a very strong form of diffusion. Dialogue and sharing of best practices happen through networks, and those authoritarian regimes with strong links, engage with one another. They learn from each other and from past domestic experience. The four case studies and the wider post-Soviet space highlight the relevance of networks and the existing interdependence in key areas of power, emphasises the extent of interrelationships.

Political opportunity structures analyse a “groups’ strategy in the mobilization of available resources,” resulting in “political opportunities vary between actors and change over time” (Tarrow, 1988: 429). Investigation of political opportunity structures “helps to understand variations in the strategies, structures, and outcomes” (Tarrow, 1988: 430).

There are constant shifts in elite power, with regime members changing position in the hierarchy or the regime being replaced by another (McAdam, 1996: 26). Regimes may be more open or closed over time, which affects the opportunity structure (Tarrow, 1989: 22). The competition between different factions, the instability of political alignments, the availability of other influential actors outside the regime to influence actors, and the ability of the state to repress all contribute to the extent of political opportunities (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015: 59). This is very similar to the idea of the single and multiple pyramid structures discussed by Hale (2015). Political opportunities change, as with the withdrawal of the Brezhnev Doctrine by Gorbachev and the weakening of regime hardliners. This changed the international and domestic environment for the communist satellite states in Eastern Europe, creating new political opportunities and resulting in competition between regime and non-regime elites (Oberschall, 1996: 95).

Within the four case studies, political opportunities vary over time, and there are variations in strategies. With Moldova and Ukraine having multiple pyramids of elite competition contributes to the tenuous hold on power for regimes. This creates opportunities as there is elite competition, coupled with rapid alliance evolution and the power of factions outside the regime, offering an alternative. Even in the Belarusian and Russian regimes, there is factionalism. Both the Kremlin and the Belarusian authorities have modernisers on the one hand and Siloviki structures on the other creating competition. Therefore, these different factions could learn different practices. After all, elites decide what to implement and what not to execute. Therefore, it is possible different factions learn different lessons.

Moldovan and Ukrainian governments, at least nominally, espouse a pro-European integration message. Therefore, Western organisations exert some leverage over them, resulting in a lowering of authoritarian measures. Similarly, Moldova and Ukraine are not members of many of the post-Soviet regional organisations, only belonging to the CIS, although the Poroshenko government removed Ukraine from most CIS structures. As shown in chapter six, post-Soviet regional organisations provide expertise on best practices and training methods against protesters. As Moldova and Ukraine are only members of a few regional organisations, unlike Belarus and Russia, the latter learn more from peers about best practices. Therefore, there are different opportunities in the four cases for learning.

Emulation plays a crucial role in understanding learning among the four case studies as they ascertain what worked in other settings and act accordingly. However, it does not necessarily need to be emulation, there could also be “herding behaviour” (Beissinger, 2007: 259), as authoritarian regimes concerned by a possible loss of power look to a successful source that stopped a particular contagion. Demonstration effects are important. If it can be demonstrated that something works it is likely to be copied. Regimes that are culturally, historically and politically similar, or with at least enough comparable characteristics, are more willing to learn from one another (Beissinger, 2007: 260). Learning is helped by the linkage states have with one another, allowing “agents to make analogies across cases and to read relevance into developments in other cases,” with agents constantly monitoring what is occurring in linked states (Beissinger, 2007: 263). There is a likelihood that authoritarian regimes that have been successful offer support “for strategic reasons” (Beissinger, 2007: 265). While Beissinger (2007) concentrated on the democratic success of agents during the Colour Revolutions, his analysis that success induces learning

and that examples only have a short shelf-life for implementation is less relevant for authoritarian regimes who learn from both internal and external success and failure. As authoritarian regimes are constantly learning and adapting the short example shelf-life is less relevant.

Figure One: Elite Networks and the External Learning Process

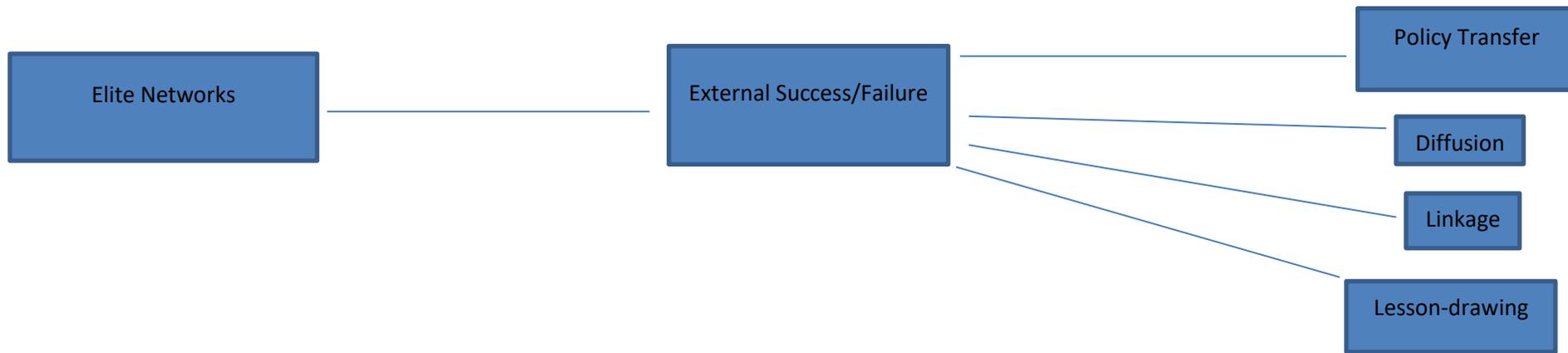


Figure one represent the learning that authoritarian regimes engage in when learning from external success and or failure. Elite networks in authoritarian regimes when learning from examples of external success or failure are likely to draw on four learning processes. These were discussed earlier in the chapter, but diffusion, policy transfer, lesson-drawing and linkage are all key to learning. If authoritarian regimes have linkage with other authoritarian regimes they are likely to learn from the successes and failures that occur in the politics of allies. Authoritarian regimes only need to watch the news to know that other authoritarian regimes are suffering from protests, which makes the diffusion of learning from external failure relatively simple. However, I argue that authoritarian regimes are interlinked and so this makes diffusion easier as elites talk and regularly collaborate. This makes the diffusion of successful examples from abroad easier for an authoritarian regime to learn from. Lesson-drawing allows authoritarian regimes to draw relevant conclusions from external examples and decide whether lessons are relevant for implementation. Similarly, authoritarian regimes ascertain successful or failed policies from external sources and whether these should be implemented domestically. As figure one emphasises these factors aid learning from external examples.

Figure Two: Elite Networks and the Internal Learning Process

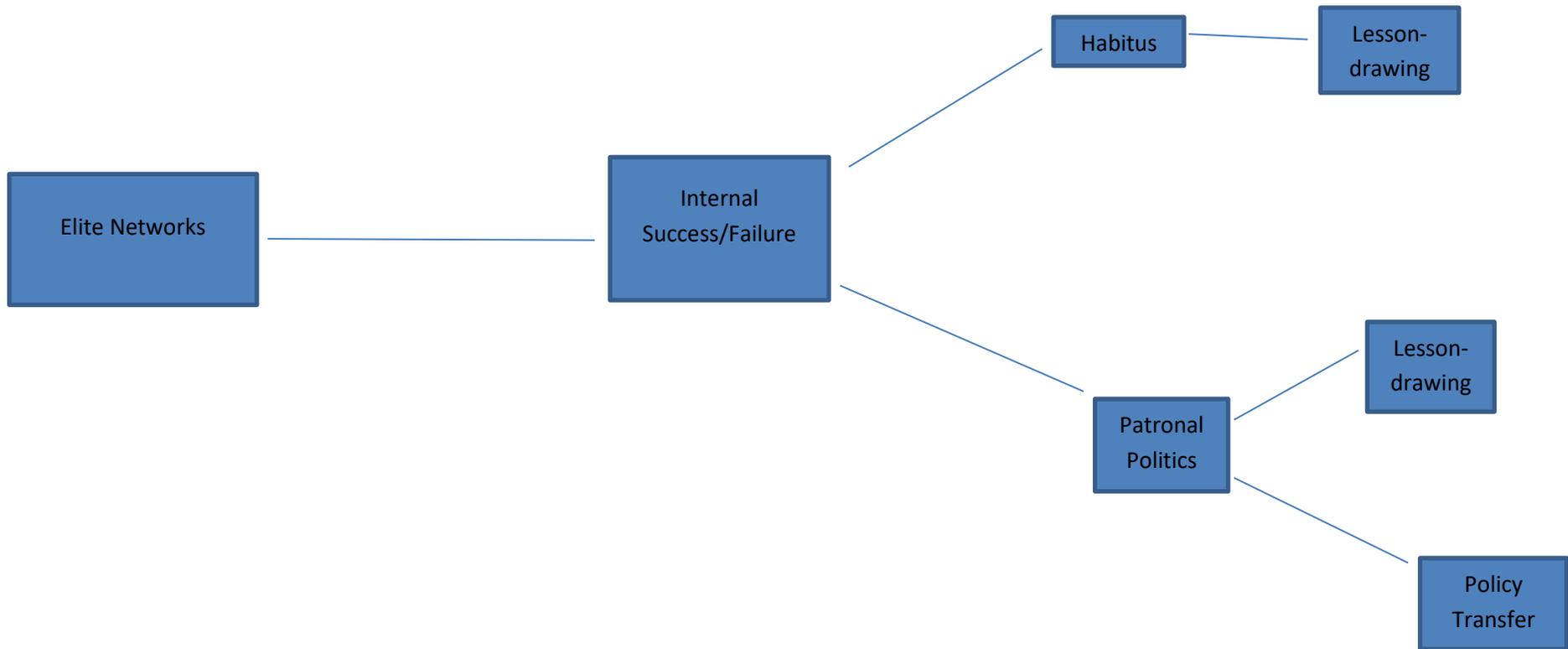


Figure two presents elite networks and how these networks learn from internal processes of success and failure. As mentioned earlier, habitus is important as growing up in a particular political setting shapes a person's perceptions. Many politicians in the four case studies grew up in the Soviet Union and not only survived the 1990s, but wrote the rulebook on how to survive that decade¹⁴⁸. Therefore, they are likely to resort to authoritarian practices and lesson-draw from these experiences. Consequently, habitus is crucial for understanding how authoritarian regimes learn from internal examples of success and failure. Another aspect of how elite networks learn from success and failure is the concept of patronal politics. Moldovan and Ukrainian elites have simply changed position when a new regime takes power. This gives these factions opportunities to learn from the success and failures of previous regimes. Regimes even learn from the Soviet Union. One example was the failed social parasite law in Belarus, which was taken from Soviet legislation. The only difference was that the Soviet Union exiled the unemployed internally, whereas the Belarusian regime taxed them (Loushnikova, 2015). Existing elite networks in the four case studies are part of the patronal system present in all four states. Whereas, the Belarusian and Russian regimes do not have the same turnover in regimes as in Moldova and Ukraine, Belarusian and Russian elites have been in power a long time. They learn from past successes or mistakes, and draw lessons from the Soviet period. Although both regimes do have elite renewal with newer cadres brought in, these younger elites learn from those who came before and try to maintain the system¹⁴⁹. In Moldova and Ukraine regimes come and go, but the elites remain merely with changed power structures. Therefore, they have

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Tadeusz Iwański – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), Warsaw, 18/05/2017.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Dzianis Melyantsou – Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Co-ordinator at the Minsk Track-II Initiative, 04/05/2017, Minsk; Interview with Nikolay Petrov – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

experience of how other regimes domestically functioned, thereby lesson-drawing and using policy transfer when learning from internal experiences.

2.5. Conclusion

The chapter analysed learning theories to ascertain if authoritarian learning is different from its democratic counterpart. Theoretically both are similar, but authoritarian and democratic learning have dissimilar aims, with authoritarian learning centred on the need to ensure regime survival. Authoritarian leaders are concerned with retaining power and will do anything to achieve it. Authoritarian elites use policy transfer, lesson-drawing and diffusion to learn. Authoritarian learning is a networked learning process, allowing for dialogue, the sharing of best practices and means to maintain power.

Chapter Three:

Fieldwork and Methodological Procedures in Analysing

Authoritarian Learning

“In a few short years, the democratic wave has been slowed by a powerful authoritarian undertow, and the world has slipped into a democratic recession¹⁵⁰.”

3.1. Introduction

On Monday, April 18, 2016, Aleksandr Bastrykin, head of the Kremlin’s Investigative Committee, wrote an article in the Russian newspaper Kommersant, arguing that American involvement in Russia’s neighbours’ affairs was democracy promotion. For Bastrykin the Kremlin should counter Western attempts at democracy promotion by no longer following “pseudo-liberal values,” and the authorities should stop “playing with false democracy” and construct an ideology where the “common good” overrides individual needs. This would allow the Kremlin to construct a distinctive Russian political system with popular support. According to Bastrykin (2016), the Kremlin should copy Chinese legislation to restrict foreign media operating in China (Bastrykin, 2016). Although the article was not official policy, Bastrykin has a close relationship with Putin, having been an associate of Putin since their school days in Leningrad (Zapodinskaya, 2007), so it is likely that his Kommersant article was approved by others in the Kremlin.

Bastrykin’s article highlights that the Kremlin believes Western democracies are trying to destabilise Russia in an American sponsored hybrid-war. To alleviate the

¹⁵⁰ Diamond, 2008: 37.

“information war” (Bastrykin, 2016) emanating from America, the Kremlin needs to follow Bastrykin’s recommendations by using domestic methods, and copying Chinese practices to consolidate control. The Kommersant article gives a blueprint for increased Kremlin control, with control being the hallmark of authoritarian power. Bastrykin’s article emphasises authoritarian learning from internal and external sources, which I argue is the basis for how authoritarian regimes learn.

To better understand authoritarian learning and give the subsequent chapters a path to follow in investigating how, why and what authoritarian learning is, and how authoritarian regimes learn, I analyse the methodology used to locate evidence of authoritarian learning. I explain the different research methods used and justify why I chose the four case studies of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine and the time period too. Before this, I briefly explain the fieldwork I undertook, the issues I experienced and how I overcame these. Then I explain the black box of authoritarian regimes and clarify the research methods that I use to open up the black box in each regime, before providing six proposition and eight research questions and explaining these. An explanation of the methodology used here, will help provide an explanation for the causal inference that authoritarian learning is happening. As it is difficult to conclusively prove that X does cause Y, the methodology used here will allow for strong causal inference that X does cause Y and that authoritarian learning does happen and can be shown. As this research is inductive a strong methodology is crucial for showing how I will investigate the phenomenon of authoritarian learning.

3.2. Into the Field – Explaining My Fieldwork

Increasingly in academia, there is a demand for the researcher to provide all data to other researchers and have a public profile to engage the general public¹⁵¹. While, obviously having benefits, such as sharing data and allowing the public to see that academia is not about people in ivory towers, when studying authoritarian regimes there are a number of issues to making data readily available to fellow academics and the wider public. The European Commission (2016: 52) advocated that all researchers should share data and findings, and while a fine exemplar, data sharing like interviewee data and listing respondents puts interviewees in danger of potential persecution when conducting research in authoritarian regimes. Publicising all data and the various sources used, could lead to the data falling into the wrong hands, and result in interviewees being harassed. Similarly, having a Google, or social media presence or a profile on a university website can result in the researcher facing provocation or being unable to speak to interviewees too nervous to speak to a researcher¹⁵². In my own experience, I found that people in the four regimes were unwilling to meet me once they knew my actual research.

The notion of open research while appropriate for most research, does not operate well in an authoritarian setting where relationships between interviewer and interviewee are constructed over time and are difficult for others to replicate (Koch, 2013: 390). One should account for the danger of conducting research in authoritarian settings, not only to

¹⁵¹ For instance, my school required having a profile on the School's website. While allowing others to see my research and topic, it means other groups can view my profile, which can affect the willingness of people to interview and affects data gathering.

¹⁵² Talking to a few colleagues who study authoritarianism, they wrestled with having a social media profile. One colleague who faced online harassment while researching Azerbaijan deleted their Facebook account; however, others kept their social media presence because of the growing requirement in academia to have such a presence.

the researcher but also to respondents. The death of Giulio Regeni¹⁵³ and the arrest of Matthew Hedges¹⁵⁴ have recently led to media interest in conducting research in authoritarian regimes.

There have been a number of articles recently (Goode and Ahram, 2016; Loyle, 2016; Malekzadeh, 2016; Markowitz, 2016; Art, 2016) and one book (Glassius et al. 2018) about conducting research in authoritarian regimes, which have begun to explain appropriate ways to perform research in authoritarian regimes. While these studies provide a clear picture of the travails of researching in an authoritarian setting, by the time I began conducting fieldwork in August 2016 these articles and the book were unpublished. Therefore, I relied on a seminar I attended in 2015 in London on researching in authoritarian regimes and my own ingenuity when I was in the field conducting fieldwork.

Before beginning my fieldwork I contacted researchers and academics whose research concentrated on the four case studies. I felt that by contacting them and speaking with them I could access their contacts. On the whole, this snowballing technique worked with contacts giving me contact details for other people. I targeted people I knew personally or whose work I had read, both at the academic level and in newspapers. I felt that these people were a good place to start in locating contacts, and by interviewing them they would serve as gatekeepers to others, like politicians. I tried to establish a broad contact network of potential interviewees, as this would allow me to build a broader network.

The initial difficulty was a lack of trust towards me by some potential interviewees. This is understandable in authoritarian settings with people unwilling to meet someone

¹⁵³ Giulio Regeni was a PhD student at the University of Cambridge. He was studying independent trade unions in Egypt. His mutilated body was found in a ditch on the outskirts of Cairo, and it is alleged the Egyptian government was involved in his murder.

¹⁵⁴ Matthew Hedges was a PhD student at the University of Durham and was arrested in the United Arab Emirates in 2018 allegedly for spying.

new. When contacting a potential interviewee I established early on why I was contacting them, who had given me their details, and I provided a link to my profile on the School of Slavonic and East European Studies Website. I hoped that by being honest straight away I would reduce their discomfort. On the whole, this strategy worked and I managed to secure a large number of interviews, and while a couple of potential interviewees refused to meet me, I felt that honesty was the best method to establish trust. As I would be undertaking two research trips of only a short duration each, I tried to establish contact and build a relationship with potential interviewees before undertaking fieldwork. I sent interviewees emails once a week to try to get to know them better, check their availability, and establish if they were still willing to meet me. In an ideal world, it would be best to build the relationship over a long time and go to the field initially for a meet and greet exercise. However, the time constraints of having four case studies meant that I could not do a field trip to establish contact. Therefore, I relied on emails and social media to maintain and build connections.

I tried to establish a research relationship with universities in the four case studies to provide some 'legitimacy' to my research. I felt that as a researcher I should get a research visa in Belarus and Russia, as the British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies advised for this course of action. Although I did not need a visa in Moldova and Ukraine I approached universities there for help and support, as well as offering 'validity' in the eyes of my interviewees to my research.

The National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow was helpful in this regard. However, my attempts to contact Moldova State University failed, and the National University Kyiv Mohyla Academy decided that my short period of research in Kyiv, meant there was little point that I affiliate with them. Belarusian State University

requested a research proposal and required that I have an interview with a KDB agent. This would entail explaining my research and providing details of who I was proposing to interview, and my itinerary during my stay in Belarus. Feeling that I would put academics at the institution in jeopardy, as well as my interviewees I decided not to apply for a research visa for Belarus. After all, I did not want to give the KDB a head start on who I was going to contact, and where I was going to visit. Although this might raise legality issues, I felt that not putting my interviewees in jeopardy outweighed needing to obtain a research visa. I was aware that the KDB would probably monitor me as soon as I arrived in Minsk. I prepared a number of answers to explain my research should anyone request from the security services ask questions, but thankfully this did not happen.

Having attempted to establish contact with potential interviewees and construct a large database of potential interviewees, sorted out visas and tried to affiliate with universities, I set about the more prosaic issues. Travelling in the post-Soviet region is great fun, but does take planning and working out how long to be in each country and whether I would have time to visit other cities than the capitals. Having determined my contact database I set about working out how I was going to visit their cities and fit in as many interviews as possible into one trip. Skype was also useful for those interviewees that either lived outside the region or were unavailable at the time I was in each city. As most of the politics of each case study happens in Chişinău, Kyiv, Minsk and Moscow and as many of the contacts I wanted to talk to were based in these cities, I concentrated my attentions in each capital. Most contacts were politicians, journalists, academics and researchers. I also had interviewees in St. Petersburg, Vilnius and Warsaw, so I needed to plan my fieldwork to incorporate all these cities and give myself time to meet as many people as possible.

Before the fieldwork began I thought about what I would need to conduct the interviews. I decided that I needed USB sticks that would require a password to access, as this would give some protection to my interview documents if I was unable to email them to my various email accounts. Of course, there are ways to access passwords or merely smash a USB stick, but I felt that it offered some protection. I carried three password protected USB sticks on my person and hidden in my luggage to try to get one through airport security, and not lose any data should I have difficulty sending the data via email at any point. I thought about taking a second laptop, or tablet, that would not access the Internet and on which I could store interviews. However, I quickly dissuaded myself of this idea, as I was already travelling with a laptop, USB sticks, two notepads and a Dictaphone. As I was travelling as a tourist in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine I thought that there probably are not too many tourists going to these countries, carrying two laptops. I felt that this would cause too much suspicion at airport security, and so I decided not to take a second laptop, or tablet. While there was the possibility that someone could access my laptop through the Internet and view my data, or simply take the hard-drive I felt that having too many electronic devices would raise suspicions and result in the security services taking an unnecessary interest in me.

I undertook two fieldwork trips between 2016 and 2017. The first trip occurred in the winter of 2016 and was the longer of the two. I conducted interviews in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Chişinău, Kyiv, Minsk, Vilnius and Warsaw. I possibly made the mistake of having the first fieldwork trip as my longer one. As mentioned, it is perhaps best to go to the field for the first time to explore and get a feel for the countries that you are researching. However, with limited time and with the knowledge that many potential interviewees were unavailable for my second trip, winter 2016 was busier. My second trip happened in the

spring of 2017 and did not include St. Petersburg or Vilnius. A number of interviews were also conducted by Skype and in London, before, during and after my research trips, and throughout my PhD.

Upon arrival to the four case studies I met acquaintances to discuss interview questions, and whether these questions worked in the domestic context. I did mock interviews with local friends to get a feel for how interviews would go in each country. I was fortunate that some interviewees offered to look at some interview questions and see whether these worked in the local context.

When conducting interviews I allowed the interviewee to choose the venue. I felt that as they were the local they would know the best place, and by choosing the venue they would feel comfortable. Such venues were often in their office, or at a café or restaurant. I also felt that meeting in a public place or their office meant that it was less likely we would be disturbed. At the beginning of each interview, I asked whether they would require anonymity and if they minded whether I recorded the interview. There is a list at the end of the thesis of interviewees and those that requested anonymity have been anonymised. Most respondents did not mind that I recorded the interviews, but for those that did, the Dictaphone was naturally turned off. To create a rapport I spent the first few minutes talking about general things, from my travels to the weather. I decided, initially, to act as if I did not know much about the case studies, as I felt this would allow the interviewee to relax and divulge more information. However, after I experienced a number of lectures and condescension I changed tactics and refrained from a teacher-student dichotomy, and acted as a researcher with sufficient knowledge of the country and the current situation.

At the end of each interview, I thanked the interviewee and asked them for further contacts. I allowed them to list potential interviewees without mentioning whether I had

spoken to these new contacts. On a few occasions, I was asked who I had spoken to already. I felt that it was best not to give too much information to respondents to protect those I had interviewed.

Some interviews did not go according to plan, with interviewees either becoming confrontational or unresponsive. This was difficult, I tried to tease out answers from indifferent interviewees but this was not always possible and generally, the few interviews where this happened were short. In regards to the two confrontational interviews, I tried to be as diplomatic as possible. I had had friends vet the questions and I am still unsure what occurred in those interviews. I tried to de-politicise the questions for all interviews, and to approach every response with an open mind, but perhaps this did not quite work as well as intended.

I transcribed each interview as quickly as possible so that they remained fresh in my mind. This was of course not always possible, so I would save each audio file on encrypted USB sticks, using an individualised code for each interviewee to give the interviewee and document anonymity from inquisitive eyes. If I was still working on a transcription and was unable to save it to the secure USB sticks, I would password protect the document, in an attempt to keep prying eyes out. I would email the file too two email accounts in separate emails, thinking that at the very least one would get through. Although it is possible to read the email, I felt that by anonymising each interview I did not provide information as to who it was I had spoken to in the document. It is possible that the individual could be located by reading between the lines, but I felt that this was a small risk. However, I transcribed the interviews quickly and saved these transcriptions to each USB stick and sent it via email, with each transcription under an anonymised code.

Working in authoritarian regimes is a challenge. One needs to be aware of personal safety, but also of the security of respondents. Holding a British passport I was likely to be relatively unaffected, although it was possible I could be banned from any of the countries. There are ways I could have improved my fieldwork and certainly, I learnt while conducting research. However, in this technological era, it is increasingly easy for security services and governments to find out whom I interviewed. To an extent, I hoped that the authorities were not too concerned with who I spoke with. To the best of my ability, I tried to protect my respondents and I feel that I achieved this aim.

3.3. The Black Box Problem

Tracing authoritarian learning remains difficult, as these regimes are opaque and information, when it does permeate out, is often out dated. The difficulty of finding evidence is complicated by the fact that little is written down. Rather, decisions are often vocalised or left to others to implement. For instance in Belarus, Lukashenka does not write down orders but vocalises them, giving him deniability should the person tasked with implementing the order go too far, or not execute the order appropriately¹⁵⁵.

Similarly, the Kremlin uses a system called *otmashka* which means go-ahead; which provides the implementer leeway and Putin the deniability should the executor go too far, or not far enough (Pavlovskiy, 2016a). Putin often signs documents for subordinates to implement with the phrase “I agree” but does not provide detail as to what he agrees with¹⁵⁶. Increasingly, middle-men deal with implementation, allowing Putin to remain above the fray, to locate the best practice to keep power as he enters the last six years of his

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Valery Kavaleuski – Consultant with Freedom House and journalist with Voice of America, 02/08/2016, Skype.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Michael Rochlitz – Assistant Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 08/11/2016, Moscow (since the interview at the Ludwig Maximilians Universität München and now Professor of Economics at Universität Bremen).

constitutionally restricted second presidential term (Gaaze, 2018). Therefore, with no direct evidence emanating from the four case studies, the researcher has to take a circuitous route to locate examples of authoritarian learning.

This indirect path forces the researcher to rely extensively on inference, although there are ways to make those extrapolations more concrete. One way to provide evidence of authoritarian learning is to analyse legislation say on NGOs and trace similarities in legislation back to their source. As mentioned in chapter two, Azerbaijan (2013), Tajikistan (2014), Kazakhstan (2016), Ukraine (2017) and China (2017) passed legislation, which either directly limited foreign funding for NGOs or increased their bureaucratic workload. This trend of five restrictive laws over a four year period points to learning from a common source, and with the exception of Ukrainian and Chinese legislation, the laws in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan bear a strong resemblance to the language of Russia's 2012 foreign agents law (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Azerbaijani Service, 2013; Parshin, 2014; Glushkova, 2016). Legislation in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan appears "to be largely copied; the legislation is almost identical in its language and effect" to the 2012 Russian legislation (Van de Velde, 2017).

Although not copying Russian legislation word-for-word, the Chinese NGO law like the 2012 Russian foreign agents law restricts foreign funding for NGOs. Therefore, it is likely that the Chinese regime learnt from earlier Russian legislation (Plantan, 2017). Similarly, the Ukrainian legislation is dissimilar but the Russian example served as inspiration for Bankova to pass restrictive NGO legislation¹⁵⁷.

Following the legislative trajectory of legislation is one way to determine that authoritarian learning occurs. If a number of states, particularly those from the same region,

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Oleg Sukhov – Journalist at the Kyiv Post, 22/04/2017, Kyiv.

pass similar legislation, a likely common denominator is that they are learning from each other. Therefore, it can be inferred that learning occurs. However, tracing a legislative trail does not explain much more than it is likely that learning happens. There are other methods to open up the black box. One approach is to analyse the known meetings and determine who attended each meeting. It is possible to determine in some cases what was said at a meeting through document analysis, or through investigation of government or organisation websites to find documents that provide areas of interest that point to learning. For instance, the CSTO states that member states will take action to stabilise situations in third-party states, requiring a military, or police presence (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2004)¹⁵⁸. It may not be possible to show the smoking gun but deductions can be made which highlight learning. However, for the most part determining what was said at meetings remains impossible or there are only vague details.

Another option is to trace the comings and goings of people in each regime and locate who they meet with and how often. Determining familial or business ties is another option to find out who an individual is close to. Tracing the location of people in each regime is a way to infer learning. This is made easier when regimes share people, which is a particular characteristic of the Kremlin. Currently, Vladislav Surkov, a former deputy head of the presidential administration is the Kremlin's man in Ukraine. When former Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovich fled in 2014, Surkov became the Kremlin's man in the DPR and the LPR. Russian Kuratory administer the DPR and the LPR (Peshkov, 2016). In 2004, during the Ukrainian presidential election, President Kuchma hired Russian political technologists,

¹⁵⁸ Corroborated in an interview with Joerg Forbrig – Director of the Fund for Belarus Democracy and Senior Transatlantic Fellow, Central and Eastern Europe at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, 16/09/2016, Skype.

like Gleb Pavlovskiy who was the Kremlin's master political tactician, to try to win Yanukovich the presidency (Trenin, 2011a: 89). As well as Russian influence in the other three case studies, many personnel in the other case studies were born, lived or worked in Russia. For instance, many Belarusian elites were born, educated, or worked in Russia, and they retain close ties to the Kremlin¹⁵⁹.

Getting inside the black box of an authoritarian regime is difficult and the researcher is likely to have to take a convoluted path to discover evidence. Authoritarian learning can only ever really be inductive, as it is nearly impossible to have access to the intricate details of a regime and attend top security meetings. Therefore, one is left with inference, using the strongest evidence to state that X, or Xs, cause Y, or Ys. The task of locating viable data is made easier by the use of an appropriate methodology that opens up the black box.

3.4. Research Design and Methodology

Before providing an appropriate methodology to open up the black boxes of the four case studies and ascertain the extent and levels of authoritarian learning in each case, I develop an appropriate research design. A research design is a plan to find an applicable methodology and it acts as a strategy to help the investigation of authoritarian learning here. The research design also provides an overall structure. An analysis of research design helps deliver an explanation for why the research methods – which are the tools for conducting the analysis – have been chosen. A research design provides a framework for how the analysis will be conducted in later chapters, and it is the starting point for

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Alyaksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies, 08/08/2016, Warsaw.

generating appropriate research questions (Bryman, 2016: 39), and in this investigation, propositions as well as research questions.

3.4.1. Research Design

To analyse authoritarian learning, I use a number of methodological foundations, such as interpretivism (constructivism). Interpretivism perceives the real world as constructed by actors (Furlong and Marsh, 2010: 186), and the person is placed at the centre of analysis as people interpret their understanding of the world through their experiences. I take an epistemological approach which focuses on the analysis of how knowledge is gained. As I wish to understand how knowledge is gained, I follow an interpretivist structure (Furlong and Marsh, 2010: 189). As knowledge of the world is interpreted by a person's ability to construe what is occurring in the world (Crotty, 1998), which is an important aspect of learning, I feel that an epistemological approach coupled with interpretivism is appropriate for analysing authoritarian learning. While, Guba and Lincoln (1994: 110) are correct to contend that epistemology and ontology are blurred I incorporate both an interpretivist epistemology and an anti-foundationalist ontology (Furlong and Marsh, 2010: 186). This is because interpretivist ontology perceives the world as socially constructed and epistemology tries to improve knowledge of the world and its socially constructed nature (Furlong and Marsh, 2010: 185). Authoritarian regimes are concerned about maintaining control; consequently, so they attempt to create a world in which they can exert full control. Therefore, I take an interpretivist approach, as this research philosophy analyses how actors operate (Parsons, 2010: 92).

As well as interpretivism, there are other political science philosophical approaches which are relevant. These are behaviouralism and rational choice. Learning is interpretivist

with actors learning new knowledge. However, learning also incorporates behaviouralism as learning draws on historical experiences to shape knowledge. Behaviouralism explains the behaviour of people (Sanders, 2010: 40). Therefore, it is a useful concept for understanding elite behaviour in the four case studies, as behaviouralism analyses the values that actors already have, leading to the actions that agents take (Sanders, 2010: 23). Like habitus, behaviouralism gives actors personal autonomy and accounts for why elites in the four case studies either learn or do not, and how their personal characteristics shape their actions.

Similarly, rational choice is relevant to understanding authoritarian learning, as actors make a cost-benefit analysis to determine which actions are the best ones to take in a given situation. Authoritarian regimes establish a winning coalition to give the authorities as wide support as possible among elites and the populace (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2011), and so agents make a decision whether the benefits of regime incumbency outweigh any potential costs of tenure. Using the example of the 2005 Andijon massacre, Uzbek elites decided that the benefits of quelling protests quickly, even though it resulted in the massacring of protesters, outweighed the costs of Western condemnation as linkage with Western states were limited. This is a cost/benefit analysis and highlights that rational choice is important for understanding why elites in the four case studies implement one policy but not others, and learn in some cases but not in others. However, as Baumgartner and Jones (2005) argued people are fallible and have limits, such as not knowing the consequences of their actions, leading them to make mistakes. Although authoritarian regimes are constantly adapting and learning, they may not be very good learners, and what works in one situation may not work in another. Failure to learn and learning from the failure of others are important aspects of authoritarian learning.

To understand authoritarian learning and understand how authoritarian regimes learn, why they learn and what they learn, I take a comparativist design. As authoritarian learning remains an understudied topic a comparativist approach allows researchers to compare two or more case studies, so “that we can understand social phenomena better” (Bryman, 2016: 65). A comparativist approach of two or more case studies allows for theory to be tested, and by using case studies one can ascertain whether the theory is appropriate (Bryman, 2016: 67-68). At the same time, a comparativist approach is useful to generate theory and provides a “link between evidence and inference” (Landman, 2008: 17). In the case of authoritarian learning, a comparativist approach allows researchers to determine the extent of the learning, what authoritarian regimes learn, how they learn and why they learn. It allows researchers to determine whether there is actually a phenomenon of authoritarian learning by comparing cases.

Case studies allow researchers to answer research questions (Yin, 2014: 22; Lu and Sexton, 2009: 35), giving clarity to a subject through in-depth analysis of a case or cases (Stake, 2009: 23-24). While one option is to analyse a single case study to determine whether a phenomenon occurs I want to understand how authoritarian regimes learn, why they learn and what they learn. Therefore, it is necessary to take a comparativist approach using multiple case studies, as I wish to compare a number of case studies to determine whether authoritarian learning happens and clarify understanding of this phenomenon. I use an exploratory case study framework as it allows a researcher to build theory and provides a greater explanation of a particular issue (Yin, 2012: 29), in this case a greater elucidation of authoritarian learning.

While it is often better to study states sharing one or more common characteristic this leads to selection bias. This is a particular problem when using the comparativist approach, as researchers choose the cases to be analysed, and this deliberate selection is an acute form of selection bias (Landman, 2008: 36). However, the deeper analysis which comes from investigation of a few case studies reduces selection bias, as nuances between cases come to the fore (Landman, 2008: 69). While, selection bias is always possible, and an issue to be aware of the in-depth investigation of authoritarian learning, I feel I have avoided this problem. As argued in chapter one, the four case studies are not all the same level of authoritarian regime as each other, and it is likely there will be differences between Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.

Although, there remains the potential for selection bias within the four cases studies due to a number of similar characteristics in terms of culture and history there are significant differences. To understand authoritarian learning I did not want to focus on only one case study, as I felt a single case study would not provide an appropriate understanding of authoritarian learning. Potentially a single case study analysis could miss key aspects of authoritarian learning. By contrast, using more than one case study provides a wider analysis of authoritarian learning, giving greater gradation in understanding this issue.

As I am investigating authoritarian learning which I felt to be a common characteristics in all authoritarian regimes, both electoral and competitive, I chose to use a most-similar systems design to allow analysis of case studies with similar characteristics. After all, studying countries that are closely linked helps better explain political phenomena (Landman, 2008: 35). Therefore, to explain authoritarian learning, I concentrate on states from a single region, specifically the post-Soviet space. It is difficult to investigate

phenomena in the post-Soviet region without including Russia. Therefore, Russia as the regional hegemon became one case study. However, I felt that I needed at least one other case study. I considered countries like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, but while Kazakhstan, in particular, has close ties with Russia, I felt the most appropriate case study of an established authoritarian regime with close cultural, historical, economic and political links to Russia was Belarus. However, I felt that an analysis of two established authoritarian regimes was insufficient to understand authoritarian learning. Therefore, to really understand authoritarian learning I needed to analyse at least one competitive authoritarian regime. I chose to study two competitive authoritarian regimes to balance the two electoral authoritarian regimes in Belarus and Russia. In the post-Soviet space, there are only a few competitive authoritarian regimes, providing a limited selection pool. I could have chosen Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, but I felt that as with Belarus I needed a state with many links to Russia from culture, language and history – and preferably Belarus. Ukraine seemed a more appropriate case than Armenia and Kyrgyzstan in this regard. My final choice followed similar selection criteria, with the necessity that the chosen case require links with the other three cases. Therefore, Moldova seemed a suitable fourth case study.

While the four case studies retain links to one another there are significant differences. This is especially the case after twenty-eight years of independence, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the four case studies have become increasingly different from one another. Belarus and Russia have more settled regimes than the contested politics in Moldova and Ukraine. As mentioned in chapter two, Belarus and Russia are electoral authoritarian regimes, where elections merely provide a façade of legitimacy for the continued re-election of each regime. By contrast, Moldova and Ukraine have competitive

authoritarian regimes, where elections are competitive enough for the incumbent regime to lose power.

Therefore, it is possible that the four case studies learn different things, or the incumbent authorities use different methods to learn. As seen in chapter one, there are periods of attempted authoritarian consolidation in Moldova and Ukraine, pointing to the possibility that regimes in these two countries are not constantly adapting and learning, or are unable to do so. Historically, Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes have been less integrated in post-Soviet regional organisations than regimes in Belarus and Russia. As discussed in chapter six, regional institutions play a key role in passing best practices between members to help regimes learn and keep power.

Ukrainian and especially Moldovan elites often support one internal regime until its demise and then re-label themselves when a new regime comes to power. For example, Plahotniuc was a close ally of President Voronin before in 2009, financing the PDM in a complete volte-face of political allegiance¹⁶⁰. Therefore, Moldovan and Ukrainian elites are likely to learn from internal examples. Of course, they learn from external sources, but it is likely the internal is highly important. These dissimilarities between the case studies provide an avenue for increasing understanding of authoritarian learning and how it operates in different settings.

Pinpointing a viable timeframe has to be relatively arbitrary, as the time frames of the individual regimes are distinctive. Including every learning event from the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 would make any investigation convoluted. Therefore, I chose 2000 as the beginning date. However, I do assess Ukrainian learning under President Kuchma from

¹⁶⁰ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 20/04/2017.

the 1996 Russian presidential elections as it is an excellent example of learning. I chose 2000 as the start year because it is when Putin took power in Russia. This seemed the most appropriate starting point for the analysis. Russia is the regional hegemon, and while Yeltsin's shelling of parliament in 1993, and instigation of constitutional changes set the tone for Putin's presidency (Gill, 2002: 190), it was only after 2000 that "actual democratic content" was stripped from Russian state institutions (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss, 2008). 2000 seemed an appropriate starting point, as an analysis beginning in 1994 when Lukashenka took power in Belarus would result in a too-large time-frame of investigation. By the same token choosing a time period based on Moldova and Ukraine would be a challenge as Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes do not historically have a long tenure, with very few regimes having more than one term in power¹⁶¹. 2000 saw the emergence of Putin as Russian president and Kuchma also moved Ukraine towards semi-authoritarianism, Voronin came to power in 2001 and began consolidation and the disappearance of opposition members in Belarus started in 1999 and saw the final consolidation of power by Lukashenka. Therefore, 2000 is the most appropriate year to begin analysis.

The end point of the investigation is February 2019 before the Moldovan parliamentary election of 24 February 2019. This is because the analysis needs to stop somewhere and cannot continue in perpetuity. This is the difficulty of political science as a day is a long time in politics, and so analysis of any event is often incomplete as information only becomes available later, or it quickly becomes outdated by events. However, I refer to events that have occurred in Moldova and Ukraine since both held elections in 2019. This

¹⁶¹ The obvious exceptions are Kuchma in Ukraine and Voronin in Moldova. However, Kuchma's first term began in 1994, which as with Lukashenka, would result in a long period of analysis and investigation over 25 years.

allows the reader to perceive changes that have occurred in Ukraine and especially Moldova. It highlights that the argument made here has not become obsolete by events.

As mentioned, I use a most-similar systems design as I am analysing authoritarian learning, which constitutes a single factor across the four case studies. Authoritarian learning is seen here as the independent variable, as I argue that its impact affects other variables. If regimes did not learn then we would not see any effect. An analysis of authoritarian learning in the post-Soviet region provides conclusions, which can be replicated both within future analyses of post-Soviet authoritarian regimes, and even in other regions that have a propensity of authoritarian regimes, like the Middle East or East Asia. There are possibly issues of validity, as internal validity relies on evidence that X causes Y (Bryman, 2016: 41). However, in authoritarian learning the likelihood that X causes Y can only be inferred. But, a rigorous research methodology provides enough coherent evidence that X causes Y. To begin to determine how to explain that X causes Y I discuss the methodology I use in the ensuing chapters.

3.4.2. Research Methodology

Having analysed the research design used here, I turn to explain the research methods I use to open up the black box of each regime. Much evidence for authoritarian learning is inferred by analysing how X, or X's, cause Y. Therefore, it is important to choose research methods which turn the inference that learning happens into concrete evidence that learning actually occurs. I use are process-tracing and interviews, as these methods provide sufficient evidence that X does indeed cause Y and complement the comparativist research design.

3.4.2.1. *Process-tracing*

Case studies and process-tracing are interlinked, with process-tracing being “an important, perhaps indispensable, element of case study research” (Vennesson, 2008: 224). Process-tracing acts as “a procedure for identifying steps in a causal process leading to the outcome of a given dependent variable of a particular case in a historical context” (George and Bennett, 2005: 176), and a case study helps represent causal links. As case studies involve in-depth analysis, these causal links come to the fore and process-tracing shows that X does cause Y (Vennesson, 2008: 232). Process-tracing is used in both a positivist and interpretivist research design as through case studies process-tracing explains events or phenomena (Vennesson, 2008: 224). As I use an interpretivist perspective, process-tracing allows the researcher to locate a link and ascertain how it “manifests itself and the context in which it happens” (Vennesson, 2008: 234).

Process-tracing breaks down causal processes into smaller pieces to understand social phenomena (George and Bennett, 2005; Bennett and Checkel, 2015) and connects one procedure to another (Ruzzene, 2014: 362). With process-tracing researchers can assess how single and shared decisions are made and the reasons for those choices (George and McKeown, 1985: 35). Process-tracing attempts to “validate a causal relationship between independent and dependent variables” (Anbrosio and Tolstrup, 2019) and “is a method for unpacking causality, that aims at studying what happens between X and Y and beyond” (Trampusch and Palier, 2016: 438). As I am conducting inductive research, process-tracing with its use of causality and analysis of links provides evidence that X does cause Y. With process-tracing, a researcher can trace engagement, dialogue and analyse where a policy originated from (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 17-18). Solid inferences can be made by an in-depth analysis that authoritarian regimes share policies and practices.

There is one important issue regarding process-tracing and authoritarianism and this is the issue of what Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte (2018) term “missingness,” where the causal chain has missing links, making process-tracing, with its reliance on causal links, difficult to implement. This can be due to a number of reasons, from denial of access to state archives to regime members refusing to speak. The Kremlin provides more data than the other case studies, especially Belarus and Moldova, as unlike the other three case studies, the Russian authorities provide websites and documentary evidence. By contrast, the Belarusian Presidential Administration and various security services remain “hidden” and do not publish information¹⁶². How to deal with gaps in “the evidentiary record” is addressed by Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte (2018) through a number of mechanisms. The one that of relevance here is to “contextualize the data generation process,” which considers what an actor’s actions would be, and accounts for loss of data. Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte (2018) contend that data loss can be rectified through an in-depth understanding of the subject by the researcher, and the use of second-hand sources, if primary sources like interviews are unavailable.

An example using process-tracing is the dictatorship laws passed during the Euromaidan to help Bankova justify clearing central Kyiv. These were copied from earlier Russian and Belarusian NGO and judicial legislation (Coynash, 2014; Wilson, 2014a; Snyder, 2014). Even the language was the same (Koshkina, 2015a: 173). The legislation was forced through parliament, eight days after Yanukovich met Putin secretly in Russia (Wilson, 2014c: 81; Leshchenko, S, 2014d). By analysing meetings, legislation and practices, learning

¹⁶² Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

can be shown. Case studies and interviews make process-tracing easier, as they provide information on elite movements and meetings.

I use an inductive type of process-tracing, as I wish to build understanding, and ascertain whether X and Y are connected and whether X explains Y (Trampusch and Palier, 2016: 439). Process-tracing allows researchers to investigate causes to determine outcomes. Therefore, through analysis of certain events (X) I ascertain that learning (Y) has happened. It is crucial to consistently explain the process being investigated as this makes it easier to be traced (Beach, 2016: 467). As I am dealing with authoritarian regimes, locating relevant information may be inaccessible. Data may simply be unavailable and so evidence for learning in one case study may simply be unobtainable. However, through a deep contextual understanding of the case studies it is possible to by-pass the issue of unavailable information and analyse causal links (Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte, 2018). By analysis of steps in the causal chain it is possible to fill any gaps left by missing data and determine that X does cause Y (Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte, 2018). To a great extent, it is up to the researcher to determine how to overcome missing data, and whether existing evidence is sufficient. However, an in-depth knowledge of case studies (Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte, 2018) and if necessary stringent testing, like a smoking gun or doubly decisive test (Ambrosio and Tolstrup, 2019), would provide sufficient evidence to alleviate missing evidence, thereby helping the researcher to argue that X does cause Y.

3.4.2.2. Interviews

Interviews fit closely with process-tracing, as interviews provide new avenues of discovery, and give new evidence that X does cause Y (Vennesson, 2008: 235). Interviews can be a process of trial and error (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000: 26), with the researcher

engaging in self-learning when conducting interviews, as in my experience every interview is different and therefore, a learning opportunity. I use semi-structured interviews as they personalise interviewee experiences and responses (Galleta, 2013: 23). They allow open-ended questions where the respondent can expand on an issue and give further information (Nguyen, 2015: 37). Semi-structured interviews help interviewees relax, as they act as a conversation and provide information that a structured interview would simply not return, as a structured interview often returns specific and rigid answers. By using semi-structured interviews follow-up questions can be asked (Uribe-Jongbloed, 2014: 142) as can personal and theoretical questions (Galleta, 2013: 24) to increase understanding of a topic.

Earlier in the chapter, there was a section denoting my travails in the field. Most of my interviews were conducted face-to-face, but due to the vagaries of being in one place for a short time, and not having the funding to travel to where some interviewees were, I often conducted interviews via Skype. It is crucial to build a rapport with an interviewee, and while this is better in a face-to-face setting, Skype does allow the interviewer and interviewee to see one another.

After an initial few minutes of small talk to build affinity I asked each interviewee whether they required anonymity and if they wanted the interview recorded. Knowing that talking to a Western researcher may be dangerous for my respondents I decided it was important that they have the option of being anonymised. While, this may detract from the ideal of mentioning all interviewees by name, which would give added weight to the references from interviews, I felt it was far less important than protecting respondents. Although it may be considered that anonymity diminishes the analysis, I needed to protect my respondents due to the vagaries of researching in authoritarian regimes. As all of my

interviewees are academics, researchers, journalists and politicians, I felt that anonymising those that wanted such assurances allowed me to get more interviews, as respondents were more willing to talk if I provided the option of anonymity. All of my interviews are specialists in the workings of at least one of the four case studies and so anonymising a few interviews did not lessen the information I was given by respondents.

After each interview finished I thanked them for their time and for meeting with me. I asked them if they could think of other people to contact and if they had contact details for these people. I found quite quickly that if I could tell potential interviewees if I had been given their contact details by person A then they were more willing to be interviewed. On only one occasion did a potential interviewee initially refuse because they did not agree with the views of the person who had recommended them. However, after an email conversation, I convinced them to agree to meet and talk to give their view of the situation.

Therefore, I used the snowball sampling technique, asking respondents to give me contacts. While, snowball sampling is not the most rigorous sampling technique, as sampling should ideally be non-biased, snowball sampling is a good technique for using with gatekeepers. A gatekeeper is a person who has the potential to provide access to a group or other contacts. As a lowly second-year PhD student, during my first field trip, I did not have the largest contact database, and so initially I contacted and interviewed people I knew personally or whose work I had read. I felt that speaking with them would allow them to meet me and provide me with other contacts and they could vouch for me if necessary. Snowballing while perhaps as not ideally random as other sampling techniques is useful when dealing with gatekeepers or trying to get access to elites.

At times there were difficulties in speaking to politicians and respondents close to or working for the four regimes. Regimes in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine claim to be democracies, and so speaking to people close to each regime was a challenge. However, by speaking with specialists on each regime I got significant amounts of information, and it is unlikely that regime insiders, or former-insiders, would provide such information. For example, it is very unlikely that regime insiders from the Belarusian regime or the Kremlin would be willing to discuss with me their collaboration at the Union State level and what was discussed in say the monthly meeting of the Interior Ministries. Similarly, it is unlikely someone from the CIS would be willing to discuss what was discussed at an informal meeting of the Council of Heads of State (CHS). Therefore, I interviewed researchers, academics, journalists and the occasional politician and they provided a clear understanding of the political situation in each case study and possible avenues to follow to understand authoritarian learning.

Interviews and process-tracing complement one another and both research methods are useful in testing the effectiveness of the other research method. According to Bryman (2016: 697) triangulation is “the use of one or more method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that findings may be cross-checked.” Triangulation allows researchers to overcome intrinsic weaknesses and biases which may exist in the data, and by combining research methods, triangulation reduces such eventualities, while increasing the validity of the research. By using more than one research method I use what is termed multiple methodologies, using different qualitative research methods to find applicable data (Natow, 2019). When conducting elite interviews, triangulation is particularly useful as it allows data to be collected from a number of sources (Natow, 2019). Interviews provide a

fuller picture but can be difficult to conduct when researching politically sensitive areas as respondents may be unwilling to speak (Davies, P, 2001). Getting access to elite interviewees may be challenging and so a researcher needs to “conduct extensive analysis of documents and background work before conducting interviews” (Kezar, 2008: 415).

Triangulation is useful because it allows the researcher to use different research methods to complement one another and helps locate specific areas that increases the gathering of evidence. Triangulation is useful when using interviews, as interviewees may not remember key aspects of events. They could also offer a rose-tinted analysis, giving their role a greater sheen, or they could simply not tell the truth. Use of other research methods to triangulate evidence reduces such possibilities and increases validity. By using a comparativist design and process-tracing, I allow for analysis away from interviews, in particular through document analysis, so reliance on interviews is reduced. I triangulated interviews with other interviews, document analysis and knowledge of the case studies to cross-check accounts and come to appropriate conclusions.

3.5. Propositions and Research Questions

Having provided the comparativist research design to be used and explained the research methodology of process-tracing and interviews, I now explain the propositions and research questions to be analysed in the succeeding chapters. I define authoritarianism as a regime that infringes various freedoms, as well as violates elections, learning as a *process* of engagement, leading to the development of beliefs, skills, ideas and discernment and authoritarian learning as a process by which authoritarian regimes adopt survival strategies taken from prior successes and failures of past governments both internal and external. Authoritarian learning involves elites relying on past experience to shape their

understanding in the present, and using a mixture of diffusion, lesson-drawing, policy transfer and linkage to draw appropriate lessons to establish a full palette of survival strategies. All four aspects of learning are relevant when learning from an external example. In regards to internal learning, however, lesson-drawing and policy transfer are pertinent for explaining learning from domestic examples. Networks of collaboration exist, allowing authoritarian regimes to cooperate with one another and learn from the experiences of others. Actors are independent and so they make informed decisions and decide whether they incorporate one lesson or not. Analysing authoritarian learning involves an inductive approach, as evidence is made through inferring that X causes Y. There can only ever be an interpretation, although it is a reading of the situation backed-up by evidence. To best show that authoritarian learning exists in the four cases, I analyse the propositions and research questions used to shape the following chapters.

3.5.1. Propositions

As the analysis is inductive, inferring from available evidence that learning occurs, I do not use hypotheses as hypotheses assume a deductive analysis. Hypotheses require stringent testing, and as authoritarian learning involves inference that authoritarian learning occurs I use propositions, which are statements that can be tested with evidence that I find about learning in the four case studies. The propositions provide avenues to analyse whether the four cases studies engage in authoritarian learning in the next four chapters.

<p>Proposition</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Authoritarian learning differs from democratic learning because authoritarian learning is especially concerned with learning from external and internal examples to increase the chances of survival for an authoritarian regime, by providing a full palette of survival practices.</p>
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Proposition 2	Authoritarian learning has a flattened hierarchy and network, with authoritarian regimes learning from one another, rather than a hegemon dispensing lessons or an authoritarian gravity centre.
Proposition 3	Internal networks are useful for learning and for preserving authoritarian regimes.
Proposition 4	Both success and failure are equally important arenas for learning for authoritarian regimes as each other.
Proposition 5	Authoritarian regimes are just as likely to learn from internal examples as external examples.
Proposition 6	Authoritarian regimes learn to provide a fuller palette of survival practices than just relying on repressive techniques.

The proposals complement the research questions, and like the research questions, they are explored in the next four chapters. The propositions form the bases of these chapters. Although proposition one has to a large extent been addressed, as authoritarian regimes learn in order to survive, there is further analysis to be made to provide sufficient evidence to answer this proposition. Propositions four and five are addressed in the next two chapters to determine whether authoritarian regimes are just as likely to learn from success as from failure and from internal factors as much as external influences. Chapter six concentrates on the second proposal to determine whether there is a flattened hierarchy of learning. Chapter seven investigates proposition three. Like proposition one, proposition six is investigated throughout the thesis as ascertaining the learning capacity of the four case studies explains whether all four case studies retain a full palette of survival practices.

3.5.2. Research Questions

There are eight research questions and these are tabulated below, complete with explanations about how I intend to analyse them:

Research Question 1: How is authoritarian learning different from democratic learning?

This is the main research question. One of the principal aspects of the analysis here is to ascertain whether authoritarian learning is different from democratic learning and to understand what those differences are.

Research Question 2: Do authoritarian regimes collaborate, support, engage in dialogue and learn from each other?

A key point is to ascertain whether authoritarian regimes support and engage in dialogue with one another, the extent of that dialogue, and which state institutions are involved. This helps determine the extent of learning in the four case studies.

Research Question 3: What specific circumstances exist for an authoritarian regime to support others?

I establish the circumstances for regime support. Does it occur during protests, or do regimes engage in developing tactics during peaceful periods to counter future protests? Are secure regimes or regional hegemony, the ones who engage in supporting other authoritarian regimes? Understanding these questions determines when learning occurs.

Research Question 4: Did the other case regimes react to democratic revolutions (such as the Colour Revolutions, Arab Spring and Euromaidan), like Russia did? Why and when do these regimes collaborate, support, talk and learn from one another?

It is often advocated that the Kremlin reacts to these events, but do other authoritarian regimes respond similarly? If so, it points to possible authoritarian collaboration to prevent

such events and emphasises that Russia is not only doing this. It is pertinent to understand why authoritarian regimes learn. It could be for survival, or to counter democratic principles. The when is also imperative, for when do regimes offer support and determine when it is necessary?

Research Question 5: Does the regional hegemon diffuse learning to others, or can other regimes diffuse methods to the hegemon?

Within the post-Soviet space does Russia, as the regional hegemon, bolster or promote authoritarianism, and is the learning strictly hierarchical with the regional hegemon on the top, or can Russia learn from other regimes in the post-Soviet region?

Research Question 6: How can deliberate support for democracy prevention be distinguished from general authoritarian collaboration?

Determining general authoritarian collaboration and democratisation prevention is difficult to measure. But, it can be determined that dialogue, tactics and meetings between regimes to counter democratisation points to a distinction between authoritarian collaboration and say economic cooperation.

Research Question 7: What tactics or methods do these regimes copy from each other?

Do regimes copy tactics from each other? Do they, for instance, copy ideas on preventing NGOs, the media and the opposition, or do they also improve the economy, thereby improving their legitimacy and reducing the potential for protests?

Research Question 8: Why do authoritarian regimes copy each other?

This can be summed up in one word: survival! But is this the only reason, or do authoritarian regimes club together to undermine democratisation. Do they prefer having other authoritarian regimes in the region?

The eight research questions are investigated in the next four chapters and answers are given to ascertain whether these questions were answered in the affirmative. Chapter eight as the conclusion refers to these questions and analyse whether there is sufficient evidence to provide clear answers for each research question.

3.6. Conclusion

The chapter began by explaining how the field-work was conducted and the travails encountered and dealt with when conducting field-work. Researching in authoritarian regimes brings a number of problems. The main issue is safety, involving ensuring the security of the researcher, but mainly the safety of the interviewees. Trust was an issue, but once I broke through this barrier I began to interview more and more people. To reduce the possibility of my respondents identities being compromised I anonymised all interviews when I saved the transcriptions to my laptop. I kept all interview data about on three encrypted USB sticks, and every night I sent the transcriptions of completed interviews to two email addresses in separate emails. This ensured some maintenance of anonymity for my interviewees. While, I never had any known undue difficulty with the authorities, it is best to be prepared.

Having explained how I operated in the field I turned to the research design. Having explained the difficulty of accessing the black box of an authoritarian regime and explained that in order to get viable information I would need to take the long way round to get evidence of authoritarian learning, I set about explaining the research design I would use. I use a comparativist approach analysing the four case studies of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. I justified the reasons for why I chose the four case studies, explaining that these four states share many similarities like culture and history, but they are also distinct

from one another, as they are not as authoritarian as one another, with Belarus and Russia being electoral authoritarian regimes and Moldova and Ukraine being competitive authoritarian regimes. Therefore, differences among the four case studies reduce the problems of selection-bias and provide a clearer understanding of authoritarian learning.

Having provided a viable research design I set out a coherent research methodology that would best analyse authoritarian learning and strengthen inferences with evidence. Process-tracing and interviews are inter-linked with case studies, and these create a coherent methodology for investigating authoritarian learning. I explained how I would use process-tracing and interviews, and explained how I would overcome the issue of triangulation. I provided six propositions and eight research questions to be investigated. These propositions and research questions give answers to why and how authoritarian regimes learn and what these regimes learn. The propositions are the basis for the next four chapters.

Chapter Four:

Learning from Internal and External Failure

“We only remember Gorbachev not because he succeeded but because he failed!”

Quote from Paul A. Goble¹⁶³.

4.1. Introduction

The above quote emphasises failure, as while Mikhail Gorbachev may be lauded in some Western circles for ending the Cold War, and communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, he did not set out to achieve these outcomes. Rather, the policies Gorbachev initiated – while beneficial – ended in failure¹⁶⁴. In Russia, Gorbachev is reviled as the villain who brought about the end of the Soviet Union (Monaghan, 2016: 7; Yablokov, 2018: 59). Putin was in Dresden during most of the Gorbachev period, so he was “an outsider to perestroika” (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 118). Therefore, it is probable that Putin has a poor view of Gorbachev’s attempted reforms. The Yeltsin administration viewed the reforms of Gorbachev with trepidation and attempted “to close down the channels for popular activism that had opened up during the Gorbachev period” (Gill, 2015: 21), emphasising that Gorbachev was perceived in Russia as a failure. I return to learning from the failure of Gorbachev when addressing Belarusian and Russian lessons from the Soviet collapse, but the Russian security services have drawn lessons from the 1980s, expressly from the

¹⁶³ Interview with Paul A Goble – Professor at the Institute of World Politics and editor of the “Window on Eurasia” blog, 22/08/2016, Skype.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Paul A Goble – Professor at the Institute of World Politics and editor of the “Window on Eurasia” blog, 22/08/2016, Skype.

Solidarność¹⁶⁵ movement and the economic protests in Gdańsk (Galeotti, 2019c), which spread across Poland and eventually into Eastern Europe culminating in the demise of the Eastern European Communist satellite states.

Before investigating learning from authoritarian failure I discuss what is meant by failure. Authoritarian regimes want to maintain control at all costs, so anything contributing to a loss of control is a failure. If the leader is forced to flee, like Yanukovich, this constitutes failure. Taking Hale's (2015: 34) analogy of a bank run, authoritarian regimes do not want people to believe the regime cannot maintain power. A bank can only be viable if people believe it has money. If word gets around that the bank lacks liquidity then the bank will suffer a run as people fear for their savings and they will take deposits out of the bank, causing a bank run or even bank collapse. This is similar for authoritarian regimes. The authorities have to show that they can keep power. Therefore, authoritarian regimes cannot be seen to fail.

However, what constitutes failure in authoritarian regimes? The most recent example of failure in the post-Soviet space is Yanukovich fleeing at the end of the 2014 Euromaidan protests. Although protests often occur in the four case studies, regimes nearly always survive. This is particularly so for the Kremlin and the Belarusian regime. While there were protests in Russia in 2005, 2011-2012, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, with the 2011-2012 protests being particularly significant, the regime survived. Similarly, the 2006, 2010 and 2017 protests did not lead to regime change in Belarus. Therefore, I argue that when a regime survives protests, this cannot be considered a failure.

¹⁶⁵ Solidarity (Solidarność in Polish) was formed in 1980 at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk. Led by Lech Wałęsa it became the largest non-communist trade union in Poland and by 1989 had negotiated semi-free elections, resulting in the defeat of the communist regime and the emergence of a Solidarność led government.

Regime collapse like the downfall of the Yanukovich government in 2014 is one instance of failure for authoritarian regimes. The second aspect of failure is the leader image. This is particularly so for the authorities in Belarus and Russia, where leader image has become synonymous with regime survival. In Russia, the Kremlin has created a heavily personalised regime with the legitimacy of the authorities resting on Putin (Kaczmarek, 2015: 35). In Belarus, Lukashenko is bat'ka, the Victorian patrician father of the nation (Wilson, 2011a: 257). Lukashenko needs to maintain the line he is supported by most Belarusians. It is why his electoral victories – apart from the first election in 1994, where he was not the incumbent – have ranged between 75 and 83% to show the extensive level of his support, even if the figure is false. Leader image is important to both regimes and anything that affects it is a failure. Along with regime collapse, this is what is meant by authoritarian failure.

Bank and Edel (2015: 20) postulated that authoritarian regimes learn from failure, but is this so? Can authoritarian regimes not learn from success? These questions will be addressed in chapters four and five. I will address proposition four that 'it is plausible that authoritarian regimes learn as much from examples of success as they do from instances of failure.' I begin to answer proposition five that 'it is feasible that authoritarian regimes are just as likely to learn from internal sources as they are from external sources.' Authoritarian regimes learn from examples of success and failure and learning from both is an important aspect of experiential learning. To survive an authoritarian regime analyses examples of success and failure to develop an appropriate survival palette. Similarly, authoritarian regimes analyse examples from internal and external sources to increase their survival capacity.

To answer propositions four and five, I investigate instances of learning from internal and external failure. Examples will be analysed thematically as this approach shows how the four cases learn. The first part of the chapter analyses learning examples from external failure. I investigate the reaction of the four case studies to the 2004 Orange Revolution, the Arab Spring and the Euromaidan. As mentioned in chapter three, it is likely evidence may be missing, and not all four case studies provide relevant information. However, available data raises interesting questions and shows how authoritarian regimes learn. I then assess an example of learning from combined internal and external failure, which is Plahotniuc's lessons from the 2009 Moldovan protests, and the 2015 and 2016 Romanian protests. I then investigate examples of learning from internal failure, such as learning from the Soviet Union and the 1990s. After this, I analyse learning from previous image failure. As mentioned, image failure is an issue in Belarus and Russia, as both governments rely heavily on a strong leader image. Therefore, I analyse the Putin image or "Putin mystique" (Artunyan, 2014), as this example clearly shows Kremlin learning. Before concluding, I investigate learning by Poroshenko from the Euromaidan.

4.2. Learning from External Failure by the Four Cases

Learning from external failure is when authoritarian regimes learn from the failures of others. The collapse of one authoritarian regime, or in some cases a number of regimes, creates fear in other authoritarian regimes. This induces learning to reduce the chance that other authoritarian regimes will suffer the same fate. For example, the Kremlin apparently took lessons from the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe and the resulting collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. As Galeotti (2019c) argues the Russian security services have trained against a potential Solidarność movement arising in Russia and leading to economic

protests. Many Kremlin personnel worked in the Soviet Union and so experienced events that started in the docks of Gdańsk and culminated in the collapse of the communist satellite states in Eastern Europe. During the Gorbachev period, Putin was a KGB agent in Dresden and “could only look in from afar” during this period of significant change in the Soviet Union (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 110). During the last days of the East German regime, Putin faced down a crowd in Dresden outside the KGB building. The message from the local Soviet military base that “Moscow is silent” emphasised to Putin the isolation of his position and the failure both of the Soviet Union and the East German regime (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 181). Witnessing one of the 1989 revolutions first hand was a life experience for Putin and has affected his thinking in trying to stop such a situation in Russia. It is why Putin has been averse to large protests (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 115, 181-182). This was postulated in chapter two, but further analysis is needed in the future. I analyse a number of examples of learning from external failure by the four cases, although the 1989 events show Kremlin learning even thirty years later.

4.2.1. Learning from an Orange Protest

In 2004 Ukraine held presidential elections which would see a new president elected as the incumbent, Kuchma, was constitutionally barred from standing after two consecutive presidential terms. Kuchma had chosen his successor, Yanukovich, due to pressure from the Donbas clan. The elections were stolen, denying challenger, Yushchenko, victory. Mass protests finally resulted in the central electoral commission overturning the fraudulent second-round result allowing for a third electoral round, which Yushchenko won (Wilson, 2005a). The Kremlin publicly supported Yanukovich and even tried to pressure Kuchma into using violence against protesters. It sent political technologists to follow the

same electoral strategy in Kyiv that had got Putin re-elected earlier in 2004. However, this attempt to re-run the 2004 Russian presidential election failed (Zygar, 2016: 92-94).

This defeat for the Kremlin resonated and led to the Kremlin instigating a number of practices to alleviate a possible Orange Revolution in Moscow. There have been a number of analyses of the key aspects that the Kremlin initiated after 2004 (Finkel and Brudny, 2012b; Horvath, 2013). The Kremlin by 2005 set about creating a preventive counter-revolution which appropriated “the revolutionary methods” of the Kremlin’s opponents (Horvath, 2013: 6), and the tactics used by protesters in the Orange Revolution to restrict such a possibility occurring in Moscow. The preventive counter-revolution of the Kremlin established an ideology which united regime factions. The Kremlin instigated further repressive legislation that targeted groups, such as political parties, NGOs and public demonstrations which could form the basis of a Moscow Colour Revolution. The preventive counter-revolution mobilised patriotic social groups, from regime-funded NGOs to Nashi, a pro-Kremlin youth group (Horvath, 2013). Nashi was set-up to stop anti-regime protesters taking control of squares and streets. It was opposed to “the unnatural alliance of liberals, fascists, sympathizers of the West and ultranationalists, international foundations and international terror, united by one and only thing – the hatred for Putin” (Finkel and Brudny, 2012b: 19). Nashi united with Spartak and CSKA football hooligans to provide muscle should a Colour Revolution occur in Moscow (Horvath, 2013: 117).

The 2004 Orange Revolution in Kyiv still resonates for the Kremlin as the Russian authorities are constantly trying to counter such events from happening in Russia. Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2012a), stated that “Russia was a “training ground” for using informational,

organizational and other external levers of interference in internal affairs.” The term Colour Revolution has continued as the Kremlin’s descriptive tool for explaining protests, with Putin (2016a) claiming that the Syrian conflict was the final Middle Eastern Colour Revolution. In 2019, Deputy Secretary of the Security Council, Rashid Nurgaliev (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2019), claimed that Western states will continue to promote colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space and particularly in Russia.

Events in Ukraine in 2004 led the Kremlin to instigate a preventive counter-revolution as it learnt from the failure of Yanukovich to get elected as Ukrainian president and the ensuing Orange protests at the fraudulent elections. The spectre of a colour revolution for the Kremlin and the term Colour Revolution became a label to explain all protests for the Russian authorities. It is clear that the Orange Revolution and the wider Colour Revolution phenomena have affected Kremlin thinking (Dickinson, 2017). However, is this applicable to the other three case studies?

Another regime that reacted in a similar way to the Kremlin in countering the Orange Revolution and the Colour Revolutions in general was the Belarusian regime. I (2017b) have detailed how the Belarusian regime began its own preventive counter-revolution after the fall of Slobodan Milošević in the 2000 Bulldozer Revolution. The Belarusian authorities according to Andrew Wilson (2011a: 213) “learnt the apparent lessons of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution better than the opposition.” For instance, the Belarusian authorities learnt that Yanukovich’s claim that the Orange protesters were paid American stooges had not resonated with Ukrainians (Wilson, 2011a: 214). Therefore, the Belarusian regime looked for an alternative ‘enemy’ to galvanise public support. Opposition candidate during the 2006 presidential election, Alyaksandr Milinkievich spoke fluent Polish.

This was enough for the Belarusian regime to claim he was pro-Polish (Wilson, 2011a: 214) and the Związek Polaków na Białorusi (ZPB)¹⁶⁶ were also accused of anti-regime activities, an allegation not helped by the meeting between Andzelika Borys – who would become ZPB leader – and EU representatives in Brussels (BelaPAN, 2005). The Belarusian security services ‘discovered’ a plot between the ZPB and the Polish security services to remove Lukashenka from power (Ankudo, 2007). Other Polish as well as Lithuanian plans to oust Lukashenka were also ‘found’ (Provalinskaya, 2007; Ankudo, 2006a; 2006b; Gryl’, 2005b), and two Polish diplomats were evicted (Wilson, 2011a: 214). The ZPB was split into pro and anti-regime organisations with the anti-regime ZPB often visited by the security services (Pulsha, 2010).

Having located a viable ‘enemy’ to galvanise the public against, the Belarusian regime set about refining other tactics from the Colour Revolutions. The youth group Otpor was prominent at the 2000 Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia, uniting protesters and opposition parties, and so the Belarusian regime created the BRSM¹⁶⁷, which amalgamated two other pro-regime groups, the Belarusian Youth Union and the Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union. The BRSM was created in 2002 a full three years before Nashi in Russia (Gryl’, 2012), highlighting that the Belarusian authorities were quicker to lesson-draw from the Colour Revolutions than the Kremlin, and that the Kremlin learnt from the Belarusian government (Hall, 2017b: 162). The BRSM was created as a forum to bring young Belarusians into a pro-regime and patriotic organisation (Dovnar, 2003). The BRSM was tasked with taking control of squares and streets during protests in central Minsk to alleviate a possible Belarusian

¹⁶⁶ The Związek Polaków na Białorusi (in Polish) or the Sayuz palyakau na Belrusi (in Belarusian) is the Union of Poles in Belarus and acts as cultural and education association for the Polish community in Belarus.

¹⁶⁷ In English this is the Belarusian Republican Youth Union.

Orange Revolution (Vyachorka, 2004). The creation of the BRSM was one practice the Belarusian authorities devised to restrict a possible Belarusian Colour Revolution. The pro-opposition youth group, Zubr, which was formed in the lead-up to the 2006 presidential elections, was infiltrated by the security services in order to neuter Zubr as a viable Belarusian Otpor (Dovnar, 2004).

While the 2004 referendum which did away with presidential term limits gave the regime security, Lukashenka is wary of any possibility of losing power¹⁶⁸, and so reacts to protests, however small, indiscriminately. This is why the regime used significant repression against demonstrations in 2006 and 2010, and only refrained from such coercive practices in 2015 due to the geopolitical need to improve relations with the EU¹⁶⁹. Although the Belarusian regime was relatively safe after 2004, the authorities still needed to stop any future bank runs and remain responsive to potential protests. It is why the Belarusian government continued a preventive counter-revolution even when relatively safe (Silitski, 2010). The regime has pre-empted democratic challenges, increasing control over the media, NGOs, and the education sector to teach students the 'right' information since the Bulldozer Revolution. The authorities used strategic increases in public-sector wages at times of pressure to maintain control (Silitski, 2005).

The Belarusian regime reacted to the Orange Revolution and the wider Colour Revolutions with a preventive counter-revolution taking further control of the media, civil society, and using Colour Revolution tactics against protesters. The Belarusian authorities are averse to protests and are constantly perfecting anti-protest techniques through

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with David R Marples – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

training exercises against pseudo-protesters¹⁷⁰. Although tactics have changed since 2014, due to the partial re-set in relations with the EU, the Colour Revolutions worried the Belarusian regime and resulted in the authorities attempting to prevent such an eventuality happening in Minsk, and to alleviate a “pink,” “orange” or “banana” revolution in Belarus” (Lukashenka, 2005).

Unlike information on Kremlin and Belarusian reactions to the Orange Revolution and the wider Colour Revolutions, there is less information on how Moldovan regimes responded to the Colour Revolutions. The PCRM leader, Voronin, won the presidency in 2001 and embarked on power consolidation, which after protests in 2002 became more nuanced (Tudoriu, 2013: 171). The PCRM won a parliamentary majority in 2001 and due to its homogeneity as the dominant parliamentary party and with Voronin as president, the PCRM exerted control over the state (Rodkiewicz, 2009). Voronin slowly took control of state institutions, placing allies in power and using reiderstvo¹⁷¹ tactics to take control of business and increase his, and that of his family’s, business empire¹⁷². Control over business was but one control method. The PCRM reduced the budgets of local governments, making these institutions dependent on the PCRM’s largesse and state-controlled media became a PCRM voice (Rodkiewicz, 2009). The PCRM turned into a patronage party, dispensing financial incentives to gain the support of other factions. It kept changing the electoral system to ensure the PCRM of continued victory (Rodkiewicz, 2009). The PCRM co-opted

¹⁷⁰ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

¹⁷¹ Reiderstvo is the practice of asset-grabbing and is a practice used across the post-Soviet space by elites to take the assets and businesses of others.

¹⁷² Interview with Mark Mazureanu – Researcher at Universität Mannheim and Lecturer at Rutgers University, 14/04/2017, Chişinău; Interview with Mihai Popşoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

opposition political parties to create a plural opposition (Hale, 2015: 389). Voronin showed skill when dealing with the opposition and demonstrations, backing down at key intervals and offering concessions, only to re-calibrate later (Point.md, 2009).

While the PCRM created a system where there was partial political plurality, Voronin became a lame duck in 2009 due to term limits. This created fissures in the regime, an issue that became acute when the PCRM's main financial funder, withdrew his support. Plahotniuc had supported Marian Lupu as Voronin's successor, but Voronin chose Zinaida Greceanii (Hale, 2015: 405). Other oligarchs like Vlad Filat and Chiril Lucinschi began to offer the opposition financial support (Hale, 2013: 490). There is no denying that the emergence of 900,000 protesters across Moldova – due to the PCRM's attempt to steal the 2009 parliamentary election (Wilson, 2009) – weakened the capabilities of the security services to use repression (Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu, 2009: 138), and the attack by protesters on the parliament (Harding, 2009) certainly represented a revolution-type event. However, the police eventually managed to control central Chişinău, six days after protests began (Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu, 2009: 138). The PCRM's collapse did not occur because of protests as in Kyiv in 2004, but because of a united opposition, who likely fearing further PCRM rule, denied the PCRM a parliamentary majority through unknown levels of unity. This accord, coupled with the loss of support for the PCRM, ended the PCRM's monopoly on power and resulted in victory at the July 2009 parliamentary elections for the AEI coalition (Hale, 2015: 409).

There is limited information on the PCRM and Voronin's reactions to the Colour Revolutions, but the consolidation of power that the PCRM attempted was partly due to learning from the failure of Yanukovich in 2004. However, by late 2003, after Voronin

rejected the Kozak Memorandum¹⁷³ relations with Russia deteriorated. By co-opting more nationalist-minded parties like the Christian Democrats, while also restricting the power of more pro-Russian factions (Hale, 2015: 380-381), Voronin increased his consolidation of power. Yet, the Colour Revolutions, especially the Orange Revolution, would have worried Voronin as protest could lead to regime collapse¹⁷⁴. It is interesting to note that during Voronin's presidency in 2006 the Moldovan Security Services (SIS) established Moldova's first anti-terrorist centre to deal with all "manifestations of extremism" (Point.md, 2006b). As seen in chapter six, the case studies have a loose definition of what constitutes extremism, and although an oblique reference, it is likely Voronin worried about a possible Colour Revolution in Chişinău. While, there was a breakdown in relations between the Voronin regime and the Kremlin there remained significant links, due to Moldovan membership in the CIS, allowing the Moldovan and Russian regimes to share information. Such an event as the Orange Revolution would have been publicised in Moldova allowing the PCRM to learn too.

Diffusion, linkage and lesson-drawing were also important for the Belarusian and Russian regimes. Lukashenka was a close ally of Milošević, and Milošević's fall in 2000 induced learning by the Belarusian regime (Feduta, 2005: 442). As seen in chapter six, the Belarusian and Russian regimes are closely interlinked and so would have worked together to counteract further Colour Revolutions in the post-Soviet space. Certainly, Belarus was a testing ground for the Kremlin and provided lessons with its earlier preventive counter-

¹⁷³ The Kozak Memorandum was devised by Dmitriy Kozak to solve the Transnistrian conflict. It would have allowed Russia to station troops indefinitely on Transnistrian territory and federated Moldova. Under American and EU pressure Voronin refused to sign the agreement (Hale, 2015: 380).

¹⁷⁴ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 17/05/2017.

revolution (Hall, 2017b). Therefore, the Colour Revolutions highlight the power of linkage, diffusion and lesson-drawing in explaining authoritarian learning from external failure.

4.2.2. *Learning from the Arab Spring*

The Arab Spring was a set of mass protests across the Middle East and North African region and ended in the collapse of some regional authoritarian regimes. A combination of mass protests, the importance of social media, a symbol of martyrdom and repression that antagonised rather than dispersed, and in the case of Libya outside intervention, led to the collapse of regimes in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen (Carapico, 2013; Ghabra, 2015; Zemni, 2015; Abubakr Buera, 2015). However, there were successes, as some authoritarian regimes rode the protest wave and survived. Morocco and Jordan instigated reforms to placate enough of the populace to reduce support for demonstrations (Bank, 2012; Belghazi and Mouddeh, 2016). Algeria which was slightly out of kilter with other Arab states mixed reforms with the threat of state-sponsored violence to quell potential protests (Volpi, 2013).

I analyse examples of success from the Arab Spring in chapter five. A wave of protests across a region renowned for the longevity of its authoritarian regimes would have alarmed other authoritarian regimes across the globe. For example, the Arab Spring clearly unsettled the Kremlin and the Belarusian regime. Putin (2014a) spoke of “chaos, violence” with the “Arab Spring” being replaced by the “Arab winter,” and Dmitriy Medvedev (2011) argued that the Arab Spring would “backfire” for the West, while Lukashenka (2011b; 2014a) stated that the Belarusian army should prepare for a Western-sponsored coup. The Arab Spring alarmed the Belarusian and Russian regimes, and potentially the Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities.

Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, regularly met representatives from Middle Eastern and North African Security Councils to discuss the Arab Spring. In 2015, Patrushev visited Cairo and met his Egyptian counterpart, Fayza Abunnaga, to discuss “Colour Revolutions” and “their impact on the security of Russia and Egypt,” and the failure of the Egyptian regime during the Arab Spring (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2015c). Another meeting saw Patrushev with Egyptian and Emirati officials to discuss how Colour Revolutions were being used “to divide the Muslim world and at the same time weaken Russia and China” (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2015b). During the meeting, Patrushev stated that “over the past decades, Russia has accumulated considerable experience in countering “Colour” revolutions” from passing legislation “aimed at strengthening the constitutional system, protecting territorial integrity,” while “countering terrorism and extremism,” and bringing up a patriotic youth cohort, developing “civil society institutions, and rallying the nation on the basis of common, spiritual, moral and historical values. On all these issues, we are ready to provide the necessary advisory assistance to our partners” (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2015b). It is indicative that Patrushev referred to the Arab Spring as a Colour Revolution, highlighting that the Kremlin was still affected by the Colour Revolution spectre.

The Kremlin did not need to visit the Middle East and North African region – although first-hand information is always best – as television channels showed the protests. Putin (2012c: 3) remarked that the Arab Spring had occurred due to the growth of communication technologies, allowing protesters to use the Internet, social media and mobile phones to organise protests. While there should be free communication, Putin (2012c: 3) argued that there should be restrictions to stop their “use by terrorists and

criminals.” Putin (2012c: 3) also remarked that NATO intervention in Libya set a precedent, allowing others “to realise a “Libyan Scenario” which could have implications for Russian security.

However, the primary lesson for the Kremlin was the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine¹⁷⁵. Gerasimov (2013: 1) argued that the Arab Spring had changed perceptions of how war would be conducted in the future. The doctrine, or rather notion, stipulated that direct military confrontation between armies in the field was being replaced by “political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military measures implemented with the use of the protest potential of the population” (Gerasimov, 2013: 1). Such ideas were used by the Kremlin in the Ukrainian conflict in what has been termed “guerrilla geopolitics” (Galeotti, 2015).

It is revealing that the 2014 pro-Russian protests that began in south-east Ukraine were called the “Russian Spring,” which in part was a mockery of the alleged American intervention in the Arab Spring (Lauder, 2018). Such an example emphasises that the Kremlin learnt lessons from the Arab Spring. The Kremlin used nationalist groups to carry out the Russian Spring, providing it with deniability if necessary, but the Russian Spring idea came from the Kremlin (Jarzyńska, 2014). Nationalist groups were tasked with seizing buildings, beating up pro-Ukrainian activists and even attacking Russian speakers (Krutov, 2014), thereby giving the Kremlin a justifiable reason for intervention (Dynko, 2014). The alliance with Russian nationalist factions to carry out Kremlin aims in Ukraine helped increase nationalist support for the regime after the 2011-2012 protests (Popescu, 2012;

¹⁷⁵ Named after Valeriy Gerasimov is the current Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.

Makarychev and Yatsyk, 2014; Laruelle, 2015). However, this does not detract from the lessons drawn by the Kremlin about the Arab Spring.

The Belarusian reaction to the Arab Spring was relatively quick, with Lukashenka (2011b) mentioning instability and that elections in Egypt and Tunisia had not brought peace. While the 2013 Gerasimov 'Doctrine' was created as a direct response to the Arab Spring, it appears the Belarusian regime had also been learning, with Lukashenka (2012) stating that the Belarusian army needed to develop methods against a possible Arab Spring-like event in Minsk. These reforms against non-military threats were completed in 2016 (TUT.by, 2016b). In 2014, during a visit to the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Minsk, Lukashenka (2014a) stated that the authorities should constantly prepare for something like the Arab Spring. A couple of days later when addressing the National Assembly, Lukashenka (2014b) mentioned that the Belarusian regime had already prepared by controlling NGOs and the "fifth column"¹⁷⁶ and that poverty had caused the instability, so the regime needed to improve the Belarusian economy to reduce the likelihood of potential protests.

As with the Orange Revolution where the Belarusian regime devised an 'enemy' in the form of the Polish and Lithuanian governments, the Arab Spring allowed the authorities to re-create the external 'enemy' story. Such discourse was helped by the 2012 teddy bear bombing¹⁷⁷, allowing the Belarusian authorities to claim that then Swedish ambassador Stefan Eriksson supported radical groups to instigate an Arab Spring in Belarus (Yanushevskaya, 2012). The regime improved its listening capabilities, enhancing the

¹⁷⁶ This is Lukashenka's label for the opposition.

¹⁷⁷ A Swedish NGO dropped teddy bears over Minsk. The teddy bear parachutists carried pro-democracy messages, and the escapade resulted in a diplomatic row between Sweden and Belarus and the tit-for-tat expelling of diplomats.

capacity of the IAC to poll Belarusians to find issues that could lead to future protests (Inanets, 2017). The authorities developed tactics to control the Internet and what Belarusians viewed online, as the Arab Spring had seen protesters unite online (Shraibman, 2015). When the Arab Spring started, the Belarusian government allegedly issued orders to all regional state structures and security services to be ready for potential instability (Gryl', 2016). The numbers of police personnel were increased in 2011 and there were training exercises in Hrodna to counter-protests (AFN.by, 2011). The regime monitored opposition movements and constantly detained opposition activists (Tikhonenko, 2011). Phishing emails were sent to the email accounts of opposition activists, which allegedly originated from the KDB (Kanygin, 2011). The available evidence points to the Belarusian regime reacting to the Arab Spring and devising practices to restrict copy-cat protests in Belarus.

Unlike the Belarusian and Russian regimes, the Moldovan authorities do not have the capacity and aptitude to exert the same level of control and react to the Arab Spring as the Belarusian and Russian authorities did. As a competitive authoritarian regime, the Moldovan authorities vie with other groups and the government does not have a full repressive palette. For example, the Arab Spring highlighted the power of social media to Moldovan civil society, contributing to organising the Moldovan 2015 and 2016 protests (Popșoi, 2015). According to Freedom House, the Moldovan authorities tried to exert greater control over the media (Point.md, 2012), although there was not the capacity for concerted media control. The Plahotniuc regime attempted to increase control over state institutions to restrict potential protests (NewsMaker, 2016d). This attempt at consolidation saw the simulation of reform and the reverse of earlier changes (Jurnal.md, 2016a). Although not directly linked to the Arab Spring, the Plahotniuc regime consistently gutted

reforms and attempted to create a frontage of change to placate Western backers¹⁷⁸. It is likely that the Arab Spring was tracked in Chişinău, but it did not lead to significant changes, simply because Moldovan regimes do not have the capacity to make changes when events happen in other global regions. If changes occur in the post-Soviet space or Romania then the Moldovan authorities are more likely to react¹⁷⁹.

Like Moldova, there is limited information on the effect of the Arab Spring on Ukraine. However, like Moldova, the Yanukovich tried to consolidate control over state structures, at the time the Arab Spring started (Solodkiy, 2011: 5). The authorities devised new methods to control the electoral system (Minakov, 2011), and increased the number of Berkut and Griffin security personnel, while also procuring weapons, and instigating anti-protest training exercises¹⁸⁰ (Grani.ru, 2017). While it is likely the Arab Spring played a role in precipitating attempts at consolidation, Bankova began consolidation when Yanukovich became president in 2010 (Kudelia, 2014). Elsewhere, I (2017a: 163) have argued that Yanukovich was too busy “fighting the last war” of the Orange Revolution to acknowledge the Arab Spring, which is why Bankova failed with the Euromaidan, as the Euromaidan shared many similarities with the Arab Spring (Dagaev et al. 2014).

Although there are limitations to the information available for how the Arab Spring affected the Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes there is evidence pointing to learning by these regimes. There is ample data of Kremlin and Belarusian regime learning from the Arab Spring. There is evidence of direct dialogue between, particularly the Kremlin, and regimes

¹⁷⁸ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 17/05/2017.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Mark Mazureanu – Researcher at Universität Mannheim and Lecturer at Rutgers University, 14/04/2017, Chişinău.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with a specialist on Ukraine who requested anonymity, 24/04/2017.

in the Middle East and North Africa. This highlights that policy transfer and linkage occurred. The Arab Spring was televised, so representatives of each regime did not need to be on the streets of Cairo, Algiers or Tunis. Therefore, diffusion was also a key factor. It is likely that the linkage between the four case studies allowed lessons to be passed from one case to others. Although evidence is limited that the Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes learnt directly from the Arab Spring, there are pointers that all four case studies learnt from the Arab Spring, although the Belarusian and Russian regimes were more adept at lesson-drawing from these events.

4.2.3. *Learning from a Protest in Kyiv*

The Euromaidan's proximity resonated for the Kremlin, and the Belarusian regime and possibly the Moldovan authorities too. Yanukovich's failure as a fellow authoritarian caused consternation for the Belarusian and Russian regimes (Maltseva, 2016: 144), and would have forced the regimes in Minsk and Moscow to learn. There were also potential lessons for the Moldovan regime.

The Kremlin viewed Ukraine as similar to Russia, as the Russian authorities relied on a thesis by Tamara Guzenkova, deputy director of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI), an organisation summed up as "where old spooks are sent to retire" (Kovalev and Bodmer, 2017). According to allegations levelled by former-RISI analyst, Alexander Sytin¹⁸¹, the Kremlin followed a document by Guzenkova which argued that Russian intervention would be welcomed in Ukraine, as Ukrainians had always supported Russia since the Treaty

¹⁸¹ His condemnation of RISI can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/alexander.sytin/posts/772114072866973> (in Russian).

of Pereyaslav¹⁸². This is certainly a failure as Russia failed to understand that Ukraine is different from Russia, both during the Orange Revolution and again during the Euromaidan. While possibly the Kremlin continued to fail to learn about Ukraine, there were lessons the Kremlin could draw from Bankova's failure at the Euromaidan.

During the Euromaidan Russian state media quickly had two discourses. On the one hand, Yanukovich was blamed for being weak, not resorting to sufficient violence to disperse protesters, negotiating with the West and allowing the West to fund far-right groups (Shestakhov, 2014: 1). On the other hand, Putin (2014d) claimed Yanukovich's fall was a Western-sponsored coup against a legitimately elected president. Such rhetoric was used in 2004 in the aftermath of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, when the Kremlin claimed it was Western-sponsored regime change (Wilson, 2005a: 183). However, the coup rhetoric of 2014 was stronger than in 2004.

During the Euromaidan, Bankova used a group of thugs, called the Titushki, to attack protesters, thereby allowing the regime to deny any responsibility (Nemyrych, 2013). Bankova paid each Titushka between €25 and €50 to fight protesters (Goncharenko, 2014). The Titushki were "tracksuited thugs, a mixture of football hooligans, fight-club members and petty criminals" and operated with the Berkut security forces (Reid, 2015: 265).

However, the Titushki were unorganised, ill-disciplined and violent, with the Titushki being "responsible for almost a dozen documented deaths, though many of their victims were among the 'disappeared'" (Wilson, 2014c: 79). While the Titushki were notoriously violent when faced by large groups of protesters they often fled. One example

¹⁸² This was the agreement between Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky and Muscovy, which gave Russian support to Khmelnytsky war with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Eventually, Muscovy moved against the Hetmanate and Ukraine became part of the Empire.

was when forty Titushki were found hiding in a supermarket, after losing a fight with football hooligans from Dynamo Kyiv and Dnipro (Kyiv Post, 2014b; Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2014h).

This failure in Ukraine precipitated Russia's new security forces the Rosgvardiya and showed that the Kremlin was learning from the Euromaidan (Zygar, 2016: 181). Rosgvardiya is a separate entity to existing security services, giving the Kremlin a well-equipped armed force without relying on the army and "constitutional rules" (The Moscow Times, 2016a; E'kspert, 2016: 7). It has expanded to include the Ortyad Mobilny Osobogo Naznacheniya (OMON)¹⁸³, the Special Rapid Response Unit and Interior Ministry troops with Rosgvardiya reaching 340,000 personnel (The Moscow Times, 2016b; Falaleev, 2016: 7; Sozaev-Guriev, 2016: 2). Ostensibly, Rosgvardiya was created to fight terrorism, although the Kremlin is increasingly wary of the perceived enemy within (Zheleznova and Sinitsyn, 2016), and Rosgvardiya was used against protesters, most recently during protests in 2019 (Odissonova et al. 2019). The idea of creating the Rosgvardiya was first considered in 2013, but a significant reason for precipitating the construction of the force was because of the Euromaidan (E'kspert, 2016: 7; Veselov and Bondar, 2016: 24). Having seen protests in 2011-2012 and the failure of the Berkut, the Kremlin learnt that a strong paramilitary force was necessary (Baidakova, 2016b: 7).

With the Russian economy flat-lining, the Kremlin believes protests are possible and it needs a loyal paramilitary organisation, such as the Rosgvardiya to counter future protests (Shklyaruk, 2016: 5; Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 2016: 2). A video of the Rosgvardiya training in Lyubertsy – just outside Moscow – highlights tactical development against

¹⁸³ The OMON are a paramilitary police force.

protesters (Standish, 2016; Otkrytaya Rossii, 2016). Under legislation Rosgvardiya personnel can shoot protesters (Interfax, 2016), and Rosgvardiya has wider powers than other Russian security services (Shvarev, 2016). The Rosgvardiya is only accountable to the president, giving it a stake in Putin's survival (Baidakova, 2016a). While the 2011-2012 protests were peaceful, the OMON was found to be unable for controlling protests, and the failure of the Ukrainian regime to coerce protesters emphasised the need for a large, heavily equipped, repressive force (Nicol'skiy et al. 2016; E'kspert, 2016: 7; Veselov and Bondar, 2016: 24; Baidakova, 2016b: 7).

The Belarusian regime took lessons from the Euromaidan, considering that Bankova had not constructed an identity acceptable to most Ukrainians. With Belarusian identity weak, the Belarusian regime considered it possible that a Donbas scenario could occur primarily in the eastern voblast of Mahilioŭskaja. Therefore, the Belarusian authorities began a soft-Belarusianisation policy to differentiate Belarus from Russia to internal and external audiences¹⁸⁴. The regime promoted Belarusian in schools (Astapenia, 2014b) and endorsed a new history – although not fully – shifting from emphasising the Great Patriotic War – traditionally the basis of pro-regime identity (Marples, 2014) – to the Polish-Lithuanian Grand Duchy with an emphasis placed on figures like Grand Duke Algirdas who beat Muscovy in the Fourteenth Century (Mojeiko, 2015). The centenary of the first independent Belarusian state in 1918 was celebrated in 2018, a date that until then was reserved for the non-regime opposition. The principality of Polotsk was given a makeover as an entity distinct from Kyivan Rus' and, therefore, a separate Slavic unit. The Grand Duchy of

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk; Interview with Dizannis Melyantsou – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies, 04/05/2017, Minsk; Interview with Ryhor Astapenia – Analyst at the Ostrogorski Centre, 03/05/2017, Minsk; Interview with Alexei Pikulik – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2017, Minsk.

Lithuania is presented by the Belarusian regimes as a quasi-Belarusian state (Wilson, 2018: 8).

Russianisation which served Lukashenka well in maintaining public support in the past has been reduced. Soviet sounding street names have been replaced with the names of historic Belarusians to decrease Soviet nostalgia and promote Belarusian identity (Astapenia, 2014b). Security personnel deemed to close to the Kremlin were replaced by personnel considered loyal to Belarus, although these people remain pro-Russian, having trained in Russia and kept close ties with Russian security personnel¹⁸⁵. During an address to the National Assembly Lukashenka (2014b) spoke about maintaining a strategic partnership with Russia while preserving Belarusian identity.

While Lukashenka (2015a) has commented about protecting the Belarusian language, history and culture, there has only been limited Belarusianisation (Kłysiński and Żochkowski, 2016: 39; Shraibman, 2016b). This gradual approach is in part because the Belarusian regime is aware that rapid change would risk alienating most Belarusians and the Kremlin¹⁸⁶. The Belarusianisation policy was an attempt to differentiate Belarus from Russia and promote Belarusian identity, but some key Belarusian historical figures like Kastus' Kalinowski and Tadevsh Kastysyushka¹⁸⁷ have been ignored due to their 'recent' Ninteenth

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Alexei Pikulik – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2017, Minsk; Interview with Dizannis Melyantsou – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies, 04/05/2017, Minsk; Interview with Ryhor Astapenia – Analyst at the Ostrogorski Centre, 03/05/2017, Minsk; Interview with Alyaksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies, 09/08/2016, Warsaw; Interview with Alyaksandr Aleshka – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies, 17/08/2016, Skype.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Alyaksei Lastouski – Analyst at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 08/12/2016, Minsk.

¹⁸⁷ Kastus' Kalinowski is better known in Polish as Konstanty Kalinowski and Tadevsh Kastysyushka is better known as Tadeusz Kościuszko.

Century battles against Russia, and both figures have been passed to the Poles as national Polish heroes (Karbalevich, 2019). However, the Belarusian authorities instigated a Belarusianisation policy to promote an identity that increases support among the wider populace¹⁸⁸.

The Belarusian regime has balanced its soft-Belarusianisation with alliance with the Kremlin, as pro-Russian groups perceive this Belarusianisation policy as a precursor to a Ukraine scenario and the infringement on the rights of Russians (Kachurka, 2014; Fadeyev, 2015; Instituta stran SNG, 2016). For instance, in December 2016, pro-Russian activists were arrested for claiming that Belarus was not a separate nation with a distinct language, history or culture (Shraibman, 2016b). Fearing that the Kremlin could use pro-Russian groups to stage protests that the Belarusian authorities would repress, the Belarusian security services arrested them in a pre-emptive strike¹⁸⁹. This shows learning by the Belarusian authorities from events in Ukraine, as the Kremlin justified the annexation of Crimea and Donbas intervention on the basis of protecting Russians from nationalist Ukrainian groups.

However, further Belarusinisation is unlikely as it will cause friction with Russia¹⁹⁰, and the Kremlin retains economic leverage over Belarus, thereby limiting distancing by the Belarusian authorities from the Kremlin. As Belarus's new hybrid-war military doctrine highlights it still works with Russia, seeing the West as the main threat (Sivitskiy, 2016; Hansbury, 2016). The Kremlin has tightened the screws in the energy and banking sectors, with Russian banks refusing to lower interest rates, which has affected Belarusian monetary

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Dzianis Melyantsou – Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Co-ordinator at the Minsk Track-II Initiative, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Alyaksei Lastouski – Analyst at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 08/12/2016, Minsk.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Alyaksei Lastouski – Analyst at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 8/12/2016, Minsk.

policy. The Kremlin has withdrawn funding for projects and constructed border controls, tying Belarus closer to Russia (Hansbury, 2017; Bohdan, 2017c; Preiherman, 2017b).

As well as pseudo-Belarusification, the regime took another lesson from the Euromaidan. Bankova had used provocateurs and claimed the protesters were fascists (Wilson, 2014c: 69). During March 25, 2017, protests the Belarusian regime contended that a clandestine military-sports-club known as the Belyi Legion¹⁹¹ – which had dissolved in 2000 – had re-emerged (Smok, 2017). The Belyi Legion reappeared in Belarusian state media after the social parasite protests (Smok, 2017). While it could be a case of domestic learning state media linked Belyi Legion to Pravy Sektor (BelGazeta, 2017a), a Ukrainian far-right groups which had received undue attention in the Russian media during the Euromaidan. This highlights that the Belarusian authorities learnt that a far-right group could justify repression and get Kremlin support. It is unlikely Belyi Legion was real; as the Belarusian authorities used it to justify a crackdown after the 2010 Minsk bombing. In 2017, it was used again as the enemy within (Pankovets, 2017). The regime resuscitated Belyi Legion for two reasons. Externally Belyi Legion as a similar organisation to Pravy Sektor was a message to the Kremlin to support Lukashenka (Lukashuk, 2017; Hansbury, 2017). Internally it was used to show Belarusians that future protests would be met with repression by the authorities¹⁹².

As with the Arab Spring, there is less evidence to how the Moldovan regime reacted to the Euromaidan. The Moldovan regime got first-hand experience of the Euromaidan by meeting the Yanukovich-era Ukrainian ambassador, Serhiy Pyrozhkov, to find out what Bankova was doing against protesters. The Moldovan security services devised

¹⁹¹ In English the White Legion.

¹⁹² Interview with Aleś Łahviniec – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Alyaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

practices to counteract a possible Maidan in Chişinău (Tristan, 2014). The Plahotniuc regime could not be seen to be cracking down on the opposition, as it needed EU funds. However, the Moldovan regime increased control over state structures and reduced “the protesters mobilization capacity to a manageable size¹⁹³.” Media outlets controlled by Plahotniuc did not give much coverage to the Euromaidan to reduce potential protests in Moldova (TV7.md, 2014). The Moldovan security services requested greater legislative powers and equipment to cope with a potential Euromaidan in Chişinău (Point.md, 2014).

The Euromaidan due to its proximity to other authoritarian regimes in the post-Soviet space induced learning. It is clear that the Kremlin and the Belarusian regime learnt and even the Moldovan regime drew lessons. The learning from the failure of Bankova in 2014 highlights a mixture of diffusion and linkage. The Euromaidan was well publicised and due to its geographical proximity in Kyiv, other neighbouring authoritarian regimes devised best practices against a domestic Euromaidan. Due to the linkage between Bankova and especially the Kremlin, but also the Belarusian and Moldovan regimes, there was significant lesson-drawing from events in Kyiv in the winter of 2013 and 2014.

4.2.4. Learning from Western Failure

For over a decade the EU has suffered a number of crises: from the Euro collapse to the refugee emergency and Brexit. This has allowed member states like Hungary and Poland to roll back democracy, which the EU has been unable to counter. Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, has consolidated power and hollowed out state institutions using constitutional amendments allowing him to centralise power (Verseck, 2013). Orbán forced

¹⁹³ Facebook correspondence with Mihai Popşoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 12/07/2017, Facebook.

many judges to retire and curbed the power of the Constitutional Court to monitor legislation and promoted allies to key positions, such as at the Central Bank. A regulatory media council set-up in 2016, monitors independent media outlets for supposed ‘biases’. If found – and it is the council which defines bias – then the accused outlet is fined (Zalan, 2016). Orbán’s “illiberal democracy” serves as a model for other states (Friedman, 2016). Not only has the EU failed to curb the democratic rollback in member states like Hungary, but it has allowed candidate states, like Serbia under President Aleksander Vučić, to backslide on reforms (Milić, 2017: 56).

Although the EU has not failed, as after all, it has not disappeared, its failure to curb democratic rollback, coupled with Brexit (Walker, 2016), and muted appetites for further expansion (Beesley, 2017), affects how ostensibly pro-European Moldovan and Ukrainian elites perceive EU viability. Moldovan elites have calculated that reform is now unnecessary¹⁹⁴. The EU does not have the energy to enforce reforms. By signing the association agreement with Moldova and Ukraine the EU cannot enforce reforms, as there is nothing the EU can offer Moldova and Ukraine as membership is a distant prospect¹⁹⁵.

4.3. Learning from External and Internal Failure: The example of Moldova

Moldova provides an example of learning from internal and external failure. Moldovan regimes learnt from events like the 2004 Orange Revolution, the Arab Spring and the Euromaidan. However, it is likely that lessons were taken from the 2015 and 2017

¹⁹⁴ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 20/04/2017.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Tadeusz Iwański – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw; Interview with Kamil Catus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

Romanian protests. A domestic example of failure was the 2009 Twitter Revolution.

Plahotniuc was likely susceptible to learning from domestic examples¹⁹⁶.

In the build-up to the 2009 Twitter Revolution¹⁹⁷ the PCRM fought a dirty parliamentary electoral campaign, which by regional standards was not especially fraudulent, but there was harassment of television stations and businesses. Moldovans living in the West were unlikely to vote for the PCRM and they had difficulties registering to vote. During the elections, the PCRM padded their vote tally, instead of the 45% published by exit polls before the election, it got the necessary 50% to allow it to form a government without needing a coalition partner (Wilson, 2009).

The electoral fraud led to protests in Chişinău and eventually some demonstrators stormed parliament. Police managed to prevent a small group capturing the presidential office (Harding, 2009). While the PCRM won the election it was one seat short of the needed 61 seats to give it the right to choose the president without the support of other parties. However, against a concerted opposition, who refused to break ranks, the PCRM could not get approval for its presidential candidate (Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu, 2009: 138-139).

The Twitter Revolution united the opposition, stopping the PCRM getting 61 parliamentary seats and a super-constitutional majority¹⁹⁸. Indirectly the Twitter revolution led to a change of government. The haemorrhaging of PCRM support – epitomised by

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Ion Manole – Director at Promo-LEX, 12/07/2017, Skype; Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 11/07/2017.

¹⁹⁷ Named after the social media platform used to organise protests (Rao, 2009).

¹⁹⁸ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 09/11/2016; Interview with Mihai Popşoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

Plahotniuc stopping his financial support for the PCRM¹⁹⁹ – led to a four-way coalition between the PDM, Party of Liberal Democrats of Moldova (PLDM), Liberal Party and the Our Moldova Alliance in the AEI coalition. While the Twitter Revolution was itself not a revolution, as it did not result directly in a change of government, it remains important not only for Plahotniuc but also for many current pro-European elites who in 2007 were PCRM members²⁰⁰. The recount demanded by protesters and a united opposition that refused to be split, eventually led to a new parliamentary election in July 2009 and the loss of control by the PCRM to the AEI coalition. Therefore, the PCRM'S failure in 2009 would resonate for Plahotniuc as an example of what not to do.

The 2015 Romanian protests lasted six days ending in the resignation of Prime Minister Victor Ponta's government. The death of 64 people caused by a fire in a central Bucharest nightclub was the catalyst for anti-corruption protests (Euronews, 2015). Protest numbers grew when it was discovered that the nightclub opened without a fire permit, as protests turned into wider anti-corruption demonstrations (Ilie, 2017). About 25,000 protesters took to the streets in central Bucharest on November 4, 2015, demanding the resignations of Ponta and Interior Minister Gabriel Oprea, which eventually to the resignation of Ponta (Ciobanu, 2015; Marinas and Ilie, 2015).

New anti-corruption protests occurred in Romania in 2017. After Sorin Grigoreanu's election as prime minister on January 4, 2017, the coalition of the Social-Democrat Party (PSD) and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats passed a secret change to the penal code (de Costin, 2017), to officially reduce overcrowding in prisons but in actuality, to release

¹⁹⁹ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 11/07/2017.

²⁰⁰ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 20/04/2017.

politicians convicted of corruption. The proposal had one significant beneficiary, the leader of PSD, Liviu Dragnea, who was given a suspended two-year sentence for corruption in 2012 (Paun, 2017). While the government tried to continue with the proposal, concerted protests forced it to back down (French, 2017; Gillett, 2017a; 2017b; Gillett and Henley, 2017; Fishwick, 2017; Ciobanu, 2017; Connett, 2017). Due to the large Moldovan diaspora in Romania the Moldovan regime has to learn from events in Romania, especially when protests are about corruption. The 2015 and 2017 Romanian protests allowed the Moldovan regime to learn from the failure of the Romanian government²⁰¹.

The Moldovan regime had already experienced protests for a year between 2015 and 2016 due to the loss of a billion dollars by three banks. However, in 2017, the Moldovan regime initiated changes to the electoral system allowing the PDM to gain greater control²⁰², resulting in protests in Chişinău (Smeshnaya, 2017). The learning that occurred from the 2009, 2015-2017 protests and the Romanian protests allowed the Moldovan authorities to instigate those lessons (Journal.md, 2016b) from stopping protesters reaching Chişinău by setting-up police cordons every 30 kilometres and discontinuing local buses and trains travelling to Chişinău. By the standards of Moldovan politics, an excessive police presence was deployed²⁰³. Lessons from 2009 were particularly relevant, as many in the regime had been a part of the PCRM before 2009²⁰⁴. For instance, former-Interior Minister Jizdan and

²⁰¹ Interview with Dumitru Alaiba – Programme Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms Moldova (CPR) and currently Parliamentarian in the ACUM coalition, 14/07/2017, Skype.

²⁰² The proposed similarities to Britain’s electoral system were pointed out to me by one of my interviewees when I was in Chişinău; Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 20/04/2017.

²⁰³ Interview with Dumitru Alaiba – Programme Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms Moldova (CPR) and currently Parliamentarian in the ACUM coalition, 14/07/2017, Skype; Interview with Ernest Vardanean – Lecturer at Moldova State University (MSU), 14/07/2017, Skype.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Dumitru Alaiba – Programme Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms Moldova (CPR) and currently Parliamentarian in the ACUM coalition, 14/07/2017, Skype; Interview with Ernest Vardanean –

former-Director of the General Police Inspectorate Alexandru Pânzari were both involved in the 2009 repression (Jurnal.md, 2016f).

4.4. Learning from Internal Failures in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine

While internal learning in authoritarian learning is understudied an analysis of learning in the four case studies will increase understanding that both failure and success are crucial to authoritarian learning. Internal learning is likely very important in Moldova and Ukraine. Elites change political allegiance, like Plahotniuc who moved between political parties and retained a close affinity with President Dodon. How close is speculative, but there were rumours that Dodon and Plahotniuc worked together in a cartel, although as later events showed it was a cartel of convenience (Cațus, 2018b). Plahotniuc learnt from his time in the PCRM and the 1990s as a businessman. Moldovan elites often take lessons from the past²⁰⁵. Poroshenko also was in earlier regimes at the centre of power under Kuchma, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko (Hale, 2015: 333), giving him plenty of learning opportunities.

These are clear instances of authoritarian learning from internal examples, but they do not analyse learning from internal failure. I will analyse Belarusian and Russian learning from the Soviet collapse and Lukashenka and Putin's learning from Vyacheslau Kebich and Yeltsin's failure. I then address image failure. This is relevant to the Belarusian and Russian regimes, where leader image is important. Originally, Putin's image was that of a bureaucrat, but the Kursk disaster put pay to this image, and it is an example of learning from failure. A final set of examples are the learning from the failure of the 2004 Orange

Lecturer at Moldova State University (MSU), 14/07/2017, Skype; Interview with Mihai Popșoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

²⁰⁵ Interview with a researcher on Moldova who requested anonymity, 20/04/2017; Interview with Kamil Cațus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017 Warsaw.

Revolution for the Yanukovich regime and the learning that occurred after the Euromaidan by the Poroshenko regime.

4.4.1. Learning from History

4.4.1.1. Lessons from the Soviet Period

Malinova (2011: 108) analysed speeches by Putin to the Federal Assembly, finding that the majority of historical references were devoted to the Soviet period and the 1990s. One lesson from the Soviet Union for Putin (2016b) was that Lenin's federalisation policy created "a time bomb". While there were other reasons for centralisation under Putin after 2000, like attempts by oligarchs and regional elites to create regional kingdoms and the 2004 Beslan disaster (Gel'man, 2015a: 23-24), Soviet federal failure was one reason for Putin's centralisation.

Economics is another lesson of Soviet failure. Under Putin the economy is largely controlled by allies and the Kremlin preserves their interests, and the extent of the private sector remains vague (Dawisha, 2014; Makeev, 2017; Murtazaev, 2012)²⁰⁶. While the economy is controlled it is less regulated than the Soviet planned economy. Putin (2012b) stated that Lenin introduced a market economy with the New Economic Policy in the 1920s and that a market economy brings prosperity. During his millennium message, Putin (1999) was unequivocal that the Soviet economy had "doomed" Russia. The Kremlin is particularly worried about the disenchantment among the populace that led to the demise of the Soviet Union. Elites in the Russian regime are fearful of "systemic collapse" and a sluggish economy which would cause wide public dissatisfaction. With many of Putin's close allies having

²⁰⁶ Interview with Maxim Trudolyubov – Editor-at-large for Vedomosti and Senior Fellow at the Kennan Institute, 05/04/2017, Skype.

witnessed the Soviet collapse the Kremlin retains a large repressive capacity (Galeotti, 2019b).

In Belarus, Lukashenka (2016b) stated that the Soviet collapse was due to it producing insufficient good quality consumer products. Therefore, the Belarusian regime has established an updated Soviet economy (Lukashenka, 2016a), with the government taking lessons from the Soviet collapse, and attempting to improve the Soviet economy. Allegedly upon coming to power in 1994, Lukashenka asked his advisors if anyone knew how to build a capitalist system, and when no one answered in the affirmative he asked if they knew about the Soviet economy. This question was answered positively by his advisors and Lukashenka allegedly said “okay we shall go with what we know then.” While an analogy it does explain the strong late Soviet elements existing in the Belarusian economy, with the state maintaining control over most industries²⁰⁷. Lukashenka remains Sovietised, wanting to construct a modernised Soviet state (Ioffe, G, 2014: 125; Karbalevich, 2010: 50)²⁰⁸, and like Putin, Lukashenka (2016e) stated that the Soviet collapse was a cataclysm.

As mentioned in chapter two, habitus is how people shape their present through their past (Bourdieu, 1972; 2000). Most elites in the case studies grew up in the Soviet Union. Putin is a good example of how habitus affects his present. Growing up on the streets of Leningrad – from a relatively poor household – it is likely Putin perceived the Soviet system as failing, at the very least economically. Hill and Gaddy (2015: 76-105) argue

²⁰⁷ Interview with Alyksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies, 09/08/2016, Warsaw.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Alyksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies, 09/08/2016, Warsaw; Interview with Alyaksei Lastouski – Analyst at the Political Sphere Institute, 8/12/2016, Minsk; Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at TUT.by, Minsk, 11/12/2016; Interview with Alexei Pikulik – Academic Director at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2016, Minsk.

that Putin was a “survivalist.” While we do not know what a youthful Putin thought, he must have been aware that the Soviet system was not performing effectively due to his family’s poverty in a worker’s paradise.

Unlike Lukashenka whose political career took off in the Gorbachev period (Ioffe, G, 2014: 123-124) Putin having been a KGB officer in Dresden in the late 1980s only saw Gorbachev’s reforms up close in the last Soviet days when he returned to Leningrad in 1990 (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 107-108). While Putin largely missed Glasnost and Perestroika, East Germany was a good learning environment. The East German regime having been abandoned by the Soviet Union was left with a crumbling economy and ideology (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 114). This was similar to the Soviet Union – but witnessing it in Dresden – Putin concluded that ideology was insufficient for regime survival (Gevorkyan et al. 2000: 71-72). A final lesson was that Glasnost allowed ordinary citizens to speak out (Aron, 2012: 43); which for a KGB officer was anathema, as allowing the public to speak freely had led to questions about the legality of the Soviet Union and decreased support for the Union.

4.4.1.2. Lessons from the 1990s

The so-called wild 1990s resonated for Putin as a failure. Putin (2015b) blamed Yeltsin for the Soviet collapse. This fits with his often miss referenced address to the Federal Assembly that Soviet failure was a geopolitical disaster. Rather it was the 1990s which brought instability, oligarchs, mass poverty all against a “dramatic economic downturn, unstable finances, and the paralysis of the social sphere” (Putin, 2005). During the millennium message, Putin (1999) argued that after the 1990s, Russia needed patriotism and state strengthening, and the wild capitalism that existed under Yeltsin would end. Other lessons of the ‘failure’ of the 1990s were that the parade of sovereignties and personal fiefs

in regions like Karelia and Tatarstan (Gel'man, 2010: 9-10; Prokhanov, 2013) could not reoccur. In 1993 and again in 1999, Yeltsin could have been impeached (Sakwa, 2008b: 123, 136). Such a lesson of failure was taken by Putin. After becoming president in 2000, he set about making certain impeachment could never reoccur. It is one reason why by the end of his first term in 2004, he coerced the media, other political parties and the oligarchs²⁰⁹. State weakness under Yeltsin was epitomised by defeat in the First Chechen War (1994-1996). It is one reason why during the Second Chechen War (1999-2009), Putin showed a strongman persona (Moscatelli, 2011). While Yeltsin did not lose power, the 1990s were considered a failure by Putin's Kremlin.

Both the Belarusian and Russian regimes speak of the instability of the 1990s, equating it with corruption and violence. Lukashenka drew lessons from the failure of Prime Minister Vyacheslau Kebich to win the 1994 presidential election. Lukashenka (2002) during his annual address to parliament, referred to the Kebich period (1991-1994) as a "nightmare". As incumbent Kebich had the resources to win the 1994 presidential elections, but having never contested a truly competitive election he was unprepared (Way, 2012: 629-631). Kebich controlled the media and used electoral manipulation to assure himself of victory (Way, 2012: 636). Both were practices Kebich learnt in the late 1980s (Wilson, 2011a: 148). However, Kebich misunderstood the art of democratic competition, failing to ensure he had the full support of regional elites. Kebich also failed to take Lukashenka seriously as a candidate (Way, 2012: 642). Kebich's failure to get elected in 1994 was a lesson for Lukashenka²¹⁰.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Maria Lipman – Editor-in-chief of the Counterpoint Journal, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

²¹⁰ Interview with Alexei Pikulik – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2017, Minsk.

Another lesson Lukashenka took from the Kebich period was that corruption should be hidden. According to Lukashenka (2014c), the Kebich government had taken corruption to extremes. Highlighting learning, Lukashenka (EJ.BY, 2018) has stated consistently that elites should not take too much, but the system has constructed hidden corrupt activities, although Belarus is less corrupt than other post-Soviet states (Smok, 2015). Another lesson was that while Kebich had Russian support, he and Stanislav Shushkevich – former head of the Supreme Soviet – constructed a Belarusian identity allied to the West, which upset most Belarusians. Lukashenka (2003) stated that he understood the people better and knew what they wanted, a return to stability and continuance of the Soviet Union or close relations with Russia.

4.4.2. Learning from Image Failure

Another area of authoritarian failure is the failure of leader image. For personalised regimes like Belarus and Russia, it is important that the leader's image is maintained constantly. A collapse of image will lead to questions about legitimacy. One example of image failure is during the early days of Putin's first presidency. Although Putin flew a helicopter at the beginning of the Second Chechen War in 1999, the Kursk disaster finally confirmed that a macho persona was required, rather than a bureaucratic image. The failure of the bureaucratic image during the Kursk disaster has seen a more macho Putin figure since and is a case of Kremlin learning.

Putin became acting president in 1999 as a relative unknown, but his name recall to the majority of Russians increased after a speech made on television promising to kill Chechen terrorists by "wasting them in the outhouse"²¹¹. Such tough-guy rhetoric was

²¹¹ A link to the comment can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPFDp4KdJ0M> (in Russian).

accepted by most Russians. However, as president after 2000 one event threatened the tough-guy image, the sinking of the K-141 Kursk submarine. This modern submarine – in service since 1995 – was the pride of the Russia navy. On August 12, 2000, it sank in the Barents Sea due to a hydrogen peroxide explosion (Sakwa, 2008a: 88).

Initially, the authorities blamed a collision with another naval vessel of an unidentified state, while also internally blaming “the guilty” (Rossiskaya Gazeta and INTAR-TASS, 2000: 1) without defining who the culpable were. The Navy claimed the Kursk’s sinking was the machinations of a foreign power (Zvrev, 2000: 2). The sinking of the submarine was compounded by the fact that the crew were poorly trained and the submarine did not have an escape hatch, which would have allowed the seamen to evacuate. The Navy refused to acknowledge there was an incident for nine hours. Russian ships in the vicinity failed to come to the rescue, and when finally a rescue team was sent the rescue was bungled as the rescue team were poorly trained (Gessen, 2014: 164-166).

Putin initially refused to go to Viyayevo, the Kursk’s home base, stating his presence would only get in the way of specialists (Rossiskaya Gazeta and ITAR-TASS, 2000: 1). Ten days after the sinking he visited Viyayevo but was accosted by an angry relatives of the sailors (Gessen, 2014: 168-170). This was compounded by a television interview with Larry King, where Putin was asked what happened to the submarine, to which Putin responded “it sank” (CNN, 2000). This and the verbal abuse Putin suffered in Viyayevo was publicised in the Russian media (Shevtsova, 2005: 117; Burrett, 2011: 40), ending an unofficial truce where Russian media did not criticise Putin.

Although there were other reasons for the change of Putin’s image, the Kursk disaster and Putin’s failure to deal effectively with the situation, contributed to the Kremlin

changing Putin's image to one of mystique, celebrity and a macho-man persona (Arutunyan, 2014; Goscilo, 2011; 2013). Since Kursk, Putin has quickly been on the scene of all crises. For instance, with the Dubrovka Theatre siege, when Chechen terrorists took an audience hostage on October 23, 2002, Putin cancelled a meeting with American President George W Bush (BBC, 2002), emphasising he had learnt he needed to be on the scene. During the 2004 Beslan school disaster when Chechen terrorists took control of a school, Putin was very visible (Toal, 2017: 90). Such a learning curve was seen after the explosion at the Sayano-Sushkenia hydroelectric plant in 2009. Putin not only visited the plant but held a visual conference call and spoke with relatives (Gerasimenko, 2009).

Another event was the public dressing down of oligarch, Oleg Deripaska, to re-open his factory in Leningrad Oblast and pay employees. It was broadcast on television showing Putin arriving by helicopter and forcing an oligarch to re-open a factory and pay his workers. It was the personification of the Tsar looking after his people. An agreement had already been reached in Moscow the day before, but the televised dressing down of Deripaska played well to the crowd (Badanin et al. 2009). This was the continuation of the dramaturgiya which has personified Putin's rule from "Putin versus the Chechens" to "Putin versus the oligarchs" (Wilson, 2012). The Kursk disaster was a lesson of internal failure for the Kremlin.

Although, the presidential direct line (pryamaya liniya)²¹² is a lesson from the failure of the Soviet Union to speak with its citizens, the Kursk disaster was a factor as Putin had appeared distant during the Kursk sinking. The pryamaya liniya as Putin (2001b) stated

²¹² The pryamaya liniya is a heavily circumscribed event, where for about four hours Putin answers the questions of the public. These questions are often vetted beforehand; allowing Putin to practice answers beforehand (Davies, K, 2017).

at the first event, provided the Kremlin with knowledge about the problems faced by Russians, and the first pryamaya liniya occurred soon after the Kursk disaster pointing to learning. Although, less popular than it once was (Korchenkova, 2015: 2; Korchenkova and Samokhina, 2013: 2), the pryamaya liniya is still watched by about 60% of Russians (Korchenkova and Miller, 2017: 3) and is a controlled environment allowing the Kremlin to show that Putin deals with citizens' problems, while being seen by millions of viewers (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 76). Pryamaya liniya shows that Putin is close to the majority of Russians, and due to the failure of Putin to appear caring during the Kursk disaster, it is a contributory factor to the direct line in 2001.

4.4.3. Bankova Learning from the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan

4.4.3.1. Yanukovych and Orange Lessons for after 2010

Two final examples of internal learning are the lessons various Ukrainian regimes took from protests in Kyiv in 2004 and 2013-2014. The Yanukovych regime took lessons from the Orange Revolution and the Poroshenko government drew lessons from the Euromaidan. I (2017a: 163) have argued that Yanukovych was “fighting the last war” devising best practices to reduce the chance of a new Orange Revolution forcing him from power after 2010. Yanukovych learnt a number of lessons from the failure to get elected as president in 2004. Firstly, his image received a makeover (Hall, 2017a: 164). Having been the only one in 2004 advocating the use of violence against protesters (Wilson, 2005a: 136), in the run-up to the 2010 presidential elections Yanukovych spoke about how the Orange Revolution was the democratic will of Ukrainians (Yekelchuk, 2007: 224), and he employed American public relations specialists to change his error-prone image (Wilson, 2015: 342),

while playing on the frustrations of Ukrainians after the failures of the Orange Revolution (Haran and Prokopchuk, 2010; Motyl, 2010: 125).

Secondly, Yanukovych turned the Party of Regions into a dominant party (Hall, 2017a: 164). Party of Regions co-opted politicians from smaller parties and was willing to work with an array of other political parties, while remaining highly centralised internally (Kudelia, 2014: 20; Way, 2015a: 49; Haran, 2013b: 76), which made it a strong force and improved its ability to win elections. Thirdly, Yanukovych used the financial resources of supporters like oligarch Rinat Akhmetov to offer monetary incentives for opposition politicians to join Party of Regions (Way, 2015a: 64-65; Kudelia, 2012: 424). Fourthly, the Yanukovych regime used pro-regime groups to act as pro-regime protesters when needed, and to harass opposition groups (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2010j).

Fifthly, Yanukovych took over state structures when he became president in 2010, with the Supreme and Constitutional Court becoming regime friendly courts (Pastukhova, 2011b). Control of the Constitutional Court allowed Yanukovych to revert to the 1996 constitution, thereby giving him freedom from parliament and control over ministers, the SBU and the Prosecutor General's Office (Kudelia, 2013: 175; 2014: 21). As well as control over state structures and return to the 1996 constitution, Yanukovych formed a coalition with the Communist Party and the Lytvyn Bloc, which increased control over parliament (Kudelia, 2014: 21; Haran, 2011: 97).

Sixthly, the electoral playing field was heavily skewed in favour of the regime. With a parliamentary majority, Yanukovych removed Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko (Riabchuk, 2012: 11). Once Yanukovych had got Mykola Azarov approved as prime minister, the Communists and the Lytvyn Bloc were excluded from many government decisions (Fisun,

2011). Svoboda was used by Bankova to tarnish all opposition parties as far-right, which alienated enough voters from the opposition (Kramer, O, 2013). Political technology was used to create small political parties to take votes off of the opposition at elections, and 2004 legislation that allowed for coalitions, was changed to deny coalition formation, which splintered the opposition vote (Oleksiyenko, 2013; Kramer, O, 2012; McPhedran, 2012; Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2012b; Vasylyev, 2012). A final tactic was to buy politicians who had just got elected to opposition parties, to join Party of Regions. As there was no requirement that a new election be held, Party of Regions gained new deputies to the detriment of the opposition (Wilson, 2012).

Seventhly, NGOs were required to detail the activities of employees, and new legislation severely restricted NGO operations in the fields of democracy and human rights (Pastukhova, 2011a). The SBU gained legislative powers to monitor NGO actions for subversive activities (Riabchuk, 2012). Eighthly, the number of security service personnel was increased, and legislation was passed giving the Berkut greater discretionary powers to disperse protesters (Jacobs, 2014; Tregubov, 2011). The Titushki were created to act as a pro-regime rent-a-mob (Rudenko, O, 2014), and anti-fascist youth groups were established to act against protesters (Mikhel'son and Velichko, 2013). Ninthly, Yanukovich created a 'family' to control patronage, thereby – at least it was hoped – reducing regime fracturing that had contributed to the 2004 failure (Kudelia, 2014: 20). The power of the 'family' gave Bankova control over state institutions like the Energy Ministry and the Inland Revenue (Leshchenko, 2013).

While Yanukovich learnt from the failure of 2004, the lessons he took and his implementation of those lessons contributed to the Euromaidan. The growing

authoritarianism and control of state structures created a zero-sum-game between the regime and the opposition (Haran, 2013a). This zero-sum-game resulted in growing opposition unity in the build-up to the 2015 presidential elections and was just in time for the Euromaidan. The emergence of the Yanukovich 'family', which stripped \$8 billion annually from the Ukrainian economy (Wilson, 2014b), alienated established groups who perceived that their resource access was being threatened, resulting in their support for the Euromaidan (Neef, 2014). Although Yanukovich learnt from the 2004 failure, those lessons directly contributed to the Euromaidan, highlighting that learning is not always successful.

4.4.3.2. Poroshenko's Lessons after the Euromaidan

Poroshenko learnt from Yanukovich's mistakes during the Euromaidan. While Yanukovich attempted to create what Putin did in Russia²¹³, Poroshenko took a quieter approach to power consolidation with control of the Prosecutor General's Office going under the radar. Unlike Yanukovich, whose jailing of Tymoshenko shocked the West, the temporary jailing of confidantes of Kolomois'ky and politician Oleh Lyashko helped Poroshenko's inaudible consolidation of power (Sukhov et al. 2016). Like Yanukovich, Poroshenko placed allies in control of key institutions (BusinessViews, 2017), although Poroshenko was subtler in the number of allies in control of state institutions²¹⁴.

With Russia's rapid annexation of Crimea and support for separatist groups in the DPR and LPR, such moves could be put down to the current war. However, there was concern as Poroshenko instigated practices which raised questions to whether Bankova used the war as an excuse to consolidate power. One example was the ban on civil servants

²¹³ Interview with Volodymyr Yermelenko – Director of Internews Ukraine, 26/04/2017, Kyiv.

²¹⁴ Interview with a specialist on Ukraine who requested anonymity, 24/04/2017.

criticising the government, with the legislation used to stop Saakashvili from continuing to criticise then Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. Therefore, Poroshenko used legislation to limit criticism of the authorities (Melkozerova, 2017). This aversion to criticism was highlighted by one interviewee²¹⁵ who argued that Poroshenko did not accept criticism and only used the formal *vi* (you) form with ministers.

Poroshenko instigated media restrictions as social media played a significant role in organising protesters and sharing information during the Euromaidan. Under Poroshenko, journalists were attacked. On the day that journalist Pavel Sheremet was killed in July 2016 (Miller, Christ, 2016) another journalist, Maria Rydvan, was stabbed (Interfax-Ukraine, 2016) and five days after Sheremet's death another journalist was beaten (Liga.net, 2016b).

Sheremet's death remains unsolved. If his death is due to Russian operatives, far-right Ukrainian elements or even Belarusian agents then it implies Ukraine is a weak state. CCTV footage showed two people loitering by his car at about 2:40 am. One spent about 20 seconds kneeling by the car (Obozrevatel', 2016). The footage should have allowed the security services to find the perpetrators. The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and their Ukrainian partner Slidstvo found that the police investigation was flawed. Their own investigation pointed to SBU collusion (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2017a). While it is uncertain that the SBU wanted Sheremet dead, he was investigating groups close to the Poroshenko regime and the failure to find his killers (Ukrayins'ka Pravda, 2018a) leads to questions of complicity and incompetence.

After the Euromaidan, Ukrainian television channels have had "content supervisors". These are the channel's owners dictating what content their channels show

²¹⁵ The interviewee requested anonymity for this part of the interview.

(Detektor, 2016), which fits the argument put forward by one interviewee²¹⁶ that the media had a gentleman's agreement with the presidential administration not to criticise Poroshenko. The new ministry of information – like the Kremlin – used trolls to counter their Russian equivalents, while promoting Poroshenko (Sokolinskaya, 2016). As in Russia, these trolls attacked journalists online for publishing information detrimental to Poroshenko. Head of the Ministry of Information Policy, Yuriy Stets', at the time stated that he would create a Ukrainian Internet army, to counter Russian disinformation while promoting Poroshenko (Sukhov, 2016f). The trolls could be a lesson from Russia but they could also be a lesson from Yanukovich's failure. Another lesson from Yanukovich's failure was his media regulation. It failed as Bankova could not control the whole narrative. Poroshenko took a softer approach, by not trying to regulate the media. Rather Poroshenko reached agreements with other oligarchs to control the narrative²¹⁷.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter provided answers to propositions four and five. It is clear that authoritarian regimes learn from failure. As seen the reactions to the Orange Revolution, the Arab Spring, and the Euromaidan by the four case studies emphasise that learning occurred, although the Belarusian and Russian regimes appeared more adept at developing best practices. This fits the notion that as established authoritarian regimes the Belarusian and Russian governments have fuller learning capabilities than their Moldovan and Ukrainian counterparts. However, there was evidence that the Moldovan and Ukrainian

²¹⁶ Interview with Maxim Eristavi – Non-Resident Fellow at the Atlantic Council and co-founder of Hromadske International, 16/11/2016, Kyiv.

²¹⁷ Oksana Grytsenko – Journalist at the Kyiv Post, 18/11/2016, Kyiv.

authorities learnt from these events. Therefore, there is evidence that authoritarian regimes learn from examples of external failure.

However, the chapter also showed that the four case studies learnt from internal examples of authoritarian failure. The Kremlin and the Belarusian regime learnt from Soviet failure and the failures of the 1990s. The Moldovan regime due to elites moving from one government to another learnt from the 2009 revolution and the ensuing loss of power for the PCRM. Similarly, Ukrainian regimes took lessons from the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan, although Yanukovich's lessons from 2004 contributed to Bankova's failure at the Euromaidan, and Poroshenko's subtle consolidation of power after the Euromaidan did not save him from electoral defeat in 2019.

There is evidence that authoritarian regimes are as likely to learn from failure as success. However, before confirming proposition four, analysis of learning from success will need to be addressed to ascertain whether this is the case. Similarly, there are pointers to the notion that authoritarian regimes are just as likely to learn from internal examples as external examples. However, again further analysis is needed to confirm this.

Chapter Five:

Learning from External and Internal Success

“It’s hard for an authoritarian to admit they learnt from success. Learning from failure gives you credit.”

Quote from Ekim Arbatli²¹⁸

5.1. Introduction

Chapter four began answering proposition four and five, by analysing learning from failure. I address the area of success. Unlike failure, which is relatively easy track, like media coverage of the Euromaidan, or the Kremlin gaining inside knowledge of the failure of Bankova at the Euromaidan after many former Berkut officers joined the Russian interior ministry in 2014 (Gazeta.ru, 2014). However, success tends to go under the radar. Few authoritarian leaders would admit they learnt from the success of others, it is much better to be the first to learn from the failure of others and instigate success. While, former Uzbek President, Karimov, is a success to Putin because he learnt first from the failure of earlier authoritarian regimes during the Colour Revolutions (Zygar, 2016: 107), Putin has not publically admitted his admiration for Karimov’s success.

Therefore to truly assess that authoritarian regimes learn, equally from success and failure and likewise, from external and internal examples, I address examples of learning in the four case studies. As in chapter four, I take a thematic approach in the examples chosen. I split chapter five into two sections. The first section analyses examples of learning from

²¹⁸ Interview with Ekim Arbatli – Assistant Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 05/04/2017, Moscow.

external instances. By contrast, the second segment addresses learning from examples of internal success. The first external example analyses how the growth of illiberal democracy in the EU, Turkey and America are models for Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes to backslide on reforms. The second external example is whether China and Singapore are models for the four case studies. The third external example addresses lessons that the Kremlin took from perceived Western attempts at regime change in Russia and the wider post-Soviet space. Another example analyses is the copying of NGO legislation. A final external example is Kuchma's learning from Yeltsin's 1996 re-election in Russia. Internal instances of learning from success analyse historical figures that play a role in idea implementation in the present. This is particularly so for the Kremlin. The other examples of learning from internal success are the lessons Plahotniuc and Poroshenko took from their roles in past regimes.

5.2. Learning from External Success in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine

While not every example analyses all four case studies the examples highlight that success is important for authoritarian learning and confirm that learning from external examples is crucial for authoritarian learning. One example is Kremlin learning from regimes that stopped a revolution during the Arab Spring. For instance, Patrushev visited the Algerian Director of External Security, Rachid Lallali, to discuss "the prospects for the development of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa" (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2012b). By talking with the Algerian regime about Algerian successes the Kremlin learnt. Similarly, in 2016, Patrushev met Chief of the Moroccan Counterespionage and Police Service to get details about "the situation in the Middle East and North Africa" (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2016b).

5.2.1. Illiberal Democracies in Europe and the rise of Trump in America

I analyse learning from success examples for Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes. As mentioned in chapter one, Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities are not established authoritarian regimes like Belarus and Russia. Therefore, Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes likely look to existing successful models to devise power consolidation methods. While there is a strong relationship between Putin, Erdoğan and Orbán, it is Erdoğan and Orbán who have learnt from Putin²¹⁹, and to understand authoritarian learning in the four case studies I concentrate on Moldova and Ukraine who are likely to draw lessons from Erdoğan and Orbán. However, when assessing Trump and his effect on democratic backsliding in Moldova and Ukraine, I mention that the Trump presidency changed Kremlin calculations.

The arrival of Trump as president in early 2017 resulted in questions about the American government's global promotion of democracy, with Trump advocating a less dynamic approach to the advancement of democracy (Carothers, 2017). Similarly, the American government is not now contesting the apparent promotion of alternative norms by authoritarian regimes in international organisations (Ambrosio, 2018; Stefes and Jose, 2017). With American inaction on promoting democracy, the Kremlin has received breathing space from what it perceives as Western attempts at regime change in Russia. The Trump presidency is unconcerned with lecturing the Kremlin on the latter's democratic failings (Antonova, 2019). The relationship between Trump and Putin has been classified as a "bromance" (Denning, 2018), but this misses the more nuanced approach that Trump as the personalists personalist resonates with the Kremlin and its politics of dramaturgiya

²¹⁹ Interview with Ekim Arbatli – Assistant Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 05/04/2017, Moscow; Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man – Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

(Kolesnikov, 2016b). While it appears that there is a genuine connection between Putin and Trump (Trenin, 2018c), and Trump's increasing ambivalence to maintaining alliances only weakens America (Trenin, 2018b; Kolesnikov, 2017a), the unpredictability of Trump's character and policies, coupled with years of mistrust between America and Russia make it difficult to improve relations (Baunov, 2017; Kolesnikov and Chizh, 2017; Lukyanov, 2017; Rumer et al. 2018; Trenin and Lipskiy, 2018; Rumer and Chinkova, 2018). Presidential Administration First Deputy Head Sergei Kirienko tried to copy the use of adverts that Trump's election campaign used, in order to target Russian voters (Atasuntsev, 2016; Vinokurov, 2017). This involved the Kremlin investing in artificial intelligence and copying the tactics of targeted adverts used by Cambridge Analytica (Gaaze, 2019). With American inaction in defending democracy the Kremlin has breathing space to consolidate at home.

During the Plahotniuc regime, American diplomats allegedly supported Plahotniuc and cultivated him as a "force to stand up against Russia" (Nemtsova, 2019b), although the American government was quick to support the new government after Plahotniuc fled in 2019 (Nemtsova, 2019a). Although the notion to nurture Plahotniuc was a policy before the Trump administration, the linkage this gave Plahotniuc with America meant there was limited American pressure for the Moldovan authorities to instigate reforms. Plahotniuc's (2016; 2017) op-eds in American media outlets attempted to emphasise to an American audience that without him, President Dodon would turn Moldova towards Russia. Therefore even before Trump, the American authorities supported Plahotniuc as a counter to Russia. While there is little evidence for such an assertion, it is likely Trump's refutation of the assertion by previous American governments of supporting democracy, coupled with American government support, contributed to the lack of reform under Plahotniuc. It is too

soon to ascertain if this backsliding continues under the ACUM-PSRM coalition government, but it is likely American support and Trump's vocalising of America-first policies limited reforms under Plahotniuc.

While the American congress and numerous state departments and the previous Obama administration supported Ukraine, over the annexation of Crimea by Russia and Russia's war in the Donbas, the Trump administration has often praised the Kremlin (Krushelnycky, 2019), and many of his original White House staff had close relations with Russian businessmen, raising questions about the impartiality of the Trump administration regarding the Ukraine conflict (Kovensky, 2017). While Trump has passed sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine conflict (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2019), in 2019 he called for Russia to be readmitted to the G-8 (Frolov, 2019). Trump's closeness to Russia is likely why both the Poroshenko and the Zelens'kyi regimes paid American public relations firms (Kovensky, 2018b; Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2019c) to promote Ukrainian government interests and keep the conflict in the mind of the Trump administration. Poroshenko even paid people close to Trump, for personal access to Trump (Kovensky, 2018b). As with the analysis of Trump's effect on Moldova, there is little evidence of the consequences of Trump on Ukraine. However, as with Moldova, it is likely that an American administration unconcerned with democracy promotion allows others to backslide on reforms.

As argued in chapter four, the EU has had difficulty with member states, like Hungary and Poland, due to their democratic backsliding. As the EU has been unable to stop this, Brussels has lost credibility with states that hope one day to join. As the rhetoric of Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes is – at least for the moment – pro-European, any example of backsliding in the EU and Europe as a whole is a model for Moldovan and Ukrainian

regimes to regress on reforms. Hungary and Poland are not authoritarian regimes as they have robust institutions, but there has been a concerted attack on these structures by Hungarian and Polish governments. Hungarian illiberal democracy is likely a viable model for the Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes. Another alternative is the increasing democratic backsliding in Turkey under Erdoğan. The support from the Romanian Social-Democratic Party (SDP) government to Plahotniuc is another contributory factor for Moldova's democratic backsliding.

With the EU's failure to stop the democratic rollback in member states, or counter the lack of reforms in states more likely to join the EU sooner than Ukraine or Moldova, Moldovan and Ukrainian elites see the success of others to dispense with EU leverage and begin to roll back reforms. The EU and America willingly accept the undemocratic actions of Poroshenko due to conflict with Russia (Trenin, 2018a). This has helped the counter-revolution underway in Ukraine (de Borja Lasheras, 2016; Eristavi, 2017) which reduces EU conditionality.

Whereas Ukrainian elites can point to conflict as the reason for backsliding, Moldovan relapses do not have the same justification. The 2013 push towards closer integration with the EU was a calculation to help the nominally pro-European government win the 2014 parliamentary election. Attempts at implementing the agreement were unlikely and there were no "guarantees, however, that Moldova will stay on the European track once the elections are over" (Racheru, 2014: 42), epitomised by the pro-Plahotniuc government formed in 2016, where politicians from other political parties were bribed to vote for the creation of the Filip government (Popșoi, 2016b; Alaiba, 2016a). The calculation to renege on democratic reforms is seen by the "theft of the century" banking scandal. This

resulted in the disappearance of a billion dollars from three banks and the arrest of Filat (Oleksy, 2018: 93). Failure to find and prosecute those responsible for the banking scandal eroded EU trust in the Plahotniuc regime (Alaiba, 2018a). The agreement between the PDM and the PSRM to create a mixed-member electoral system to retain control and split the spoils of state was criticised by the Venice Commission and the EU, but these complaints were ignored (Alaiba, 2017). However, it was the annulment of the 2018 Chişinău mayoral election when Plahotniuc's chosen candidate failed to win (Caţus, 2018a; Alaiba, 2018b), which emphasised the Moldovan regimes backsliding (Oleksy, 2018: 93).

The EU has criticised the electoral changes of moving to a mixed electoral system, and cut funding to Moldova (Ivashkina, 2018; Rankin, 2018), which contributed, at the time, to the consolidation of Plahotniuc and Dodon's ruling cartel (Oleksy, 2018: 95). Plahotniuc in 2018 emphasised that the PDM was a pro-Moldovan party rather than pro-European, which was a signal of changing relations (Ivashkina, 2018), thereby allowing the PDM and PSRM to consolidate ties (Oleksy, 2018: 94-95). The change in rhetoric and backsliding led to a distancing from the EU and the cartel's consolidation (Solov'ev, 2018), although this changed in 2019 when Plahotniuc fled the country. The delaying of parliamentary elections to 2019 allowed the PDM "to organise the electoral lists" as Plahotniuc controlled regional electoral commissions (Necsutu, 2018b). Plahotniuc solicited American support, portraying himself as a bulwark against Russia, thereby undermining EU calls for reform (Oleksy, 2016). Although Moldovan politicians have only been pro-European when money flowed from Brussels²²⁰, EU weakness in the past decade has contributed to Moldova's failure to reform.

²²⁰ Interview with Ernest Vardanean – Lecturer at Moldova State University (MSU), 14/07/2017, Skype.

However, is there any evidence of ties to Hungary, Poland and Turkey that point to direct learning, rather than a diffusion effect? There are pointers to Moldovan regimes looking at Hungary as a model with former Moldovan President Nicolae Timofti, stating that Hungary and Poland were models for Moldova because they reformed and achieved EU membership (Timofti, 2013). According to Timofti (2016), Hungary was perceived as an important supporter of Moldova and that “Hungary supports the unblocking and resumption of European funding for the Republic of Moldova.” Dodon (2017b) stated that Hungarian-Moldovan political dialogue was being intensified, and on a visit to Hungary in May 2017, Dodon (2017c) met with the Chairman of the National Assembly László Kövér and Orbán to discuss values. Although, there are only vague references to discussions and dialogue on practices – due to both Hungary and Moldova claiming to be democratic and having European values – there is linkage as well as diffusion. After all, the only European capital that Dodon visited in 2017 was Budapest, and Hungary appears supportive of Moldova getting EU funding (Popșoi, 2018c) pointing to support by Hungary and copying by Moldova.

By contrast, Ukrainian relations with Hungary deteriorated after the passing of an education act in Ukraine in 2017, which the Hungarian government interpreted as an attack on the Hungarian minority in Ukraine. The new legislation allowed for minority language teaching only in primary school for a few hours a week (Sadecki and Iwański, 2018). In reaction Orbán stated that Ukraine would be unable to join NATO or the EU, as Hungary would veto any Ukrainian membership application (Sidorenko, 2018). Orbán also stated that it was impossible for the Hungarian government to work with the Poroshenko regime (Evropeiskaya Pravda, 2018a). Therefore, relations between the Hungarian and Ukrainian

governments during the Poroshenko presidency deteriorated (Kravchenko, V, 2017a; 2018). However, relations between the Hungarian government and the Yanukovich regime were better (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2011b), with both governments improving political dialogue (Uryadoviy Kur'er, 2011). It is unlikely that there is significant linkage between Ukraine and Hungary, so diffusion is a key factor for any copying of the Hungarian model by Ukrainian governments, although even under Yanukovich "all eyes were on Russia"²²¹."

There is limited information about Moldovan governments drawing lessons from Poland's democratic backsliding. However, the Polish authorities' attempts to bankrupt the NGO Open Dialogue Foundation in 2017 (Wielowieyski, 2017), were copied by the Moldovan authorities, with the government attempting to close the Open Dialogue NGO (Makukhin, 2018b). There is evidence that representatives of the Moldovan and Polish governments met to discuss best practices on this issue (Sholar, 2018). The available evidence points to linkage and diffusion, helping pass on Polish practices to the Moldovan authorities.

Polish-Ukrainian relations are often stormy and post-Second World War events, like Volyn²²², tarnish relations (Melkozerova, 2017). However, since the coming to power of the Law and Justice (PiS) government, the Polish authorities have tried to establish strong ties with Ukraine²²³. Since the Russian invasion in the Donbas, the Polish government, especially after PiS came to power in 2015 vociferously supported Bankova (Melkozerova, 2017).

While there are only vague assertions of dialogue between the PiS government and Bankova, attacks on the Polish Constitution by PiS and the recent legislative restrictions on

²²¹ Interview with Mychailo Wynnyckyj – Associate Professor at the Kyiv-Myhola Academy, 18/11/2016, Kyiv.

²²² The Volyn massacres occurred in Volhynia, Eastern Galicia, Polesie and the Lublin region between 1943 and 1945. It resulted in the deaths of about 100,000 Poles at the hand of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.

²²³ Interview with Wojciech Konończuk – Head of the Department for Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 19/09/2016, Skype.

the Polish judiciary resonate in Bankova (Shevchenko, Al, 2017; Loginov, 2016). While there is linkage between the Polish and Ukrainian authorities, it is likely that diffusion is important. Perceiving that PiS is backsliding without EU repercussions induces similar backsliding by Bankova.

Since 2018 there has been competition between Plahotniuc and Dodon as to who can forge the greatest ties with Erdoğan. Turkey has long supported the Turkic speaking minority in Gagauzia, with the Turkish government building schools and hospitals there (NewsMaker, 2015c; Popșoi, 2018b). However, the Turkish government has started taking an interest in the rest of Moldova. For instance, the Turkish regime gave €10 million (\$11.5 million) to re-furbish the presidential palace which was partially burnt during the 2009 protests (Popșoi, 2018b). In March 2018, Dodon held an impromptu private meeting with Erdoğan at Istanbul airport, where they discussed cooperation and the regional situation (NewsMaker, 2018a). Although it is not possible to find further evidence about the meeting, Erdoğan at a later meeting with both Dodon and Plahotniuc in October 2018, discussed increased political dialogue and the ‘coups’ that had occurred in 2009 in Moldova and 2016 in Turkey (NewsMaker, 2018c; Pakhol’nitskiy, 2018).

In 2018, the Turkish government provided the Moldovan authorities with anti-riot trucks equipped with water canon to help the Moldovan government react promptly to future protests (Necsutu, 2018a). Another example of growing ties was the arrest of seven Turkish language teachers for alleged ties to Fethullah Gülen and the 2016 attempted coup in Turkey. There were also questions whether it was the Moldovan SIS security forces that arrested the seven (Ceaglei and Șevciuc, 2018; Gnatkova, 2018), or whether the Moldovan government allowed the Turkish security forces to enter Moldova and arrest the seven

teachers (Necsutu, 2018c). The Moldovan authorities hope that Turkey can be an alternative to reliance on EU funds (Solov'ev, 2018) and while the Moldovan authorities under Plahotniuc backtracked on democratic reforms earlier than Erdoğan began consolidation, the Turkish model of authoritarianism became popular for Plahotniuc who wished to copy Erdoğan's control over elections (Vasil'eva, 2018). The example of Moldovan copying of Turkey highlights linkage, but more importantly the diffusion of a Turkish model to Moldova.

Like Moldova, the Turkish government has long supported a Turkic-speaking minority in Ukraine, the Crimean Tatars (Clayton, 2014), and the Turkish authorities did not recognise the Russian annexation of Crimea (Ukrinform.net, 2018). There has been a combined security council of Turkish and Ukrainian representatives since the Yanukovych era, where both governments discussed sharing information on security (Kravchenko, V, 2016). During the Yanukovych period the consolidation of power under Erdoğan was analysed by Bankova for practices useful for Ukraine (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2013f), although the Kremlin's practices of power consolidation remained the example par excellence for Yanukovych²²⁴. How the Turkish authorities dealt with protests in 2013, was learnt by Bankova (Betliy, 2013), although as the Euromaidan highlighted perhaps lessons were not effectively learnt.

During a 2017 meeting, Poroshenko and Erdoğan spoke for three hours, rather than the allotted 45 minutes (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2017a), although it is unclear what was discussed. In 2016, Ukraine started sending police officers to Ankara for training, with the Ukrainian police getting new equipment – although it is unclear what equipment – to go with the increased cooperation with the Turkish police force (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2016).

²²⁴ Interview with Mychailo Wynnyckyj – Associate Professor at the Kyiv-Myhola Academy, 18/11/2016, Kyiv.

While it appears that Turkey and Ukraine have a limited relationship, with talk not matching reality (Kravchenko, V, 2017c), the growing role of Turkey in the post-Soviet space means that the Erdoğan regime is looking for allies to counter the Kremlin, so growing political and economic cooperation between the Turkish and Ukrainian regimes will increase (Kravchenko, V, 2015). With the EU tiring at the lack of reform in Ukraine and with Ukrainian membership of the EU unlikely for the foreseeable future, it is likely that Ukrainian political elites look for alternatives, with Erdoğan and Orbán as viable models (Kravchenko, V, 2017b; Sushko and Lisnichuk, 2018). As with Hungarian and Polish models, the Turkish model is a product of diffusion for Bankova. While there is linkage between Bankova and the Erdoğan regime, diffusion of a Turkish model is relevant too.

Although not learning as such, successive SDP governments in Romania have supported Plahotniuc making him Romania's man in Chişinău. Having the support of an external gatekeeper allows regimes to consolidate power. I briefly investigate Romanian support for Plahotniuc, although not learning, it is important for understanding attempted power consolidation by Plahotniuc. The SDP used the Romanian security services to support Plahotniuc to hold power as contact with the Romanian foreign ministry was considered too exposed. Romanian ambassador Daniel Ioniţă was also tasked with supporting Plahotniuc in the latter's consolidation of power (Noi.md, 2019). The relationship between Romanian governments and the PCRM were poor, and the arrival of the Moldovan AEI coalition in 2009, gave Romanian governments the opportunity to improve relations with a country widely considered in Romania to be a kin-state. With the arrest and jailing of Filat, the SDP fully supported Plahotniuc fearing the return of the PCRM. Since 2009 with the creation of

the EU's Eastern Partnership programme²²⁵ various Romanian governments openly supported Plahotniuc in Brussels, defending the democratic backsliding (Goşu, 2018) right up to when Plahotniuc fled Moldova in 2019. Even when the EU cut funding to Moldova, the Romanian government attempted to cover any shortfall through a loan on highly favourable terms for the Moldovan regime (Peiu, 2019).

Although not learning from another authoritarian regime, the SDP government acted as a black knight for Plahotniuc, helping bolster his consolidation of power. The SDP also defended Plahotniuc internationally. With the backing of the Romanian security services, there is likely to have been sharing of best practices to help Plahotniuc retain power. With the demise of Plahotniuc's control in 2019, the support of Romania has come to light and it remains to be seen quite what support was given. Nevertheless, the SDP government bolstered Plahotniuc and shared best practices with the Moldovan government on how to achieve power consolidation.

5.2.2. *China, Singapore (Kazakhstan?): Authoritarian Models for the Four Case Studies?*

As well as potential models for Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes in Europe, there are also other successful authoritarian models in Asia. I investigate whether the Chinese and Singaporean models resonate in the four case studies. There is a growing assertion in the literature that China is a model for other authoritarian regimes (Zhao, 2010; Breslin, 2011; Ambrosio, 2012; Kurlantzick, 2013; Bader, J, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; Horesh, 2015; Lai, 2016; Nathan, 2016). However, Ortmann and Thompson (2014; 2016) assert that the Chinese regime learnt from the Singaporean regime's economic and authoritarian model. Therefore, do the Chinese and Singaporean models play a role in the four case studies?

²²⁵ The Eastern partnership programme involves the EU, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and is an attempt to help these states make reforms and eventually join the EU.

Russian-Chinese relations have been conceptualised as an axis of convenience (Lo, 2008), or a “cosplay alliance” with more form than substance (Galeotti, 2019a). After all, both Russia and China still mistrust each other due to Soviet history and the Kremlin belief that China has eyes on Russia’s far-east, and competes for control over Central Asia. However, this marriage of convenience has been relatively successful (Lubina, 2017), while China is the dominant partner it has not made Russia subservient. Although Russia’s economic weakness is of limited value for China (Lubina, 2017: 283, 290), they have forged a stable relationship (Moshes, 2011) and tensions have not restricted cooperation so far (Kaczmarek, 2015: 165).

The Russian and Chinese regimes have developed political, economic and military contacts. Chinese and Russian leaders meet regularly, and there are various inter-governmental commissions, prime ministerial consultations, and regular meetings of the security services (Kaczmarek, 2015: 18). Kremlin relations with the West are bleak due to the Ukraine crisis and the Chinese government needs allies against the American presence in Asia (Skosyrev, 2014: 8). China and Russia use the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to counter American infringement on their interests in Asia. SCO documentation criticises “the West’s propensity to use force, its disrespect for international law and infringement of other states’ sovereignty” (Kaczmarek, 2015: 96). This example highlights that authoritarian states are not creating new norms, but twisting existing ones.

Both the Kremlin and Zhongnanhai try to settle issues in the neighbourhood, as in Central Asia, and attempt to counter American advances in the region. However, the Kremlin remains wary of a full alliance with China, which could force it into a military

partnership with China in the South China Sea or over the Senkaku Islands²²⁶ (Gabuev, 2015b). Both regimes have created forums for discussion between political elites, the military and ministries. Ambrosio (2017: 138) found these connections remain relatively weak compared to Russia's relations with post-Soviet regimes. Therefore, the Russian and Chinese regimes are in alignment, rather than an alliance.

China has perfected a system of Internet control which Russia has selectively copied. Popularly known as China's Great Firewall, the Golden Shield has existed since 1998, which some in the Kremlin want to copy (Bevza and Korotkin, 2015). Oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev, created a Safe Internet League arranging a conference in 2016 with Chinese Propaganda Department Deputy Head Lu Wei and the Central Leading Group for Internet Security and Informatisation Head Fang Biuxing to learn from Chinese Internet control (Seddon, 2016; Wade, 2016). The Safe Internet League trialled Chinese white wall software, to stop non-approved websites being viewed (Seddon, 2016). The Kremlin has begun using Chinese technology requiring user identities prior to posting content (Rudolph, 2017).

The Kremlin and Zhongnanhai have developed systems to control the Internet and collaborated to manage cyberspace (Rudolph, 2016). Russian attempts to restrict access to Facebook and Twitter and banning LinkedIn (Zelenskiy, 2016), follow Chinese practices (Nechpurenko, 2014: 1). The Yarovaya package of laws²²⁷ came from meetings in Moscow and Beijing (Soldatov and Borogan, 2016). In 2019, the Kremlin analysed methods to create an autonomous Internet, based on the Chinese model, which would be independent of

²²⁶ These islands are controlled by Japan – hence why I give their Japanese names. However, China sees them as the Diaoyu Islands and Taiwan as the Diaoyutai Islands.

²²⁷ The Yarovaya package of laws are two laws passed in the Russian State Duma (parliament) in 2016. Named after Irina Yarovaya, a State Duma deputy, the package of laws increased the powers of the security services, regarding surveillance.

American root servers, where all Internet traffic passes (Maçães, 2019). In April 2019, Putin signed legislation to create a truly independent Russian Internet (State System of Legal Information, 2019), which surpassed existing Chinese systems which the Kremlin had learnt from (Kovachich, 2019).

The Kremlin has taken lessons from regimes other than China, such as Singapore. Kremlin representatives have met Singaporean counterparts²²⁸ to ascertain if the Singapore model can be transferred from a small island state to the world's largest country (Tsepliaev, 2010). The Singaporean model provides an example of a rich state ruled by the same small circle for decades. It is an easy bribe to the public. Would they prefer instability or political stability and economic prosperity (Gabuev, 2015a)?

Another model is Kazakhstan. Extremism law changes in 2012, made media outlets responsible for content posted on their websites. This was directly taken from 2009 Kazakh legislation (Savchenko, I, 2016). Kazakhstan is an example of implementing aspects of the Singapore model to a large state. The longevity of Nursultan Nazarbaev's tenure (1991 to 2019), personality cult, economic development, construction of a new capital and strengthening of presidential power while maintaining a relatively open economy (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 2007: 2; Vedomosti, 2010: 4; Solntseva, 2008: 9; Gusev, 2010: 7), gives other regimes ideas. It is likely the Kremlin drew lessons from the Kazakh regime and attempts by former Kazakh President Nazarbaev to retain power as a father-of-the-nation figure will be watched in the Kremlin as an example of what Putin could do when he is constitutionally barred from standing as president again in 2024 (Bershidsky, 2019b).

²²⁸ Interview with Margarita Zavadskaya – Research Fellow at the European University of St. Petersburg, 25/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

Economic issues underpin Belarusian-Chinese relations as Lukashenka tries to diversify Belarus's economy away from Russia (Gevarkin, 2015). There are political aspects with Belarus supporting Chinese proposals at the United Nations (UN) and Zhongnanhai protecting Belarus from interfering outside forces (Koch-Weser, 2011). In 2012, the Belarusian and Chinese regimes created the Sino-Belarusian Great Stone Industrial Park outside Minsk. However, Lukashenka (2016c) stated that the Industrial Park was going badly, and the removal of the Park director in 2016 was an ominous sign (Zayats, 2016). This could be because of teething troubles as the park was only six years old in 2016, but when meeting Slovak businessmen in Bratislava in 2017, Belarusian Prime Minister Andrey Kabyakou asked for investment (Dubina, 2017b), pointing to a lack of Chinese investment.

Lukashenka wants to copy aspects of the Chinese model, but rather than economic liberalisation Lukashenka favours Chinese practices of restricting human rights and annual GDP growth of 8 to 10% (Dubina, 2017a). However, the Chinese model's main success is that the economy includes private enterprises. Belarus has a mostly planned economy and Lukashenka is unwilling to lose control by privatising it²²⁹. Privatisation would affect the social contract which offers citizens guaranteed jobs – even if poorly paid – for accepting the system (Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009a; 2009b). A privatised economy would mean job losses leading to a loss of regime legitimacy.

For Lukashenka, China is a source of short-term loans. However, it is possible that Chinese interest in Belarus will dry up, as China wants access to the European market, which unless there is a radical change, Belarus is unlikely to offer. Without a better relationship

²²⁹ Interview with Alyaksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 08/08/2016, Warsaw.

with the EU, the Chinese authorities will not see Belarus as important²³⁰. China would prefer a park with a European member state, like Poland²³¹. As Zhongnanhai wants its one belt – one road²³² policy to reach Europe, the Chinese regime pushes the Belarusian regime to engage with Brussels (Sivitskiy, 2017). However, Russia’s intervention in Ukraine is the likely cause of Minsk’s reconciliation with Brussels. China remains an alternative to alleviate Belarus’s financial dependence on Russia (Vasilevskiy, 2017).

The Belarusian and Chinese regimes collaborate on Internet control. This can be seen that after Belarusian Presidential Administration Head Viktor Sheyman visited China in 2005, there was a spurt of Internet censorship orchestrated by the Belarusian regime (Naviny.by, 2005). In 2015, the Belarusian government issued a tender for equipment to censor the Internet and block websites, which Chinese manufacturers won (Petrovskaya, 2015). After the 2017 protests in Belarus both Head of the Presidential Administration, Stanislau Zas and Lukashenka flew to Beijing on separate occasions and it is likely both Belarusian delegations discussed information security and how the Chinese authorities used the Internet to reduce potential state-wide protests (Mitskevich, 2017).

Under former Prime Minister, Michail Myasnikovich, Belarus worked with Chinese groups to enhance media and telecommunication control and the KDB used the OAC to copy Chinese practices at telecommunication control. There is only one international Internet

²³⁰ Interview with Joerg Forbrig – Director, Fund for Belarus Democracy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, 16/09/2016, Skype; Interview with Anna Maria Dwyer – Head of the Eastern European Programme at the Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych (The Polish Institute of International Relations), 17/05/2017, Warsaw.

²³¹ Interview with Vadzim Smok – Project Coordinator at the Ostrogorski Centre and Research Fellow at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 25/08/2016, Skype.

²³² This is a massive infrastructure project by China involving roads, railways, ports, pipelines and other infrastructure developments to connect China to all world markets (Financial Times, 2017).

cable passing through Russia, so the KDB can block it when necessary²³³. The Belarusian regime uses China as a monetary alternative to Russia and only in part copies the Chinese model. There is little direct collaboration, but there is Belarusian copying of Chinese Internet practices.

It is a similar story with Singapore. So-called liberals in the regime want to copy Singapore's economic model, but implementation remains unlikely as the regime is unwilling to lose economic control (BelGazeta, 2017b). Kazakhstan is a model, although the Belarusian authorities are less concerned with economic development and construction of a new capital, preferring to copy the Kazakh strengthening of presidential power and ending of presidential term limits²³⁴.

The relationship between the Moldovan and Chinese authorities is based on economic integration, with Dodon (2017a; 2018a) advocating for Chinese investment and Moldovan involvement in China's One Belt – One Road initiative and the construction of an industrial park, like the Great Stone industrial park in Belarus. Much of the relationship between Moldova and China involves Chinese investment in Moldova from agriculture to energy and roads (Svitrov, 2019; NewsMaker, 2016b; 2015b). There is evidence that Chinese investment occurred in the Moldovan interior ministry (NewsMaker, 2016c), although it is unclear what the money was used for. While there is economic linkage, the Chinese regime does not view Moldova as a strategic partner (Popșoi, 2018d; Larson, 2018). However, any

²³³ Aleś Herasimenka – Specialist on the Belarusian Internet and media, 19/08/2016, London.

²³⁴ Interview with Alexei Pikulik – Academic Director at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2016, Minsk; Interview with Aleś Łahviniec – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Aliaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

linkage brings two states closer, and so China serves as a model of emulation for some Moldovan elites.

Although the Moldovan authorities are enamoured by Singapore's economic development, there is limited contact between the Moldovan and Singaporean governments (News Maker, 2018b). The Moldovan government passed Moldova-2020 in 2012 and in 2018 passed Moldova-2030. Both strategies promoted the idea of turning Moldova into a European Singapore, but there has been little progress, as the changes necessary to turn Moldova into Europe's Singapore would affect elite interests. Even copying Georgia, which earlier drew lessons from the Singaporean model for implementation in the post-Soviet space, is beyond the Moldovan government as it affects vested interests (Makukhin, 2018a). Therefore, there is emulation and diffusion with the Moldovan authorities wishing to implement a Singapore-type model, but without the capacity to follow through.

During a meeting with current Kazakh President, Qasym-Jomart Toqayev²³⁵, Dodon (2019) stated that Moldova and Kazakhstan had achieved high levels of political communication between state departments. Although the statement is vague, it highlights collaboration, learning and sharing of best practices. Moldovan elites are interested in implementing parts of Kazakhstan's impressive economic model (Point.md, 2015), although there is limited information about this. By changing the electoral system and his control over state institutions and media, Plahotniuc copied many practices used by Nazarbaev to keep control in Kazakhstan, although it is likely that Putin and Lukashenka were the models Plahotniuc emulated (Jurnal.md, 2018). Although, Moldovan and Kazakh representatives

²³⁵ I give the Kazakh spelling of his name here.

meet and attend meetings at regional organisations, like the CIS and the EAEU, where Moldova holds observer status, it appears that emulation and diffusion are as important as direct dialogue.

Like Moldova, Ukraine's relationship with China is largely economic, with successive Ukrainian governments interested in Chinese investment (Larson, 2018). In 2013, there were Chinese reports that the Chinese government had purchased 5% of the agricultural land of Ukraine, which is about the same size as Belgium (Kuo, 2013; Jourdan, 2013). Investment by China was used by the Yanukovich regime to find alternatives to Russian and EU investment, which came with different forms of conditionality (Iwański, 2012a). The Yanukovich regime constantly looked to increasing Chinese investment (Matuszak, 2010; Iwański, 2012b). However, interest in China from Bankova started before Yanukovich, with the Yushchenko government taking an interest in getting further Chinese investment (Koval', 2009). Yet, it was the Yanukovich regime which went further than just economic support from the Chinese authorities, trying to strengthen political control over Ukraine by copying Chinese policies (Umland, 2011). The Chinese model may resonate for the Ukrainian authorities, in particular, Yanukovich, but for China, Ukraine is "a door to the European market" (Hiymol', 2014). Although Yanukovich implemented aspects of the political part of the Chinese model, the relationship between Ukraine and China is largely economic, pointing to linkage which induces diffusion and emulation.

The Ukrainian political elite have long seen Singapore as a model of economic prowess to emulate (Lossovskaya, 2015). However, political elites may talk of emulating the Singapore model, but this would affect vested interests, who stop attempts at emulation (Starchevskiy, 2009). The Yanukovich regime was interested in studying the tactics that the

Singaporean regime used to keep power (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2011a), as well as enhancing the Ukrainian economy, which like Singapore did not have many natural resources (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2011c). The Singaporean government has created a less corrupt, relatively open political system, but one that is controlled by the regime, which various Ukrainian regimes have tried to emulate (Tkachuk, 2014). The anti-corruption success of Singapore is one reason Poroshenko sent anti-corruption employees to study in Singapore in 2014 (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2014j). However, it is unlikely that the Ukrainian authorities will fight corruption as it permeates the system, and provides opportunities for factions to get kompromat on others and weaken other groups by prosecuting corrupt members (Grabovskiy, Serh 2012). There is less linkage between Ukraine and Singapore than with Ukraine and China, so this is a clear example of Ukrainian emulation of Singaporean practices, as well as diffusion practices.

Since the Soviet collapse, Ukraine and Kazakhstan have retained close ties, especially regarding economic cooperation (Forina, 2013). Although, with the war in the Donbas the Russia authorities stopped Ukrainian goods entering Russia, which affected trade between Ukraine and Kazakhstan, both the Ukrainian and Kazakh governments retain close ties (Melkozerova and Talant, 2016). Having successfully turned itself “into the Singapore of Central Asia”, Kazakhstan is an example for other post-Soviet states to emulate (Raikhel’, 2015). There is much in the Kazakh model of use in Ukraine, such as lower taxes which would induce investment. This would reduce opportunities for populist politicians to gain power and overspend (Monin, 2015). While, direct evidence of cooperation is difficult to find, there are strong ties between the Ukrainian and Kazakh governments, with

representatives regularly meeting bilaterally and multi-laterally at regional organisations, like the CIS, allowing for the sharing of best practices and information gathering.

5.2.3. *Russian Learning from Alleged Western Covert Actions*

The Kremlin after the 2004 Orange Revolution increasingly believed that the West, principally America, had intervened and funded protesters during the Orange Revolution to weaken Russia (Allison, 2013: 136). As Krastev (2015) argues the Kremlin perceives that the West has since the Orange Revolution engaged in promoting “instability and destabilisation” in the post-Soviet space, and so the Kremlin began “reverse engineering...trying to reconstruct and imitate what they believe the West is doing.” The Kremlin largely consists of former members of the Siloviki – Anton Vaino and Vyacheslav Volodin in the presidential administration being exceptions – and they believed the West was involved in the Orange Revolution, which precipitated a revival of anti-Westernism in the Kremlin (Shekhotsov, 2018: 73-75). The Kremlin sends signals to pro-regime groups to fight against alleged Western interference, and uses every event to force the message home. For instance, the recent 2019 protests were billed in state media as the continuation of American attempts at regime change in Russia (Gershkovich, 2019b). Increasingly, it appears the Kremlin believes that America is attempting regime change and instigating a Colour Revolution in Moscow (Gershkovich, 2019b).

Therefore, this is a case of learning from success, even if that success is figurative rather than real. The Kremlin perceived Western intervention in the Arab Spring and NATO encroachment to Russia’s borders as well as believing the West sponsored Colour Revolutions and was encircling Russia (Ambrosio, 2016: 480). Putin (2014c) argued that America had interfered in Ukraine during and after the Euromaidan, with former Assistant

Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Victoria Nuland portrayed as the ring-leader for the interference. So if the West could intervene in Ukraine during 2004 and 2013-2014 then Russia could interfere in the West (Putin, 2015a). As Krastev (2015) argues the Kremlin copies what it believes the West to be doing. As the West is waging war on Russia, the Russian authorities are emulating this conflict.

Having perceived that the West precipitated the Orange Revolution, the Kremlin began influencing Western politics. One example was the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation (IDC), which was set up in Washington, DC and Paris in 2008. For instance, the American office aimed to copy Freedom House (Kudors, 2010) and the Kremlin used it to monitor European and American democracy, to show how their systems could be improved (Lozanskiy, 2008: 3), thereby highlighting that the West was hypocritical for criticising Russian elections.

Makarychev (2008) contends the IDC is a Kremlin attempt to counter activities of Western-funded NGOs in Russia. The Kremlin uses the IDC as an NGO in the West to undermine Western institutions. While the IDC was ineffective this is not the point. Something does not need to be successful to mean it was not an example of learning from success. The Kremlin believed Western NGOs started the Colour Revolutions, so the Russian regime constructed NGOs in the West to use against Western states. Putin's (2007b) statement at the 2007 EU-Russia summit paved the way for the IDC, as Putin argued that the EU had funded electoral monitoring organisations in Russia. Due to Russia's improved finances, the Kremlin could monitor elections in EU member states. In 2015, the American institute closed and the French unit faces financial difficulties (Gazeta.ru, 2015). The IDC

may not have been successful learning, but it was founded on perceptions, however overblown, of Western intervention in the Colour Revolutions.

After the Orange Revolution, the Kremlin went on the attack. In February 2005, the Kremlin formed the Presidential Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries under the Presidential Administration. Ostensibly created to assist with foreign policy, it helped counter Colour Revolutions (Shekhovtsov, 2018: 77). Although anti-Westernism has always been in the background (Shevtsova, 2007), after the 2011-2012 protests anti-Westernism, or anti-liberalism (Laruelle, 2014), was promoted. The Kremlin has positioned itself as the defender of authentic Western values. However, doctrine is flexible, changing whenever the regime needs to change audiences or justify Kremlin rule (Shevtsova, 2016: 43).

An example of the conservative line is the Centre of Social-Conservative Politics²³⁶ headed by close Putin ally and then United Russia leader, Gryzlov (Argumenty i Fakty, 2007). The conservative line came to prominence after Putin (2012a) mentioned it. By 2013, Putin (2013a; 2013c; 2013d; 2013e), stated how Russia was defending traditional values against the West and conservative rhetoric came even earlier (Putin, 2007a). The anti-gay legislation of June 30, 2013, appeals to a domestic Russian audience (Gessen, 2014: 291-300; Tsygankov, 2016), as this pseudo-conservatism (Lipman, Mas, 2013) increases popular support for the regime (Rodkiewicz and Rogoża, 2015).

However, it also resonates among a small Western audience (Laruelle, 2017a). As the Orange Revolution was American inspired – in the minds of Russian elites – the Kremlin

²³⁶ This GONGO promotes the values of a conservative political system. More can be found about the organisation here: <http://www.cscp.ru/about/> (in Russian).

offers support to European radical political parties to weaken the West. While the Kremlin is not choosy politically, supporting parties on both the left and right, it is far-right groups that have gained the most attention (Gressel, 2017).

The Soviet Union supported far-right groups to weaken Western states (Shekhovtsov, 2018: 13), and Putin, as a KGB agent in East Germany possibly worked for the KGB Directorate tasked with enhancing ties with Europe's far-right. For example, there is evidence that Putin met neo-Nazi Rainer Sonntag who created a network of far-right personnel for the KGB in Dresden (Crawford and Bensmann, 2015). Although active measures were developed by the Tsarist secret police, the Okhrana (Wilson, 2016c), the KGB continued the practice. Putin – as a KGB agent – would have been involved in active measures, finding political forces to destabilise a targeted Western state (Mitrokhin, 2002: 13). Like the KGB, Putin engages with far-right political parties to destabilise the EU (Kulagina, 2014).

The Kremlin supports parties like Jobbik in Hungary and the Front National in France, using them for its interests (Polyakova, 2016). By supporting far-right parties the Kremlin increases the chances of sanctions being watered-down. By doing well at elections far-right parties put pressure on mainstream political parties to have a pro-Russian attitude. The Kremlin uses political allies in Europe as election monitors to counter the reports of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on electoral fraud. These parties are used to weaken institutions and organisations like the EU and NATO (Wesslau, 2016). By supporting European far-right parties the Kremlin stokes ethnic, religious and social turbulence, leading to fissures in the EU (Bugjaski and Assenova, 2016: 140-141). Far-right parties support the Kremlin's anti-EU and anti-NATO stances (Krekó et al. 2017: 76). It

is a direct lesson from the so-called Colour Revolutions that if the West could intervene in the post-Soviet region, Russia would reciprocate.

Another aspect of the Kremlin's "reverse engineering" (Krastev, 2015) of Western actions was the move to turn RT – the Russian international media channel – from a defensive operation to offensive capabilities (Van Herpen, 2016: 72). This occurred after the Russo-Georgian war, which while Russia won militarily, for Putin (2008) it lost the information war against the dominant "propaganda machine of the West." On a visit to RT, Putin (2013b) stated that RT should try "to break the monopoly of the Anglo-Saxon media." The BBC and CNN were models for RT, and British media consultants were hired to make it a modern, innovative TV cable network (Rutenberg, 2017). This is an example of lesson-drawing from successful formats and the implementation of these lessons to develop an alternative media outlet which copies much of what the BBC and CNN do, but with a twist²³⁷. One tactic is not to change Western perceptions that Russia is corrupt – this is unlikely to change – but to emphasise that Western governments are as corrupt as the Kremlin²³⁸.

RT follows a Soviet practice of the "echo chamber" (Wilson, 2016b), to keep stating something, hoping it would become true. One example from the Soviet Union was to continually state that the Baltic States willingly joined the Soviet Union in 1940. RT uses similar tactics to confuse and construct an alternative reality, relegating truth to the margins. The echo chamber creates conspiracy theories, an RT speciality. RT has allowed

²³⁷ Interview with Mikhail Fishman – Editor at the Moscow Times, 03/11/2016, Moscow; Interview with Anna Kosinskaya – BBC Russian Service Journalist and co-founder of the magazine Bumaga, 10/01/2017, London (Now at Yandex in Moscow).

²³⁸ Interview with Anna Artutunyan – Senior Analyst at the International Crisis Group. Former Journalist at RIA Novosti. Author of the *Media in Russia* and *The Putin Mystique*, 11/09/2016, Prague.

conspiracy theorists to discuss how 9/11 was an inside job (Shekhovtsov, 2015c) and that the Bilderberg group controls the world (Scherr, 2011). RT uses far-right activists as authorities on issues like human rights and discusses why the EU is failing (Miller, J, 2014; Shekhovtsov, 2015a), and that the world is controlled by a corrupt global elite (Miller, J, 2014). Since the Ukrainian conflict, RT has been at the forefront of the Kremlin's disinformation campaign (Shekhovtsov, 2015b).

While there are questions whether RT is successful (Sosnin, 2015: 8), its purpose is to sow disinformation and be attractive to enough viewers to change opinions, which is effective in democracies as only a few voters need change perceptions for governments to worry about re-election. After all, changing any part of an electorate's views induces a shift in the decision-making of democratic politicians. The Kremlin is no longer concerned with improving its image, knowing its image is tainted in the West. However, by manipulating information it can portray a world where the West is as bad as Russia (Walker and Ludwig, 2017)²³⁹. RT is a case of learning from the BBC and CNN – as both CNN and the BBC were models for the Kremlin – and previous Soviet tactics and while it might not be successful learning it is learning from success.

5.2.4. NGOs

Another aspect of learning from success is NGO legislation. The 2012 Russian foreign agent's law expanded on previous 2006 Belarusian legislation²⁴⁰, as well as Russian legislation. The Russian law came into effect on July 12, 2012, addressing the Kremlin's

²³⁹ As Anna Artutunyan told me for the Kremlin it is "we know we're corrupt, but can you honestly tell us that you're not?"

²⁴⁰ Interview with a specialist on Belarus and Ukraine who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016; Interview with Andrei Yahorau – Director for the Centre for European Transformation and Researcher at the Institute "Political Sphere", 23/08/2016, on Skype.

perceptions that NGOs received foreign funds. It restricted foreign funding of NGOs and placed limitations on NGOs which engaged in political activity as defined by the Kremlin. Once an NGO is deemed a foreign agent all its publications must include the phrase “foreign agent” (Lyons and Rice-Oxley, 2015).

NGOs need to register with the ministry of justice and face audits (Nekhezin, 2015) and inspections, whose purpose is to find something wrong with the finances of the NGO (Davidoff, 2013: 53). If NGOs fail to register they face fines and employees face imprisonment (The Moscow Times, 2012: 1). Criticism of the foreign agent’s law places a person, or organisation, on the foreign agents’ list (Mukhametshina and Churakova, 2016). In June 2014, the law was altered to allow the authorities to register NGOs they considered foreign agents (Prosvirova, 2014: 6). The foreign agent’s law was the Kremlin’s answer to stopping Western interference as in the Kremlin’s thinking the 2011-2012 protests were sponsored by America (Golyakov, 2015: 1).

As mentioned in chapter two, the 2012 Russian NGO legislation precipitated a trend of restrictive NGO legislation across the post-Soviet space and further abroad. Such laws were passed in Azerbaijan (2013), Tajikistan (2014) and Kazakhstan (2015). However, regarding the case studies, Belarus had already passed restrictive NGO legislation, which was an example for the Kremlin²⁴¹. Moldova and Ukraine attempted to copy the Kremlin after 2012. In August 2017, the Moldovan justice ministry nearly got powers to force NGOs receiving foreign money and engaging in ill-defined political activities to submit quarterly audits, disclose the origins of funding, spending and employee salaries. The legislation had

²⁴¹ Interview with a specialist on Belarus and Ukraine who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016; Interview with Andrei Yahorau – Director for the Centre for European Transformation and Researcher at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 23/08/2016, on Skype.

some key similarities to the 2012 Russian legislation (Popșoi, 2017a). However, the proposed legislation was dropped after the Moldovan authorities faced EU pressure and the threat that further EU funds would be stopped if the law was passed (Jurnal.md, 2017e). Yet, Western pressure did not stop Bankova in 2017 signing legislation which forced anti-corruption NGOs to file asset declarations, meaning NGOs spend time completing asset declarations, thereby stopping them working effectively (Sukhov, 2017e).

5.2.5. Learning from a Successful Re-Election

Although outside the period of analysis, Kuchma learning from Yeltsin is a clear example of authoritarian learning. In 1995, Boris Yeltsin's popularity was below 10% and his re-election as president in 1996 appeared unlikely (Depoy, 1996: 1148). To try to improve Yeltsin's popularity, the authorities created numerous satellite parties, like the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO) to take votes from the KPRF at the 1995 parliamentary elections and the regime backed the LDPR too. However, the new Kremlin political party, Our Home is Russia, the LDPR and KRO did not stop the KPRF becoming the largest party in parliament after the 1995 elections (Wilson, 2005b: 122).

To assure Yeltsin victory at the 1996 presidential election, the Kremlin engineered a scenario where Yeltsin would run against the KPRF's Zyuganov. Spoiler candidates were Kremlin-controlled (Wilson, 2005b: 123). Yeltsin appealed to those who voted for liberal parties in 1995 (Brudny, 1997: 258) and the Kremlin set-up the Social Movement in Support of the President to get financial and media support from the oligarchs. The campaign was run as a straight choice between Yeltsin and Zyuganov, with both state and oligarchic controlled television channels portraying Zyuganov as wanting a return to Stalinism (Brudny, 1997: 259-260). To ensure Zyuganov lost enough votes, the Kremlin introduced a third

candidate, General Aleksandr Lebed, who as a popular army commander would take votes from both nationalists and the KPRF (Wilson, 2005b: 123-124). The Kremlin gave Lebed media time and financial resources on the understanding he would endorse Yeltsin in the second round. After being appointed Secretary of the Security Council, Lebed supported Yeltsin, contributing to Yeltsin's landslide victory in the second round (Brudny, 1997: 261).

Yeltsin's re-election was played out in Ukraine in 1999 where unpopular President Kuchma wanted re-election and so Bankova copied the example of Yeltsin's 1996 re-election. Bankova instigated administrative resources to ensure Kuchma of victory (Matsuzato, 2001: 416-417). As in Russia, the Ukrainian regime orchestrated a contest between Kuchma and Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) leader Petro Symonenko. Therefore, Bankova directly learnt from how the Kremlin got Yeltsin re-elected in 1996.

Bankova ostracised other political parties. In the build-up to the 1999 elections, Rukh was split into competing factions, and its prominent leader, Vyacheslav Chornovil, mysteriously died in a car crash involving a truck (Wilson, 2005a: 42). Similarly, Hromada had been a Bankova political project supporting Kuchma's National Democratic Party at the 1998 parliamentary election, but it had reverted to opposition status when its leader, Pavlo Lazarenko, made it independent in late 1998. A few months later in December 1998 Lazarenko was arrested in Switzerland for money-laundering, and with Lazarenko jailed Bankova brought Hromada under control (Wilson, 2005b: 157). Hromada's second in command, Tymoshenko, was coerced to split the party as Bankova had Tymoshenko's bank accounts frozen. To get them released Tymoshenko agreed to support Kuchma in the presidential election and create the pro-regime *Batkivschyna* (Fatherland) party (Way, 2015a: 61).

Bankova then turned to dealing with Oleksandr Moroz and the Socialist Party of Ukraine, enticing the Village Party from the Socialists, thereby reducing the Socialists capabilities of forming a viable alternative at the 1999 election. Another candidate, Oleksandr Tkachenko, agreed to give his votes to Symonenko in the second round (Wilson, 2005b: 169-170). At various times Moroz, Yevhen Marchuk and Tkachenko accused each other of working for Kuchma (Wilson, 2005b: 158). Marchuk even claimed that Ukrainian Spetsnaz forces had been involved in Chornovil's death which divided the nationalist vote (Wilson, 2005a: 42-43).

Bankova supported Nataliya Vitrenko, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party as an alternative to Moroz, and she regularly visited Kuchma to discuss tactics (Wilson, 2005b: 158). Bankova sustained Symonenko to come second in the election's first-round, thereby reaching the second-round. However, the Ukrainian authorities terminated financial support in the second-round (Wilson, 2005b: 158-159). Money convinced the CPU to play ball and accept Kuchma's victory (Wilson, 2005b: 238-239).

Kuchma tried to copy the 1996 Russian presidential election. However, Ukraine is not Russia. While the copying of Yeltsin's re-election worked, in the long run, it precipitated the demise of the Kuchma regime. Moroz believing the presidency was taken from him became an opponent of Kuchma. He publicised the Melnychenko tapes which emphasised Kuchma's involvement in the murder of investigative journalist Hryhorii Gongadze (Tsvil, 2013: 52-53). While the lessons taken from Yeltsin's re-election in 1996 were successful in Ukraine in 1999 the tactics used alienated key elites which weakened Bankova, thereby increasing opposition numbers and forcing Kuchma to become increasingly authoritarian in his second presidential term.

5.3. Learning from Domestic Success in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine

5.3.1. *Back to the Past in Belarus and Russia*

5.3.1.1. Learning from the Past in Belarus

The Belarusian regime maintains an economy with Soviet characteristics (Ioffe, G, 2014: 125; Karbalevich, 2010: 50). After the Second World War Belarus's economy surged, having been the poorest part of Western Russia in the Tsarist period, its Soviet history was positive in that respect (Ioffe, G, 2004). The Soviet rebuilding of Belarus into a Hi-Tec economy – by Soviet standards – left excellent infrastructure and good universities²⁴². However, due to reliance on Russian resources, factories could not function with the Soviet collapse (Ioffe and Yarashevich, 2011: 754). With Belarusian independence in 1991, Prime Minister Kebich, kept the economy largely Sovietised (Ioffe and Yarashevich, 2011: 755), and when Lukashenka came to power in 1994 he had an idealised view of the Soviet Union, modernising the Soviet economy rather than changing it²⁴³.

The Belarusian authorities learnt from the Soviet Union by promoting the narrative of the Great Patriotic War²⁴⁴, although it puts the Belarusian partisans at the centre of the Soviet war effort²⁴⁵ (Marples, 2007: 101). This is mixed with pride in Soviet historicism, which reduces the role of Stalin (Marples, 2014: 331, 344, 329), but promotes Soviet success to create state-building myths²⁴⁶. The Belarusian regime took a further lesson from the

²⁴² Interview with Joerg Forbrig – Director, Fund for Belarus Democracy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, 16/09/2016, Skype.

²⁴³ Interview with Alyaksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 08/08/2016, Warsaw.

²⁴⁴ This is the Soviet label for the Second World War, where the war only began in 1941, not 1939.

²⁴⁵ Interview with David R Marples – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

²⁴⁶ Interview with Alyaksei Lastouski – Analyst at the Institute “Political Sphere,” 08/12/2016, Minsk.

Soviet period. The power vertikal' was Soviet, although its antecedents were Tsarist, where the leader decides what happens and other implement the decisions (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 267-268). Like Putin, Lukashenka recreated the power vertikal', but because of Belarus's compactness and Lukashenka's longevity, it is more effective²⁴⁷. The authorities copied Soviet government administration structures²⁴⁸. The power vertikal' gives Lukashenka the power to even tell the collective – another Soviet copy – farm tractor drivers how to drive their tractors. For Lukashenka, Belarus is his farm²⁴⁹.

Lukashenka is a success for others to emulate, in terms of his longevity. According to Grigoriy Ioffe (2011) analysts constantly predict the collapse of the Belarusian economy, but it consistently defies the odds. Belarus survived the global financial crisis relatively unscathed because of its limited international integration. While the regime privatised some state companies it kept the Soviet economy largely intact (Korosteleva, J, 2011: 650-651). Lukashenka has consistently adapted to situations and survived, so he could be considered a success for others. He is pragmatic and able to adapt²⁵⁰. I (2017b: 174-173) argued that the Belarusian regime was a testing ground for the Kremlin, as it began its preventive counter-revolution against the Colour Revolutions earlier. Two examples are the Belarusian

²⁴⁷ Interview with Valery Kavaleuski – Consultant at the World Bank and Country Analyst Consultant at Freedom House, 02/08/2016, Skype.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Vadzim Smok – Project Coordinator at the Ostrogrski Centre and Research Fellow at the Institute "Political Sphere", 25/08/2016, Skype; Interview with Anna Maria Dyer – Head of the Eastern European Programme at the Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych (The Polish Institute of International Relations), 17/05/2017, Warsaw.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at TUT.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

²⁵⁰ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 27/11/2016; Interview with Andrej Kazakevič – Director of the Institute "Political Sphere", 26/08/2016, Skype; Interview with Balázs Jarábik – Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21/11/2016, Skype.

Republican Youth Union being the precursor to the Kremlin's Nashi, and Belarusian NGO legislation being copied by the Kremlin.

As one of the first regimes to implement a preventive counter-revolution the Belarusian regime became an example for other authoritarian regimes on developing repressive measures. Lukashenka has been in power since Bill Clinton's first term and has seen attempts to impeach him in 1995 and 1996, protests in 2001, 2006, 2010 and 2017 and many economic crises²⁵¹. Belarus can be a testing ground for Western responses. Other authoritarian regimes view Belarusian crackdowns for Western responses, and if there is no reaction they act accordingly²⁵².

The idea that Lukashenka is a model for others can be seen by Moldovan President Dodon – apparently on Lukashenka's advice – trying to pass four resolutions to increase his power in 2017 (UDF.by, 2017b). Dodon justified this proposed consolidation of power by arguing it would strengthen the state as Lukashenka had done. However, Dodon had not, unlike Lukashenka, taken control of the Supreme Court, which struck the legislative changes down (UDF.by, 2017b). Lukashenka may be an example of success for other authoritarian leaders, as his longevity would be welcome, but his economic policy and Soviet economic methods²⁵³, are unlikely to have many suitors.

²⁵¹ Interview with a specialist on Belarus and Ukraine who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016.

²⁵² Interview with Valery Kavaleuski – Consultant at the World Bank and Country Analyst Consultant at Freedom House, 02/08/2016, Skype.

²⁵³ Interview with Alexei Pikulik – Academic Director at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2016, Minsk.

5.3.1.2. Learning from History for the Kremlin

Putin studies historical examples, learning from failures like Tsar Nicholas II, the Soviet period and the 1990s. Putin does not just learn from failures, as according to his press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, Putin regularly reads Russian history (Faulconbridge and Bryanski, 2011), pointing to learning from success too. Since 2000, Putin has used history to give the Kremlin legitimacy (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 63) following the idea of communication with the people. This idea began under Tsar Nicholas I, but the KGB redefined it as *rabota s lyud'mi*²⁵⁴ as a way to find out what the people were concerned with, and what might lead them to protest (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 168).

Nicholas I tried to reform the state to make it more efficient, without making radical changes. Like Nicholas I, Putin has attempted to change the state without radical modifications (Makarkin, 2001). Nicholas I turned the Russian Empire into the main European power. His reactionary attitude to the 1848 European revolutions is good for a regime portraying itself as conservative and a portrait of Nicholas hangs in the presidential office (Gautheret, 2014). Under Nicholas I Russia was not only the dominant European power, but it ended the 1848 revolutions, and so Nicholas I is a good role-model for Putin for counteracting revolutions (Taylor, 2018: 25).

Alexander II is another Tsar Putin has learnt from. Alexander's advisor Boris Chicherin coined the phrase *pravovoye gosudarstvo*, or law-based state, which gave primary place to a strong state and gradual reform (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 53). For the Kremlin, the concept of *gosudarstvennichestvo*, or statism, maintains the rule of law, but the state interprets when the rule of law has been infringed. For Putin, the constitution is the

²⁵⁴ This translates as working with the people.

embodiment of gosudarstvennichestvo as stipulated in his Millennium message (Putin, 1999). Overturning the constitution would weaken the state which is why Putin did not seek a consecutive third term (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 54).

Another reference point for Putin is the Nineteenth Century diplomat, Alexander Gorchakov. He served Nicholas I and Alexander II and was Foreign Minister under Alexander II. Gorchakov was respected across Europe helping make Russia a great power again after its defeat in the Crimean War. The Crimean defeat bears some resemblance to Russia of the 1990s and it is why Putin aspires to follow his lead (Gaddy and Hill, 2012).

Putin admires Pyotr Stolypin who attempted to reform Russia between 1906 and 1911 before being assassinated. Putin often quotes Stolypin (Syamin, 2012). Like Stolypin, t Putin is trying to create a prosperous country, but one where the state retains control (Rybas, 2001: 16). Putin (2011a) paraphrased Stolypin's 1907 address to the Duma – “you, gentlemen, are in need of great upheaval; we are in need of Great Russia” (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 71) – to “we do not need great upheavals. We need a great Russia” (Samarina, 2011: 1). Stolypin tried to transform Russia without revolutionary change. Like Putin, he believed the opposition should work with him to achieve this (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 72-74). Putin reveres Stolypin for his vision. Stolypin famously stated “give *the state* 20 years of internal and external peace and you will not recognise Russia” (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 74). Putin (2012b) stated that if he became president in the 2012 elections he would transform Russia, so people would have a better future for “decades”. Putin (2011b) has defended Stolypin's reforms even though Stolypin had hundreds hanged for terrorism.

Putin likely learned from Yuriy Andropov's practice of going to the people and finding out what they wanted (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 95). Andropov created the fifth

directorate to deal with subversive ideologies, which involved KGB officers attending protests. Rather than use overt repression, they tried to understand the grievances, offer concessions and arrest hardliners. Putin possibly worked for the fifth directorate (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 168-170) and he uses *oshtchepeniye s lyudmi*²⁵⁵ with the annual direct line (Davies, K, 2017). Therefore, Putin can ascertain what is wrong in the regions and react to lessen potential protests (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 174-176).

Like the Belarusian regime, the Kremlin has copied the Soviet power *vertikal'* (Monaghan, 2016: 131), and created a myth from the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War, making Russia a great power today²⁵⁶. Putin originally constructed his power *vertikal'* along military lines, but with the Kursk disaster, this changed (Golts, 2010) as after Kursk, the power *vertikal'* was top-down (Monaghan, 2011) before evolving to be more collective (Monaghan, 2012: 16), although it remains ineffective (Monaghan, 2016: 132; Lunkov, 2011: 6). However, the power *vertikal'* while unsuccessful is an example of learning from Soviet success (Latynina, 2009: 8).

The Kremlin has delved into the field of Russian philosophy for lessons. However, there are questions whether these thinkers actually shape the Kremlin's view. Laruelle argues (2017b) that factions in the Kremlin adhere to these beliefs. Duncan (2015: 108) is correct that the Kremlin tries to bridge the divide between White and Red Russia. One philosopher, Ivan Il'in, has been referenced (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 100), although there have only been six mentions, all about strengthening the state. Il'in analysed how Russia could defend itself from the West and justified authoritarianism (Barbashin and Thoburn, 2015). It

²⁵⁵ This translates as communicating with the people.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Ekaterina Bobrovskaya – Lecturer at Lomonosov Moscow State University, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

is likely the Il'in references placate ultra-conservative factions (Laruelle, 2017b). Putin's addresses to the Federal Assembly in 2006 and 2014 referenced Il'in's work on protecting and loving Russia (Putin, 2006; 2014).

Konstantin Leontiev and Nikolai Berdayev are other anti-Western thinkers that the Kremlin has analysed, although Putin (2013a) quoted Nikolai Berdayev wrongly (Rozhkova, 2013: 2), highlighting that Berdayev is not too important. Thinkers like Nikolai Trubetskoiy and Lev Gumilev adhered to Eurasianism, arguing that Russia should not look to the West for development (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 101). Trubetskoiy contended that European values are alien to Russians, so no matter how hard Russian elites try, Russia will never be European (Paramonov, 2007). Gumilev's idea of the nation as sacrosanct was seen in Putin's 2012 address when he stated that the nation's energy needed to be harnessed to drive Russia forward (Putin, 2012a). Finally, the Eurasianists, especially Aleksandr Dugin, have some influence on regime ideas, but these ideas are not official policy (Umland, 2012; Shekhovtsov, 2014: 74-75).

5.3.2. Learning from Previous Regimes: Plahotniuc and Poroshenko

It is likely politicians learn from the mistakes and successes of regimes of which they were a part in the past. Both Plahotniuc and Poroshenko have been members of various regimes, with Plahotniuc having a complete political change in 2009, from being a PCRM member to joining the PDM. Having been in important roles in previous regimes it is likely that these experiences shape current thinking. As argued in chapter two, this is an aspect of habitus and Plahotniuc and Poroshenko highlight the importance of internal learning well.

Plahotniuc was a businessman and supported Vladimir Voronin and Voronin's son, Oleg²⁵⁷. Many representatives in the AEI coalition were politicians under the PCRМ. Schooled in the PCRМ period they react to threats as they did then, with repression²⁵⁸. Plahotniuc uses his wealth to implement effective control which the PCRМ also did²⁵⁹. Under the PCRМ, Plahotniuc was tasked with protecting and increasing the fortune of Voronin using reiderstvo²⁶⁰ tactics on businesses Voronin earmarked for takeover. These same tactics were used by Plahotniuc after 2009 to press politicians to follow his wishes²⁶¹.

Hale (2015: 330) argues that Poroshenko has been a part of every regime since the 1994 Kuchma presidency. According to Sukhov (2017c), Poroshenko shares characteristics of previous presidents, borrowing behavioural patterns from Kuchma. Poroshenko wanted to create a scenario similar to Kuchma but was hampered by greater checks than previous regimes on him by civil society after the Euromaidan²⁶². Kuchma was less thuggish than Yanukovich, using softer coercive tools, rather than naked repression, although the death of journalist Gongadze showed that Kuchma would use violence when necessary. Poroshenko followed this soft coercion path, balancing competing clans and oligarchic groups, while using Kompromat to keep control²⁶³.

²⁵⁷ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 20/04/2017.

²⁵⁸ Interview with Ion Manole – Director at Promo-LEX, 12/07/2017, on Skype; interview with Dumitru Aliaba – Programme Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms Moldova (CPR), 14/07/2017, Skype; Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 17/05/2017.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Ernest Vardanean – Lecturer at Moldova State University (MSU), 10/09/2017, Skype.

²⁶⁰ This practice is the illicit takeover of a business.

²⁶¹ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 11/07/2017.

²⁶² Interview with Andreas Umland – Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, 23/08/2016, Skype.

²⁶³ Interview with Oleg Sukhov – Journalist at the Kyiv Post, 22/04/2017, Kyiv.

For instance, the Anti-Corruption Centre (TsPK) has been vocal about continued government corruption, criticising the Prosecutor General's Office and presidential administration. It offered training to representatives of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU), which resulted in the Prosecutor General's Office taking a detailed interest in the finances of TsPK (Ringis, 2016). Like Kuchma, Poroshenko used government bodies and media to smear people and groups who highlight Bankova's failings²⁶⁴.

Poroshenko exerted control over other elites and, particularly former Yanukovich allies (Romanyuk and Kravets, 2016; Sukhov, 2016d). Former Prime Minister Volodymyr Hroysman was a Poroshenko loyalist, which allowed Poroshenko to keep control (Synovitz, 2016a; Romanyuk, 2016). Like Yanukovich – who made secret deals with oligarchs and parliamentarians to get support – Poroshenko used backroom deals (Romanyuk, 2016). Poroshenko like Yanukovich tried to control institutions, but unlike Yanukovich, Poroshenko was subtler in how he achieved consolidation. Another area of learning from success is the 1990s when Poroshenko started his business. He learnt appropriate survival skills. Like Plahotniuc, Poroshenko used practices learnt in the 1990s to control others, which allowed him to maintain power²⁶⁵.

5.4. Discussion: Success or Failure and Internal or External?

Chapters four and five analysed propositions four and five and it can be determined that success and failure are indeed equally important for authoritarian learning.

Authoritarian regimes are just as likely to learn from examples of success as failure. While, failure is easier to track as it generally makes the news, an example being the Euromaidan,

²⁶⁴ Interview with Oleg Sukhov – Journalist at the Kyiv Post, 22/04/2017, Kyiv.

²⁶⁵ Interview with a specialist on Ukraine who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016. Interview with Tomasz Piechal – Junior Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 20/12/2016, Warsaw.

success is important. For instance the EAEU was constructed in 2015 based on the EU, in terms of the EAEU's economic structure²⁶⁶, and the Kremlin took examples from Germany and New Zealand electoral systems and the Moldovan constitution is based on the French²⁶⁷, although both regimes have twisted these from their original design. While the four case studies learn from success, there are instances of them not being very successful at it. This is especially so of the Kremlin, although this could be attributed to the fact that there is more evidence of Kremlin learning. However, this does not detract from the fact that authoritarian regimes learn from both failure and success equally.

Similarly, chapters four and five show that authoritarian regimes are just as likely to learn from external as internal examples. There are more examples in chapter five of learning from external success because locating data for instances of learning from internal success proved difficult. However, I assert that the internal is crucial for authoritarian learning as chapter four showed. Therefore, it is possible to assert that authoritarian regimes learn from both external and internal examples.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Balázs Jarábik – Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21/11/2016, Skype.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Yury Kabanov – Lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 24/10/2016, St. Petersburg; Interview with Ernest Vardanenan – Lecturer at Moldova State University (MSU), 10/09/2017, Skype.

Chapter Six:

The External Networks of Authoritarian Learning

“The Soviet Union did not collapse. The local republics adapted to a new context.”

Quote by Eric Chenoweth²⁶⁸

6.1. Introduction

With the Soviet collapse and the banning of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), political elites re-branded themselves as democrats in the post-Soviet states, to retain power. Many Soviet institutions were not replaced, allowing the new states to keep many Soviet practices, as reflected in the quote above. Political, business and cultural elites from the Soviet Union have mostly survived. These networks²⁶⁹ remain key to understanding inter and intra-elite relationships helping explain learning. Networks provide a perfect environment for the dissemination of ideas and sharing of best practices. This chapter will analyse external networks of authoritarian learning and show that regional organisations allow the exchange of information. As well as regional organisations there are extensive networks between the four case studies, making information dissemination easier to pass from one government to another, thereby making learning easier.

Networks operate in authoritarian regimes, but they are often hidden, as modern authoritarian regimes claim they are democratic, so collaboration is well concealed.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Eric Chenoweth – Co-Director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE), 14/11/2017, Skype.

²⁶⁹ When using the term networks, I am referring to the definition provided by Krackhardt and Stern (1988: 123) who see formal networks as those which explain “authority lines,” much work is done through informal networks “of friends, contacts, and accidental communications.”

Documents mentioning dialogue, meetings or cooperation use vague terms, one example being the “Information Bulletin of the CSTO Secretariat 02.10.2014” which hides the creation of a police and military force (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2014b), highlighting that information is well hidden in obscure documentation. The police and military force in question was the Collective Rapid Reaction Force, which was listed as a military division, and had been in existence since 2009. However, Mikhailov (2009: 1) found that interior ministry troops were also included in the unit.

Even though after 2014, Ukrainian political elites distanced themselves from the Kremlin some Ukrainian elites want closer ties with Russia. The political party Opposition Platform – For Life! after the 2019 parliamentary elections is now the second largest party in parliament. It advocates closer ties with the Kremlin, and its politicians regularly travel to Moscow to meet Kremlin representatives (Talant, 2019). Similarly, in Moldova, Dodon has tried to emulate Putin (Ursu, 2016). Therefore, external links are crucial for enhancing authoritarianism and increasing learning possibilities in the four case studies.

Chapter six analyses proposition two that ‘authoritarian learning has a flattened hierarchy and network, with authoritarian regimes learning from one another, rather than a hegemon dispensing lessons or an authoritarian gravity centre.’ I assess post-Soviet regional organisations and their role in external learning and then investigate political elite networks, analysing presidents, presidential administrations, security services, security councils, governments, foreign and internal ministers, ambassadors and businessmen. These highlight extensive evidence of dialogue and sharing of best practices between the four case studies. This explains the causal links that X, or Xs, causes Y. Finally, Russian links with

Moldova and Ukraine will be investigated, as these relations are one reason why Moldova and Ukraine remain competitive authoritarian regimes.

6.2. Regional Organisation Collaboration: Vehicles for Networks?

Post-Soviet regional regimes have constructed regional organisations primarily focused on economic and security collaboration. These institutions highlight cooperation between members and are venues for dialogue. Obydenkova and Libman (2019) found that post-soviet regimes that were members of the CIS, EAEU and the SCO had increased chances of survival, as members collaborate together. While, it is possible regional organisations dominated by authoritarian regimes are conducive to learning (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018: 153), this remains untested and is something this chapter addresses.

One reason Moldova and Ukraine remain competitive authoritarian regimes, rather than electoral authoritarian regimes as in Belarus and Russia, is because Moldova and Ukraine are not members of as many regional post-Soviet organisations as Belarus or Russia. Moldova has been a CIS member since 1994, and Ukraine never officially ratified the treaty of membership. However, both have attended regularly, although since 2014 due to the Donbas conflict, Ukrainian governments have distanced Ukraine from the CIS. The CIS is the only post-Soviet regional organisation both Moldova and Ukraine are members of, which reduces the dialogue opportunities with other post-Soviet states and the sharing of best practices to maintain power. I analyse the CIS, the CSTO, the SCO, the EAEU, the Union State of Russia and Belarus (the Union State) and GUAM to better understand authoritarian learning in the post-Soviet space.

6.2.1. *The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)*

The CIS was created in 1991 to keep the post-Soviet states together in a loose confederation. However, with the Soviet demise and political elites favouring independence, the CIS became a regional organisation acting against common issues like environmental degradation, terrorism, migration and cross-border trade. Political integration has largely failed, with most focus on economic cooperation (Obydenkova and Libman, 2019, 122-123).

In the CIS there are open and closed meetings, making tracking what was said challenging. There are many closed meetings on security and crime, with only the briefest mention that this is what was addressed. CIS members collaborate and share information, and the organisation publishes journals, which provide information about what was discussed at particular meetings (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2001a), allowing some information to be gleaned. The CIS provides “a common information space” expanding to an “interstate information exchange” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2001b).

Economic collaboration started after the 2008 global recession to alleviate economic recessions. Even before the 2008 global recession economic development was seen as lessening demonstrations as “poor countries” have increased “protest behaviour” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005) as citizens are likelier to be dissatisfied with a lack of opportunities. The 2009 plan for the CIS Economic Development called for “deepening interstate relations,” while developing “mutually acceptable ways of solving economic problems” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2009a) and was an attempt to limit possible protests in member states. Collaboration involved alleviating “the consequences of the global financial crisis,” to “improve the quality of life of the population

of the CIS” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2009b) and lessen possible protest. In 2011, the CIS created the CIS Free Trade Area to assuage future recessions (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2015b).

Members collaborate extensively on security issues, enhancing “operational and technical capabilities...their analytical work, exchange information and professional experience” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2013b). The CIS’s anti-terrorist centre was created in January 2001, helping information sharing and providing training (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2000). In 2010, the Council of Ministers of Internal Affairs (CMIA) increased police cooperation (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2010) and in 2012, it agreed to counter instability in any member state (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2012), thereby protecting incumbent regimes.

In 2011, the Council of Security Authorities and Special Services of the CIS (CSASS) discussed increasing “the effectiveness of cooperation between security agencies and special services of the CIS member states” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2011b). A 2017 CIS meeting had delegates analyse how to limit the “radicalisation of youth” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2017), thereby lesson-drawing from the experience of youth groups during the Colour Revolutions.

CSASS meetings remain secret, but the Security Council of the Russian Federation provides evidence of meetings and discussions. One example is a 2009 meeting, which discussed “interaction of intelligence services is an integral part of interstate relations” (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2009), pointing to close collaboration between post-Soviet security services. During the 2011 Donbas anti-terrorist training, one exercise dealt with “localising mass riots” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2011a) and

coordinated “activities to identify and prevent terrorist acts being prepared at mass rallies” (the Anti-terrorist Centre of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2011). This highlights that CIS member states engage in training exercises to counter protesters. During 2011, the CIS anti-terrorist centre provided training exercises to counteract “flash mobs used in order to destabilise the situation and organise social unrest” (the Anti-terrorist Centre of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2011). Similarly, in 2012, the anti-terrorist centre trained against terrorists who “organise riots and social unrest” and demonstrate outside government buildings (the Anti-terrorist Centre of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2012). A 2013 meeting saw the CIS anti-terrorist centre discuss tactics in the “Arab Revolutions,” and member states discussed improving training for anti-terrorist units. In 2013, CSASS discussed training anti-terror units to “suppress the activity of radical youth groups” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2013a), a direct reference to youth groups during the Colour Revolutions.

The Russian Security Council mentions two further CSASS meetings. A 2013 summit analysed the “situation in Iraq, Libya, Egypt and Syria” (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2013a). In 2015, CSASS members discussed how to stop “neo-Nazi groups...and their participation in the realisation of technologies of “colour revolution”” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2015a), a reference to the Euromaidan.

The Belarusian, Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian regimes consistently attend CSASS meetings, although Ukraine stopped after Crimea’s annexation in 2014. These examples point to learning from previous protests. Governments of all four case studies have regularly attended CIS meetings, so the regimes are susceptible to learning.

Ukraine since the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas has stopped attending most CIS forums. In 2018, Poroshenko announced Ukraine would leave the CIS in the near future, but Poroshenko countered this by stating that Bankova would follow some treaties and work with other members (Kizilov, 2018). Therefore, it appears that there remains membership by the back door, the maintenance of networks with other members, preservation of learning capabilities, and a distancing, rather than full renunciation of membership (Ponomarenko, 2018b) pointing to continued, if limited, dialogue with other members.

The CIS offers members the opportunity to collaborate and share best practices. It is not just a forum for dialogue, as the CIS provides training exercises to counter protesters, allowing members to ascertain which tactics are effective. There is also economic support to bolster members, provide them with popular legitimacy and reduce the chance of protest.

6.2.2. *The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)*

The CSTO was formed in 1992 and expanded in 1994. The CSTO grew out of the CIS and encompassed, mostly, military and security matters in the post-Soviet space. Like the CIS, there are closed meetings and collaboration with other regional organisations. After the 2008 global financial crisis, the CSTO developed “economic cooperation” (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2015), although what this collaboration entailed was vague. Like the CIS, countering Colour Revolutions is a pressing issue for the CSTO. For instance, a December 2013 meeting of the CSTO secretariat, was entitled “interaction between authorities and society in order to counter external interference and colour revolutions” (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2013b). This was a round table of the internal,

military and foreign affairs ministries' of member states, the Russian security services and the CIS anti-terrorist centre. It addressed "the role of NGOs, the media, the Internet, social networks and the blogosphere in the destabilisation of the socio-political situation" in the region, as well as analysing "provocateurs...as an element of the organisational system of external interference" and "technologies to counteract "colour revolution"" (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2013b).

While the CSTO is, mostly, a military organisation, it provides training exercises, like in 2012 where CSTO forces countered "mass riots" at "shopping complexes and shops" in "state C" to help "restore constitutional order" (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2012). Another training exercise in 2014, focused on counteracting "mass riots" (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2014a), as did a 2017 exercise which thwarted "mass riots" (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2017). A 2014 meeting of CSTO Member states, pointed to lessons learnt from the Colour Revolutions and the Arab Spring, with both "an essential factor in destabilising the political landscape" (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2014c).

Zubr (bison), a unit of the Russian OMON and their Belarusian counterpart Rys' (lynx), trained in counteracting protesters with other CSTO member police units during the Unbreakable Brotherhood-2013 exercises, when 'peacekeeper' policing units used "special means and water cannon, split the aggressively-minded crowd and detained the leaders of the "mass riots"" (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, 2013a). This highlights learning especially when considering Lukashenka's (2011a) statement that the CSTO should look to prevent new Colour Revolutions.

Like the CIS, the CSTO provides member states with dialogue and sharing of best practices. There are opportunities to test best practices in training exercises to find appropriate methods for use against protesters. The CSTO unlike the CIS is largely a military organisation and, therefore, does not involve itself in economic matters. However, the CSTO provides clear avenues for learning.

6.2.3. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

The SCO was formed in 2001 and in 2017 it expanded to include India and Pakistan. Although, the SCO is not solely a post-Soviet institution I include it in the analysis as the SCO provides one case study member, Russia, with opportunities to share best practices and learn from the tactics of others outside the post-Soviet space.

SCO documents repeat the mantra of stability and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. In the fifth anniversary declaration, the SCO stated that if stability was threatened members would militarily intervene in other states²⁷⁰. With the 2008 global recession, the SCO implemented “economic cooperation” among Members and “an economic cooperation program,” to create “mutually beneficial economic cooperation” (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2009), to alleviate “the negative consequences of the financial and economic crisis for social well-being” (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2009). SCO members realised that regional economic problems would cause instability and protests, so economic cooperation was perceived as important to stop possible future protests. A 2010 meeting followed-up with “further development of regional economic cooperation” (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2010) and a 2016 meeting saw agreements to “promote trade, economic and investment cooperation” (Shanghai

²⁷⁰ Source can be accessed here: <http://rus.sectesco.org/documents/>. Scroll to 2006. Click on the document entitled *Deklaratsiya pyatiletiya Shankhaiskoi Organizatsii Sotrudnichestva* (in Russian).

Cooperation Organisation, 2016b). In 2017, the SCO directed member finance ministries to arrange member-to-member trade deals to foster dependability and alleviate future recessions (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2017). Economic partnership protects regimes from uncertainty, making it easier to keep power. There is legislative harmonisation and close ministerial collaboration at all levels (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2008b; 2008c).

Like the CIS and CSTO, the SCO conducts training exercises for security and police forces on terrorism (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2008a; 2011; 2016a). At the 2016 exercises delegates strengthened “law enforcement cooperation” (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2016a). Its definition of terrorism is broad. During the 2013 Kazygurt anti-terror exercises, one exercise attempted to “curb terrorist activities on mass gathering sites” (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2013). The Regional Antiterrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation holds meetings between member security councils, with a 2015 meeting discussing “Nazism” (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2015a), a reference to the Euromaidan.

Like the CIS and the CSTO, the SCO provides forums for member states to discuss best practices and share tactics. Like the CIS, the SCO uses economic collaboration between member states to stave off potential protests, which could spill over into other SCO member states. The SCO not only bolsters members, but provides learning opportunities.

6.2.4. The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)

The EAEU copies the EU regarding structure and free movement of people and goods²⁷¹. The EAEU makes each economy competitive, by promoting stability and advancing living standards²⁷². The organisation was inaugurated on January 1 2015, and has created a market of 183 million people.

The EAEU has developed cooperation between member states, increasing trade between members and devising methods to grow the economies of member states (Eurasian Economic Union, 2012a; 2012b; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c). However, the EAEU does not just support member states. For example, it signed an economic cooperation agreement with Ukraine during Yanukovich's presidency (Eurasian Economic Union, 2012c). This example highlights that the EAEU offers support to weaker authoritarian regimes drawing them closer to established authoritarian regimes. By bolstering non-member authoritarian regimes and integrating them, the EAEU creates linkage between authoritarian regimes, and increases the legitimacy of the incumbent in the non-member, thereby helping power consolidation. It also reduces spill over effects, as the collapse of a non-member regime could have repercussions for members. As with Ukraine in 2012, a 2017 deal between the EAEU and the Moldovan regime (Eurasian Economic Union, 2017), was an attempt to strengthen authoritarian-minded elites in Moldova. In January 2017, Dodon met Putin to discuss Moldovan integration in the EAEU, although this was unconstitutional as the Moldovan president does not conduct foreign policy (Jurnal.md, 2017a).

²⁷¹ Interview with Balázs Jarábik – Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21/11/2016, Skype.

²⁷² Information on the EAEU can be found at <http://www.eaeunion.org/#about> (in Russian).

During the recent 2018 protests in Armenia, caused by President Serzh Sargsyan changing the constitution to allow him to become prime minister after his presidential term ended, resulting in protests, Lukashenka (2018a) spoke about the Armenian events to the Belarusian National Assembly. He called on EAEU members to coordinate – and discuss among specialists – to tackle what was clearly a Western attempt to split the EAEU through revolutions in individual members. This example highlights the possibility for collaboration and mentions specialists who work on devising best practices to counter revolutions.

The Eurasian Development Bank (EADB) strengthens economic partnerships between members (Zabortseva, 2016: 142). In 2012, the EADB established inter-state companies to create business networks across members and set-up the Eurasian Anti-Crisis Fund to invest in members (Ekonomika i Zhizn, 2013: 19). Russia through its economic hegemony is the main funder of both structures and with Kremlin support, the EADB is the main development bank in the post-Soviet space (Mereminskaya and Sokolov, 2017). While Belarus and Russia invoked border restrictions against each other in 2016 and Lukashenka has criticised the EAEU (Markarkin, 2017; Bykov, 2016; Lukashenka, 2016d), it is likely a criticism of Kremlin dominance.

The EAEU is an economic organisation offering support to bolster members and non-members alike. Through economic cooperation authoritarian linkage increases and incumbent regimes gain the support to survive. Through economic cooperation, of member and non-members economies alike, the EAEU increases prosperity, which reduces the potential for protest. Therefore, the EAEU is an important organisation not necessarily for understanding authoritarian learning, but because it bolsters authoritarian states in the post-Soviet space.

6.2.5. The Union State

Officially known as the Union State of Belarus and Russia, I will refer to it as the Union State here. Grigory Ioffe (2008: 157-160) is correct that the Union State for all the integration rhetoric has not lived up to expectations. Yeltsin talked about integration to placate nationalists and the Belarusian elite has grown accustomed to Belarusian independence. The Union State was created in 1996 and given greater legislative power in economic, political and integration matters by 1998. However, Putin is not keen on the union, and his antipathy towards Lukashenka makes further integration unlikely (Ioffe, G, 2008: 157-160).

Yet, for all the Union State's lack of activity this detracts from the closeness of Russia and Belarus. Although relations have often been difficult with numerous trade wars and gas disputes (Gretskiy, 2018: 157-158) both co-ordinate foreign and security policy. The example of the Union State highlights authoritarian learning, as experience sharing, monthly meetings between ministries and the creation of common legislation²⁷³ occur. During a 2005 Union State meeting, former Russian parliamentary speaker, Boris Gryzlov, advocated collaboration between the Belarusian and Russian authorities on counteracting Colour Revolutions (Veretennikova, 2005). During the 2004 Ukrainian Orange Revolution, representatives from Belarus and Russia discussed the effects of such an event happening in either Belarus or Russia. During the same meeting focus was on how to deal with members of the Belarusian opposition who had been on the Maidan and may instigate protests in Minsk (Standing Committee of the Union State, 2004). To counteract such possibilities, the

²⁷³ Interview with Vadzim Smok – Project Coordinator at the Ostrogorski Centre and Research Fellow at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 25/08/2016, Skype; Interview with Andrei Yahorau – Director for the Centre for European Transformation and Researcher at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 23/08/2016, Skype; Interview with Dzianis Melyantsou – Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Co-ordinator at the Minsk Track-II Initiative, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

Union State agreed to increase collaboration against Colour Revolutions (Standing Committee of the Union State, 2005). This example points to the sharing of best practices on counter-revolutions. In 2016, a new Union State military doctrine specifically addressed the possibility “of a Colour or Arab Revolution” occurring in Belarus and Russia (Standing Committee of the Union State, 2016). Combined Security Council meetings happen biannually. The Union State is a venue for dialogue and regular meetings, pointing to idea exchange and learning.

Although there is limited information about the activities of the Union State there are regular monthly meetings at all ministerial levels and information is regularly shared. Both regimes copy legislation and laws have to be similar and able to operate in both Belarus and Russia. Therefore, the Union State operates to allow the Kremlin and the Belarusian regime to devise best practices to counter threats, collaborate and learn²⁷⁴.

6.2.6. GUAM

Officially GUAM is known as the democracy and economic development-GUAM organisation. GUAM is an acronym of the first letters of each member’s name: Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. However, as Azerbaijan is more authoritarian than the other three states, there are questions to how democratic the organisation is. In Azerbaijan, opposition political parties exist, but elections are flouted so comprehensively the regime wins easily (LaPorte, 2015: 340). For instance, the day before the 2013 presidential election

²⁷⁴ Interview with Vadzim Smok – Project Coordinator at the Ostrogorski Centre and Research Fellow at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 25/08/2016, Skype; Interview with Andrei Yahorau – Director for the Centre for European Transformation and Researcher at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 23/08/2016, Skype; Interview with Dzianis Melyantsou – Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Co-ordinator at the Minsk Track-II Initiative, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

the electoral commission published results where President İlham Əliyev²⁷⁵, got 72.76% (Luhn, 2013), but he actually received nearly 85%. The example highlights how redundant elections are in Azerbaijan.

GUAM, which is supposed to be an alliance of democratic leaning states, involves collaboration between one electoral authoritarian regime and three competitive authoritarian regimes, contributing to authoritarian influences and practices percolating into Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. While GUAM has “shifted into the background” (Kakachia, 2017: 144), it is a dialogue forum where ideas are shared leading to diffusion of authoritarian values. There is coordination between law enforcement and security agencies under the rubric of combating terrorism. Information is vague, but if GUAM is similar to the CIS, CSTO and the SCO then terrorism is a euphemism for protest. A GUAM (2014b) document speaks about non-interference, which resonates with CIS, CSTO and SCO rhetoric. Cooperation on terrorism between member security services and anti-terrorism training exercises and collaboration on training methods (GUAM, 2005; 2012; 2014a; 2016; 2010) occurring. It is hard to gauge if terrorism for GUAM is a euphemism for protesters as in the CIS, CSTO and SCO, but it is likely to be so.

Therefore, it is less obvious that GUAM acts as a venue for dialogue on authoritarian learning. However, as no member is an established democracy, it is probable that the need to exert control remains crucial to the thinking of all four governments. GUAM is not a major post-Soviet organisation, but it does provide sharing of best practices and uses training exercises to determine which tactics work best. Therefore, there is evidence

275 This is the spelling in Azerbaijani. His full name is İlham Heydər oğlu Əliyev.

that like other post-Soviet regional organisations GUAM offers avenues for authoritarian learning.

6.3. The Zapad Exercises: Countering Protests

The Zapad exercises are the Russian and Belarusian military exercises which occur every four years. Each exercise has a mission statement. As seen in chapter four after the 2004 Orange Revolution, the Belarusian regime chose the Polish minority as the “fifth column” which worked with Western states to start a revolution in Belarus. It is why the Zapad-2009 exercises targeted an uprising of the Polish minority and there was even a mock nuclear strike on Warsaw (Dunin, 2009).

Therefore, all Zapad exercises have a mission statement and the Zapad-2013 and Zapad-2017 exercises highlight instances of authoritarian learning. The Zapad-2013 military exercise involved a scenario of terrorists dissipating into urban areas when faced by the Belarusian and Russian armed forces, which was a copy of events in the Arab Spring. Russian interior ministry security services were involved, and gained experience in coercing future protests (Blank, 2015: 9-10). Zapad-2013 allowed the Kremlin and Belarusian regime to draw lessons and adapt to the Russian 2011-2012 protests and Arab Spring (Wilk, 2013; Tharoor, 2017). Lessons learnt from Zapad-2013 were used by the Russian military to annex Crimea (Khalip, 2017: 9).

The Zapad-2017 exercises had a protest component. Three fake states were created: Veyshnorica located in Belarus, Vesbaria in Lithuania and Lubenia in Poland who were funded by Western states to depose Lukashenka (Surana, 2017; Shevchenko, Ant, 2017). Unlike Zapad-2013, the Veyshnorians, Vesbarians and Lubenians were well armed (Khodasevich, 2017: 6; Nesterenko, 2017; Prisyazhnyuk, 2017). While, Zapad-2017 was

defence from Western attack, Veyshnorina gave the Belarusians a learning opportunity. In 2016, the Belarusian military incorporated hybrid warfare into its military doctrine (Sivitskiy, 2016) supposedly against the West. However, the new military doctrine would counter Russian hybrid-war tactics in Ukraine as Veyshnorina could be interpreted as the DPR or the LPR (Sivitski, 2017). Therefore, Zapad-2017 was a test for the Belarusian military to ascertain military effectiveness in hybrid warfare and counter potential Russian hybrid warfare in Belarus. The Zapad exercises highlight learning to counter-revolutions.

6.4. Ties that bind: Inter-elite links in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine

There are large existing networks between the four case studies and these highlight authoritarian learning. By analysing these networks it is possible to ascertain the extent of dialogue, meetings between personnel and government actions. An analysis of networks helps understand the causal links that X does cause Y. By investigating networks, it is possible to build evidence that the four case studies learn. I analyse presidents, presidential administrations, security services, security councils, governments, foreign and internal ministries, ambassadors and business links. These networks highlight the extent of the learning and emphasise that best practices to maintain power are shared.

6.4.1. *Presidents*

Presidential meetings show concealed links and learning. For instance, in the early 1990s, Lukashenka visited Uzbekistan to speak with then Uzbek President Karimov, about Karimov's power consolidation²⁷⁶. A clear learning example is the meetings between Yanukovich and Putin during the Euromaidan between October and December 2013. As

²⁷⁶ Interview with Yauheni Preiherman– Head of the Minsk Tack II Initiative, Head of the Liberal Club in Minsk, 18/08/2016, Coventry.

well as this, the Presidents of the four case studies attended every CHS meeting, giving them a chance to discuss problems and learn.

Putin and Lukashenka consulted in St. Petersburg on April 3, 2017, after widespread protests in Belarus in March (Kot, 2017). After meeting Putin, Lukashenka (2017) spoke about how they had discussed internal issues, although it was unclear what specifically was discussed. The Belarusian regime may have cracked down in March 2017 on protesters to get a meeting with the Kremlin. After all, earlier meeting requests were rejected (UDF.by, 2017a; Gazeta.ru, 2017b), as Lukashenka had not recognised Crimea's annexation and had begun a rapprochement with the West (Hansbury, 2017; Shraibman, 2017e). The March crackdown reassured the Kremlin that the Belarusian government was dependable.

Another example is December 9, 2010, when Medvedev and Lukashenka met in Moscow before a CHS summit. Relations between the Belarusian and Russian authorities had deteriorated in 2010. Medvedev criticised Lukashenka in October (Gazeta.ru, 2010a) and the Russian film *Krestnyi Bat'ska*²⁷⁷ had "spilt political dirt on the Belarusian president" (Korosteleva, E, 2013: 241). Lukashenka and Medvedev discussed cooperation and new oil and gas deals (Gazeta.ru, 2010b; TUT.by, 2010). For the Kremlin, the deal meant Belarus would discontinue its limited reconciliation with the West (Zaitsev, 2010). For the Belarusian regime, it gave the green light for repression after the December 19 presidential elections as Kremlin support meant the Belarusian government no longer had to consider the ramifications of repression and coercion's effect on relations with the EU (Padhol and Marples, 2011: 7). Kremlin support alleviated any repercussions (Wilson, 2011a: 234-235).

²⁷⁷ The translation is "The Godfather." A reference to the Godfather trilogy and depiction of Lukashenka as a mafia boss.

Another instance of support between presidents is when Yanukovich met Putin in Sochi on October 27, 2013. Putin reiterated that if Ukraine signed the EU's association agreement, it could not join the Customs Union²⁷⁸ (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2013d). They met secretly again at a military base near Moscow on November 9, 2013. Putin purportedly promised Yanukovich full support in the 2015 presidential election (Silina, 2013: 1) and a better loan than the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and EU (Gorchinskaya, 2013) could offer.

At a meeting in Moscow on December 17, 2013, the Kremlin offered Bankova support by buying Eurobonds worth \$15 billion (Eremenko et al. 2013: 1) which would pay off some of Ukraine's vast debt (Gorchinskaya and Marchak, 2013). The loan came in tranches, allowing the Kremlin to stop payment if Bankova did not follow Russian diktats, like clearing the Maidan. The loan linked Ukraine closer to Russia, allowing the Kremlin to exert further leverage on Bankova (Pasochnik, 2013: 1).

On January 8, 2014, Yanukovich met Putin at Valdai agreeing that Bankova would clear the Maidan and issue "repressive laws" (Leshchenko, S, 2014d). These were the dictatorship laws of January 16, 2014, which copied, and were even taken verbatim (Koshkina, 2015a: 173), from earlier Belarusian and Russian legislation (Coynash, 2014; Wilson, 2014a; Snyder, 2014). The Kremlin offered Bankova support using Kremlin actors in Kyiv. The Kremlin and Bankova worked together to create the dictatorship laws, giving Bankova the powers to end the Euromaidan (Leshchenko, S, 2014d). While these failed as it re-invigorated demonstrations, the Euromaidan is replete with secret meetings between Yanukovich and Putin.

²⁷⁸ This was the Eurasian Customs Union of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia and was the precursor of the EAEU.

Face-to-face meetings do not need to occur. The telephone conversation remains an important tool to share information. During the recent 2018 Armenian protests, Lukashenka spoke with President Armen Sargsyan, with Sargsyan providing information on events in Yerevan. Sargsyan and Lukashenka “agreed on a schedule for further action” (President.gov.by, 2018), a situation alluded to by Lukashenka (2018a; 2018b) at his National Assembly address and when meeting the Zytkevichy District leadership. Lukashenka (2018a; 2018b) stated that he had advised Sargsyan on what to do. Similarly, Sargsyan and Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan held separate telephone conversations with Putin about the Armenian situation (Kremlin.ru, 2018a; 2018b).

Dodon has tried to emulate Putin (Ursu, 2016), stating during the 2016 presidential election, that he wanted to be “a dictatorial leader, the same as Putin” and “Moldova immediately needs an iron fist, a strong vertical of power” (Nemtsova, 2016). Dodon has praised Lukashenka, seeing him as an example to follow (Gubarevich, 2017), and at a meeting with Lukashenka in Chişinău in April 2018, Dodon stated that he was “envious” of Belarus and that “we would have a dictatorship as you have” (Levchenko, M, 2018).

Presidents regularly meet one another or are in frequent contact, allowing them to impart information to each other. As seen with the meetings of Medvedev and Lukashenka, or Putin and Yanukovich they offer support to one another. This is particularly so for the Kremlin, as it supported Lukashenka in his 2010 re-election and the repression that followed. Similarly, the Kremlin gave financial support to Bankova, as well as giving it the legislative powers to end the Maidan.

6.4.2. Presidential Administrations

Presidential administrations play different roles in the cases. Moldova is a parliamentary republic with a weak presidency, so the presidential administration does not

have a significant role. By contrast, in Belarus, the presidential administration is the main state institution devising legislation and helping Lukashenka formulate his will²⁷⁹.

Head of the Russian presidential administration, Sergei Naryshkin (2008-2011), visited Chişinău, meeting PCRM leader Voronin, to discuss the Moldovan political situation in 2010, and discussing how Voronin could form a government (Savina, 2010). The Ukrainian presidential administration provides examples of political collaboration with the Kremlin. Viktor Medvedchuk has been involved in most Ukrainian regimes has consistently been close to Putin, with Medvedev's daughter having Putin as a god-father (Roldugin, 2013). Medvedchuk was labelled the "main lobbyist of Russia's interests in Ukraine" (Silina, 2003). During a meeting with Putin, Medvedchuk discussed Ukraine's situation and which candidates Russia could support in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections (Zaets, 2003: 2). During 2004, Medvedchuk met Kremlin representatives to discuss the Orange protests (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2004a) and he remains the Kremlin's man in Ukraine (Kanygin, 2018), in direct contact with Putin (LB.ua, 2017d).

Links between personnel in the presidential administrations remain acute with meetings regularly happening and the discussion of ideas and practices also a consistent occurrence. There is strong evidence that the presidential administrations in the case studies precipitate learning. It may partially explain why Moldova is a competitive authoritarian regime, as it had a weak presidential administration.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Alexei Pikulik – Academic Director at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2016, Minsk.

6.4.3. The Security Services

Belarusian and Russian security services personnel have close ties²⁸⁰. Until 2015 the Belarusian security forces did not have a training school, so personnel went to Moscow which increased links with the FSB²⁸¹. However, even though Belarus now has its own school, it only offers a few courses, so any KDB officer wishing to progress must go to the FSB's Moscow school²⁸². Many Belarusian security personnel are janissaries (Kalinkina, 2014; Kryvoi, 2011) being born or educated in Russia. The Janissaries were elite Ottoman soldiers who were taken from Christian lands of the Ottoman Empire, converted to Islam, trained as elite army soldiers and then sent back to govern the lands of their birth. In regards to the Belarusian 'janissaries,' they tend to be from Russia and have a limited affiliation to Belarus and an affinity to the interests of Moscow.

The Belarusian military also trains in Moscow further solidifying links with Russia²⁸³. The KDB remains closely allied to the Kremlin seeing integration with the West as a threat to its own interests²⁸⁴. Most KDB officers have a military background, and so they have already been to the Russian military academy²⁸⁵. These ties bind. However, ties are probably not limited to just interaction between Belarus and Russia.

²⁸⁰ Interview with Alyksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 08/08/2016, Warsaw.

²⁸¹ Interview with Joerg Forbrig – Director, Fund for Belarus Democracy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, 16/09/2016, Skype.

²⁸² Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

²⁸³ Interview with Joerg Forbrig – Director, Fund for Belarus Democracy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, 16/09/2016, Skype.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Anna Maria Dyer – Head of the Eastern European Programme at the Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych (The Polish Institute of International Relations), 17/05/2017, Warsaw.

²⁸⁵ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko created inter-departmental groups between Ukraine and Russia. One of the groups created was between the SBU and FSB (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2008b), which existed until 2014 and led to collaboration between both security services. Valeriy Khoroshkovskyy (2010-2012) admitted modelling the SBU on the FSB (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2010e; 2010a). SBU Head Oleksandr Yakimenko (2013-2014) highlights the closeness of the SBU and the FSB, as Bankova allowed Yakimenko to lead the SBU even though Yakimenko served in the Russian army until 1998 (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2013d).

During the Colour Revolutions the KDB claimed to have tracked American money in a Ukrainian bank account to be used for a Colour Revolution in Belarus by Serbian, Georgian and Ukrainian activists known for precipitating revolutions (Kovalenko, 2006a: 1; 2006b: 2). KDB Head Styspan Sukharenka (2005-2007) believed Poland and the Baltic States were funding a Colour Revolution (Provalinskaya, 2007; Ankudo, 2006a; 2006b; Gryl', 2005b). The KDB 'found' a plot between the ZPB and Polish secret services (Ankudo, 2007). Claiming the new ZPB leader, Andzelika Borys, was financed by the Polish government²⁸⁶ to start a revolution, the Belarusian government imposed former leader, Tadeusz Kruczkowski and split the ZPB into pro and anti-regime factions. Belarus expelled two Polish diplomats and closed down the Polish Scientific Society "Dialogue" (Wilson, 2011a: 214). Sukharenka stated the KDB acted on FSB information that a "flower revolution" would happen in Belarus (Snegin, 2005: 2). At a Moscow press conference, KDB Head Vadzim Zaitsau (2008-2012) spoke about how the KDB and FSB shared anti-terror practices (Budkevich, 2012).

One example of KDB and FSB collaboration was the FSB's abduction of Pavlo Hryb in Belarus. Hryb, the son of a Ukrainian border guard was lured to Homel in August 2017

²⁸⁶ The ZPB received \$200,000 annually from the Polish Community Association (Stowarzyszenie Wspólnota Polska ((SWP)) (Wilson, 2011a: 214), and the KDB linked this to Polish attempts at regime-change in Belarus.

after talking with a girl on VK²⁸⁷. She was forced by the FSB to entice Pavlo to Homel. Upon arrival, Pavlo was arrested and charged with planning a terrorist act (Gordonua.com, 2017b; 2017c; BBC Ukrainian Service, 2017a; 2017b; Belsat, 2017a; 2017b; TSN.ua, 2017). It is hard to believe the KDB was unaware of the FSB's actions, highlighting how integrated they are.

Ukraine has been heavily infiltrated by the FSB. For example, during the 2004 electoral campaign opposition presidential candidate, Viktor Yushchenko was mysteriously poisoned. Two Russians travelling on false passports were arrested. They claimed the Kremlin placed \$200,000 on Yushchenko's head (Wilson, 2005a: 100). Yushchenko was poisoned by dioxin²⁸⁸ (Sinovitz, 2016). There is no concrete evidence of Russian involvement, but laboratory twelve in Moscow during the Soviet Union made poisons (Volchek, 2009) and judging by the number of poisonings of Russian opposition activists, laboratory twelve was quietly reactivated in the early 2000s (Harding, 2016b; Kramer, A, 2016a). Dioxin is hard to obtain and with laboratory twelve being the closest provider to Kyiv, it is likely someone in the Kremlin approved dispatch.

SBU head Valentyn Nalyvaichenko (2006-2010) faced constant Russian interference, with the Kremlin trying to get control over Ukrainian politicians and institutions (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2007; 2008a). During the Euromaidan there is evidence the Kremlin gave weapons to Bankova (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2014f). However, even before the Euromaidan, the FSB was heavily involved in Ukraine and some SBU members were close to or worked for the FSB (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2015a; 2015b). Under Yanukovich, the SBU operated as if it "should not notice its own existence" (Kurkov, 2014: 171). FSB infiltration was extensive and the SBU did not oppose Russian operations in Crimea or Donbas

²⁸⁷ VK, or VKontakte, is the Russian language version of Facebook and is popular across the post-Soviet region.

²⁸⁸ These are highly toxic chemical compounds, like Agent Orange or Yellow Rain.

(Kapsamun, 2014; Melkozerova, 2015b). Serhiy L'ovochkin ran a bank – used by the FSB – for Russian operations in Ukraine. L'ovochkin was associated with Russian criminal gangs and used these groups to help the FSB with operations in Ukraine (Ivanchenko, 2012).

When Yanukovich fled in February 2014, the FSB took, or destroyed, all information which weakened the SBU (Miller, Christ, 2014). The SBU was further affected by 1,391 personnel leaving for Russia after Crimea's annexation²⁸⁹ and the discovery that the second-in-command of the Anti-Terrorist Operation²⁹⁰ was a Russian spy (TSN.ua, 2016b). During the Euromaidan, SBU factions sent information to Russia about protester and regime tactics and failures²⁹¹. Many Berkut personnel since 2014 have worked for the Russian security services, and were used against protesters in Moscow in 2019 (Bershidsky, 2019d).

As well as information being sent from Kyiv to Moscow, Russian FSB agents were in central Kyiv offering support to Ukrainian security forces (Balachuk, 2018). It is unknown if the FSB has infiltrated other post-Soviet security forces, but the SBU were heavily penetrated. The FSB has constructed ties with politicians across the post-Soviet space, to entice politicians with monetary incentives to pass information to the FSB and act as pro-Russian candidates during elections (Soldatov and Borogan, 2010: 213).

There is evidence of learning between the security services in the case studies, although it is dominated by the FSB. Certainly, the Kremlin uses the FSB to infiltrate other regimes and use personnel from the security services of the other case studies for Russian

²⁸⁹ A list of names can be found here: <https://psb4ukr.org/532062-spisok-kolishnix-spivrobotnikiv-sb-ukra%D1%97ni-yaki-zradili-prisyazi-i-perejshli-na-bik-voroga/#more-532062> (in Ukrainian).

²⁹⁰ At the time (2016) this is what the Ukrainian government called the Donbas conflict Donbas for political reasons.

²⁹¹ Interview with Eric Chenoweth – Co-Director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE), 14/11/2017, Skype.

interests. This is particularly the case in Ukraine. Information is limited about the SIS in Moldova, but there is extensive collaboration between the FSB and the KDB providing evidence of cooperation and learning.

6.4.4. Security Councils

There is evidence that the Russian and Ukrainian Security Councils hold joint cooperation meetings (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2001a). Belarusian Security Council Head Henadz' Nyavyhlas (2001-2008) increased cooperation between the KDB, FSB, interior and defence ministries to counter Western sponsored Colour Revolutions (Mazaeva, 2004). The Kremlin and the Belarusian regime signed a cooperation agreement for their Security Council's to collaborate (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2008). Nyavyhlas's successor, Leanid Mal'tsau (2009-2013), met his Russian counterpart Nikolai Patrushev twice in 2012 to discuss cooperation and experience sharing (BELTA, 2012a; 2012b). The Russian and Belarusian Security Council's regularly meet to discuss national security issues and share practices (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2017). Russian Security Council head Igor' Ivanov (2004-2007), met Ukrainian Parliamentary Chairman Moroz (2006-2007) to discuss political cooperation in 2006 (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2006). In 2013, Patrushev visited Kyiv to discuss with Andriy Klyuyev (2012-2014) about joint Security Council cooperation (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2013b). There is evidence of cooperation between the security councils of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. Information about the Moldovan Security Council is limited. Although under Dodon the Security Council has become more vocal, with Dodon (2017d) in 2017, stating that the government should not restrict integration with Russia. However, the available data in the other three case studies highlights that this institution is important for learning.

6.4.5. Governments

Information about the collaboration of prime ministers is limited and it appears that the role of the prime minister in the four case studies is to deal with domestic issues, thereby limiting their role as an external actor. However, there is evidence of cooperation at the prime ministerial level, although admittedly limited. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov (2004-2007) reportedly gave the Kremlin's approval to Lukashenka to overturn the Belarusian constitution and remove presidential term-limits (Gryl', 2004). On June 6, 2017, Moldovan Prime Minister Pavel Filip (2016-2019) visited Minsk and spoke with personnel in the Belarusian regime. Although most talk was about trade, Filip held secret meetings (Otkroi Novost', 2017).

Inter-governmental commissions are a good place to meet. There is one particularly important inter-governmental commission, the Ukrainian-Russian Intergovernmental Commission which often discusses political cooperation (Knyazhanskiy, 2006; Myanovskiy, 2003: 2; Semenchenko, 2007; Zanuda, 2012). The commission has been used for closed meetings and during the Euromaidan, the commission offered economic support to Bankova (BBC Ukrainian Service, 2013; Bilousova, 2013).

While, information is lacking about levels of cooperation between parliaments and political parties there is evidence highlighting that both structures offer avenues for collaboration. This is particularly so regarding political parties, where agreements between political parties provide dialogue and information sharing. Therefore political parties, and to a lesser extent parliaments, aid learning for the four case studies.

Parliaments and political parties are important for learning. For example, the Russian Federation Council and Belarusian parliament meet regularly (Khilko, 2016). Deputies on the Committee of the State Duma for CIS Eurasian Integration and Relations

with Compatriots regularly meet with representatives from other parliaments²⁹². In 2016, the Belarusian parliament created a committee on international affairs concentrating on the CIS states²⁹³.

Within the four case studies, since 2005, United Russia had an agreement with Party of Regions (Liga.net, 2005) and the agreement was expanded in 2007, to allow for “coordinating our political positions, exchanging experience in the election campaign” (Liga.net, 2007). In 2010, the PDM signed a cooperation agreement with United Russia, providing consultations and visiting delegations. The PDM is supposedly a pro-European and, at the time, a governing party, yet it retained close ties with United Russia²⁹⁴. The PSRM President, Zinaida Greceanîi, met Prime Minister Medvedev to discuss cooperating with United Russia (Vlas, 2017b). An agreement was signed in June 2017 to improve inter-parliamentary relations (A-TV.md, 2017; Bloknot-Moldova.md, 2017). Inter-party collaboration is one avenue for learning.

6.4.6. Foreign and Internal Affairs Ministries

The four defence ministries will not be investigated as the armed forces in three of the case studies have an underfunded military. Therefore, it is unlikely the military are used against protesters. For all the talk of funding and engagement in the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts, the Russian army had its budget cut quietly in 2016 by 5% due to a weak economy (Galeotti, 2016). By contrast, RosGvardiya is better equipped than the Russian army (Luzin, 2017). It is a similar scenario in Belarus, where the army was scaled down (Bohdan, 2017b;

²⁹² Information can be found here: <http://www.duma.gov.ru/international/info/> (in Russian).

²⁹³ Information can be found here: <http://www.house.gov.by/ru/deputies-ru/viewCommittee/komissija-po-komissija-po-komissija-po-komissija-po-komissija-po-komissija-po-komissija-po-po-71/> (in Russian).

²⁹⁴ It governs alone but with the support of independents and the European People’s Party of Moldova (PEPM).

2017d). While the Belarusian army has seen an increase in numbers recently (Wilson, 2018: 11) the army remains hostage to regime whims and the need for the Belarusian authorities to continually adapt to ever-changing scenarios. Police numbers remain large with close to 325,000 militsiya for a population of ten million, which excludes other “sprawling” law enforcement agencies (Charnysh, 2016). Similarly, the Moldovan army is underfinanced (Popșoi, 2017c), whereas the *Fulger*²⁹⁵, the elite interior ministry troops, are well equipped for a force of 500 (Minzarari, 2014). Yanukovich stripped the Ukrainian army of equipment, personnel and training facilities. His last two Defence Ministers Dmytro Salamatin and Pavlo Lebedev had ties to Russian military intelligence (Euromaidan Press, 2014). Yanukovich instead relied on interior ministry forces, like the *Berkut* (Jacobs, 2014). As interior and foreign ministries are better funded than defence ministries there is likely more collaboration between ministries, which points to learning.

Russian Interior Minister Vladimir Rushailo (1999-2001) met his Ukrainian counterpart, Yuriy Kravchenko (1999-2001), to discuss coordinating law enforcement agencies, focusing on “exchange of operational information” (Novye Izvestiya, 2000: 2), an indirect reference to the sharing of best practices. In 2005, all Russian and Ukrainian Internal Affairs Generals met to discuss conducting “joint operations and investigations” (Falaleev, 2005: 3), highlighting the use of training exercises to determine appropriate tactics for exercising control.

Belarusian Interior Minister Anatol’ Kulyashou (2009-2012) worked for the Russian police in Moscow, before joining the Minsk police in 2008 (Tut.by, 2009), meaning that he had significant links to Russia and the Russian interior ministry. At the 43rd Council for Ministers of Internal Affairs (CMIA) at the CIS, Belarusian Interior Minister Ihar Shunevich

²⁹⁵ The *Fulger* (English – thunderbolt) are the elite unit of the Moldovan Interior Ministry.

(2012-) stated that delegates should cooperate against “negative trends in various CIS countries” (Gladkaya, 2015) a reference to the Euromaidan and Colour Revolutions. Since March 2015, former Ukrainian interior minister Zakharchenko has worked for the Kremlin (Bayazitova, 2015), allowing the Kremlin to get direct experience from the failure of Bankova during the Euromaidan. Belarusian Interior Minister Deputy Mikalai Mel’chanka (2014-) spoke with Russian interior ministry personnel about the Euromaidan (Burmenko, 2014), although what was actually discussed is unknown. Similarly, Belarusian Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makiey (2012-) met CSTO foreign ministers in 2014 to discuss Ukraine (Kamneva, 2014: 5).

In 2006, Moldovan Deputy Foreign Minister Eugenia Kistruga (2006-2009) met her Russian counterpart Grigoriy Karasin (2005-) to finalise cooperation between the ministries (Point.md, 2006a). Moldovan foreign ministers have consistently balanced between the West and Russia. Andrei Galbur met American Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland on the side lines of the Munich security conference to discuss Moldovan political developments (Deschide.md, 2016). In 2015 and 2016, Galbur met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to re-introduce political dialogue between the Moldovan and Russian regimes which had been restricted after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (AVA.md, 2016). Since the recall of Moldova’s ambassador to Russia, Andrei Neaguța (2017-), this limited dialogue has dissipated (Cojocari, 2017).

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Anatoliy Zlenko (2000-2003) at a meeting on security with Russian foreign minister Igor’ Ivanov in 2003 went beyond diplomatic niceties (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2003a). Before becoming Foreign Minister again, Hryshchenko (2010-2012), met Russian elites (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2008b) and nine days after being appointed he signed a cooperation agreement with the Russian foreign ministry (Ukrainskaya Pravda,

2010b; 2010c; 2010h), pointing to Hryshchenko conducting negotiations before becoming foreign minister. In 2013, foreign minister Leonid Kozhara (2012-2014) met Lavrov to discuss Russian-Ukrainian relations and Ukraine becoming a Customs Union member (Interfax-Ukraine, 2013a; 2013b; UNIAN, 2013).

At a meeting with Belarusian Foreign Minister Ural Latypau (1998-2000) Russian Foreign Minister Igor' Ivanov stated that the Kremlin would support Belarus against Western pressure (Vedomosti, 2000), which is a reference to Russian bolstering for the Belarusian regime. This was evidently continual Russian policy as Lavrov offered Belarus support in international organisations (Pivovar, 2012a). As with Belarus, the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministry colleges meet regularly, allowing information to be exchanged (Strokan, 2003: 10; Kravchenko, V, 2003).

Russian First Deputy Foreign Ministers like Vyacheslav Trubnikov (2000-2004), Valeriy Loshchinin (2002-2005) and Andrei Denisov (2006-2013) are *Kuratory*²⁹⁶ in the post-Soviet region (Neglinina, 2004; Bai, 2006: 3) collecting information on other post-Soviet states. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigoriy Karasin held secret meetings in Chişinău with all Moldovan political elites, but analysts believe he only met President Dodon in March, 2017 (Gamova, 2017: 1).

Analysis of the foreign and interior ministries offers valuable information about networks. There is support given, primarily by the Kremlin, to other regimes, as well as venues to share information and training exercises conducted to ascertain which methods are suitable for a given situation. All available evidence points to significant levels of learning in the foreign and interior ministries of the four case studies.

²⁹⁶ See footnote 8.

6.4.7. Ambassadors

Belarusian ambassador to Russia Vladimir Grigor'ev (1997-2006) regularly met Russian ministers to discuss the Colour Revolutions and how the Belarusian and Russian regimes could stop them (Gryl', 2005a). His successor, Ihar Petryshenka (2012-) met Russian State Secretary Grigoriy Karasin, about political issues and coordinating foreign policy (Pivovar, 2012b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2012). Former Russian ambassador, Aleksandr Surikov (2006-2018), worked closely with the Belarusian presidential administration (Reshetnikova, 2006: 1; Tolkacheva, 2018). His successor Mikhail Babich (2018-2019), as well as being Ambassador, was special representative for trade, and Putin's personal representative in Belarus. Having been a member of the Russian Security Council when the decision to annexe Crimea was made (TUT.by, 2018) his role was seen as keeping the Belarusian regime close to the Kremlin (UDF.by, 2018) although he failed. Ukrainian Ambassador Mykailo Yezhel (2013-2015) often met Belarusian regime personnel secretly (Kryat, 2014: 2; Mendeleev, 2010). Even when Ukraine had no ambassador to Belarus Ukrainian embassy officials met Belarusian interior ministry personnel to exchange views (Lavnekevich, 2017).

Russian ambassador to Ukraine Ivan Aboimov (1999-2001) built a strong relationship with Ukrainian President Kuchma (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2001a). His successor, Viktor Chernomyrdin (2001-2009), reportedly recommended possible prime ministers (Rudenko, G, 2001: 2). Chernomyrdin's appointment emphasises that the Kremlin saw the relationship with Ukraine as very important, as Chernomyrdin had been Russian Prime Minister and founder of Gazprom. Chernomyrdin was labelled by the Ukrainian opposition

as the real president (Sokolovskaya, 2001: 1). He told Kuchma to find a successor rather than seek an unconstitutional third term (Romanova, L, 2002: 2).

Allegedly the Russian ambassador to Ukraine Mikhail Zurabov (2009-2016) had close business ties to Poroshenko (Argumenty Nedeli, 2014: 2) having known Poroshenko since Poroshenko was foreign minister (Dergachev et al (K and K). 2016). Zurabov was considered too loyal to Poroshenko by some in the Kremlin (Dergachev et al (M and R). 2016). Zurabov lobbied Ukrainian elites for Poroshenko's candidacy and for the Kremlin to accept it (Dergachev et al (K and K). 2016). He often held late night meetings with Poroshenko to discuss Ukrainian domestic affairs (LB.ua, 2014a).

Belarusian ambassador to Moldova, Vasil' Sakovich (1999-2009), often met parliamentarians to increase "inter-parliamentary cooperation" between Belarus and Moldova (Nezavisimaya Moldova, 2005: 5). Ukrainian ambassador to Moldova, Serhiy Pyrozhkov (2007-2014) was invited to the Moldovan Security Council to discuss the Euromaidan, and the failure of Bankova to deal with protesters (Tristan, 2014). By inviting Pyrozhkov, the government was getting in-depth information.

Viktor Chernomyrdin orchestrated deals giving Russian state-owned companies – and by association the Kremlin – control of key Ukrainian assets (Izvestiya, 2004: 1) forcing the new Orange government to work with the Kremlin as it could not renege on the deals (Prokopchuk, 2004: 2). Ukrainian ambassador to Russia Mykola Byloblots'kyi (1999-2005) had close relationships with Kremlin personnel (Kipiani, 2002), while enhancing political and economic links between the Russian and Ukrainian regimes (Gamova, 2004; Andreev, 2005; Timoshenko, 2001: 9).

During the 2010 Belarusian protests, Russian ambassador Aleksandr Surikov (2006-2018) supported the Belarusian authorities, stating that the government had to use repression (Gazeta.ru, 2010c). He was involved in policy in Belarus (Lavnekevich, 2012), offering support during the 2010 protests and stating that he “respected” Lukashenka for rolling back democracy after 1994 (EurAsia Daily, 2018). Surikov negotiated loans from the Eurasian Bank and Russia in 2013 and 2016 to support the Belarusian economy (Klasovskiy, 2013; TUT.by, 2016c) emphasising that authoritarian regimes bolster one another.

Ukrainian ambassador to Belarus, Viktor Tykhonov, stated that Ukraine should become more like Belarus as the Belarusian regime survived protests and was stable (Unian.info, 2011). Belarusian ambassador to Ukraine Valyantsin Velicheka (2011-2016) after the 2012 parliamentary elections praised Yanukovich for free elections, even though there was electoral malpractice (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2012e). After 2014, Velicheko did not help Bankova locate Yanukovich allies who fled to Belarus (UDF.by, 2014).

Chernomyrdin forged close ties with Bankova and opposition groups (Zerkalo Nedeli, 2009). Mikhail Zurabov, like Chernomyrdin, was a channel between Bankova, the Kremlin and the Ukrainian opposition (Kravchenko, V, 2010). Zurabov threatened that if Ukraine did not renew the Kharkiv Treaty – which was signed in 2010 – Russia would withdraw funding and Ukrainian debt would spiral (Podrobnosti.ua, 2010) and that if Ukraine signed the EU association agreement it would need to discuss red lines with the Kremlin (LB.ua, 2013). Zurabov worked with DNR and LNR representatives before being recalled to Moscow (Andriopol'skaya and Dergachev, 2014; Kirillov, 2016).

The pressure that Russian ambassadors put on Ukraine also occurs in Moldova. The Russian embassy in Moldova is large; as one interviewee argued Russia does not need such

a big embassy. However, a big diplomatic contingent allows the Kremlin to infringe on Moldovan statehood and support the Transnistrian government²⁹⁷. Ambassador Pavel Petrovskiy (1999-2003) stated that it was important Russia had a friendly Moldova and only Russia could find a solution to the Transnistrian conflict. His successor, Yuriy Zubakov (2003-2007), reminded the Moldovan authorities that Russia was Moldova's main creditor and that thousands of Moldovans were guest workers in Russia (Amambaeva, 2004: 16) implying that Moldova should remain close to Russia.

The Russian ambassador, Valeriy Kuzmin (2007-2012) was thanked by President Voronin for support during the 2009 protests (Gazeta.ru, 2009) and Kuzmin has continued to support politicians who could become pro-Russian candidates at elections, like Dodon (Nezavisimaya Moldova, 2011b: 4). In 2011, Kuzmin stated that if Moldova joined the EAEU gas prices for Moldova would be reduced (Nezavisimaya Moldova, 2011a: 1).

Russian ambassador Farit Mukhametshin (2012-) has continued to influence Moldova. As Moldova negotiated the EU association agreement, Mukhametshin stated that further EU integration would lead to difficulties in trade with Russia. As Moldovan trade with Russia was significant, the Moldovan government should, according to Mukhametshin, be aware of the possible economic harm (Logos-Press, 2014). Mukhametshin indicated that most Moldovans wanted Russian integration and the government should accept this (Logos-Press, 2015; Moldavskie Vedomosti, 2016b: 4). Mukhametshin argued that the EU association agreement would not make Moldova richer and that the EAEU was a better option for the Moldovan economy (Demidetskiy, 2017: 2).

²⁹⁷ Interview with Mark Mazeranu – Researcher at Rutgers University and the Universität Mannheim, Chişinău, 14/04/2017.

Mukhametshin forged close ties with political elites in Gagauzia (Moldavskie Vedomosti, 2016a: 9). Inter-governmental cooperation occurs between the Kremlin and the government of Transnistria and there is a special Russian representative and ambassador at large in Tiraspol. Russian influence in Gagauzia and Transnistria means Moldova can never fully integrate with the EU (Shimanovskaya, 2017: 10).

On June 28, 2017, the Russian, Belarusian and Kazakh embassies arranged a conference in the Radisson Blu Leograd Hotel in Chişinău. President Dodon, former presidents, prime ministers and leaders of pro-Russian political parties attended, where Moldovan representatives met with CIS employees to discuss Moldova's integration in post-Soviet regional organisations (Materik.ru, 2017). In August 2017, President Dodon and Mukhametshin met to discuss Moldovan domestic issues and how to improve cooperation (Gazeta.ru, 2017a).

Ambassador networks are extensive, working with both incumbent regimes and the opposition. As ambassadors can forge strong ties they work extensively with regime personnel and impart knowledge and provide support. While Russian ambassadors have been the most effective at this, the other three case studies do cooperate. Therefore ambassadors provide opportunities for learning and offer support, thereby strengthening authoritarian regimes.

6.4.8. Business

Through trade and investment, business elites links states together, helping regimes keep control. While this may not induce authoritarianism, it maintains the current system, so business elites are important for authoritarian networks. Russian businessman and former KGB resident in London, Aleksandr Lebedev, had extensive business links in Ukraine, giving him a say in Ukrainian politics (Bondarenko, 2005). The Ukrainian gas

apparatchiks were considered more pro-Russian than others in the Yanukovich regime, and would regularly conduct their own policy with the Kremlin (Fris, 2011). The group's leaders Firtash, L'ovochkin, Khoroshkovskyy and Yuriy Boyko were labelled by former Party of Regions deputy, Taras Chornovil, the "Moscow quartet" (Kondratov, 2010). With their business interests largely in Russia, they advocated for closer Ukrainian integration with Russia²⁹⁸. Boyko – who is now the former leader of the political party, the Opposition Bloc – ignored the ban of flying directly from Ukraine to Russia to visit the St. Petersburg economic forum, where he met Russian representatives to re-start trade between Russia and Ukraine (Gayevskiy, 2018). Firtash and L'ovochkin through ownership of RosUkrEnergo have close ties to the Kremlin as RosUkrEnergo is a joint Russian and Ukrainian partnership (Leshchenko, S, 2016). Poroshenko has close links to Konstantyn Hryhoryshyn who made his fortune in Russia and has questionable links to the Kremlin (Sukhov, 2016c). Poroshenko, Tymoshenko and Akhmetov allegedly have links with Russian mobster Semion Mogilevich (Sukhov, 2017d). Poroshenko had two factories in Lipetsk, Russia, and it was not until 2017 – when the Russian tax authorities seized the factory in lieu of tax payments – that Poroshenko closed the factory. Even as late as 2015, Poroshenko was considering building a third factory in Lipetsk (Skibitska and Popenko, 2018). After 25 years of integration and with elites on the whole retaining power – although their influence fluctuates – it is understandable that there are many close links between Russian and Ukrainian elites²⁹⁹.

Plahotniuc has business interests in Russia and Ukraine (Całus, 2016b). Since the 1990s he has been involved in exporting wine to Russia (Całus, 2016b), but like Poroshenko, he has fallen foul of the Kremlin for not supporting Russian policy leading to his prosecution

²⁹⁸ Interview with Irena Taranyuk – Journalist at the BBC Ukraine Service, 30/08/2016, London.

²⁹⁹ Interview with Irena Taranyuk – Journalist at the BBC Ukraine Service, 30/08/2016, London.

for the murder of two people in London (Baisul, 2017). Never mind that the British authorities have not named Plahotniuc as a suspect, a court in Moscow's Basmani district accused Plahotniuc of the two murders. However, even with the court order Plahotniuc retains business interests in Russia. During the banking scandal, head of the anti-corruption centre, Viorel Chetraru, refused to investigate links between Plahotniuc and the Russian mafia (Campeanu, 2013). However, links between oligarch Vlad Filat and the Russian mafia (Kontsyu, 2010: 1) were investigated. A final Moldovan politician, Renato Usatîi, made his fortune in Russia through ownership of VPT-NN, which supplies track to Russian railways linking Usatîi to the Russian political elite (Nuttall, 2017). As with Plahotniuc and Filat, Usatîi has links to the Russian mafia (Timpul.md, 2013). In 2018, a Moldovan court brought a case against Usatîi because of links to an organised Russian-Moldovan criminal money-making scheme (Cheban, 2018).

Russian oligarch Petr Aven as head of Al'fa-Bank has investments in Belarusian banks and Al'fa-Bank Ukraine is a subsidiary of the parent Russian bank (Timtchenko, 2017). Al'fa-Bank has a stake in Ukrainian telecommunications firm Altime (Mikhailenko, 2018). Russian oligarchs Denis Novozhenov, Roman Abramovich, Aleksandr Abramov and Aleksandr Frolov bought shares in Privat group, which included PrivatBank, thereby having an interest in one of Ukraine's biggest companies and at the very least a business relationship with Privat's owner, Kolomois'kyi (Delo.ua, 2016). Mikhail Gutsierev who has links to Kolomois'kyi – having bought Moskomprivatbank – also bought Sberbank's Ukrainian subsidiary with fellow Russian oligarch Grigoriy Guselnikov (Rucompromat.ru, 2017), increasing Russian interests in the Ukrainian banking sector. Mikhail Fridman who part owns Al'fa-Bank controls mobile communication company Kyivstar (Kotov and Glazkova, 2015). Andrei Melnichenko as the owner of EuroChem controls 60% of the

Ukrainian market for fertiliser, so Ukraine relies heavily on the company to fertilise crops (Kupfer, 2018). With the Donbas conflict links between Russian and Ukrainian business remain murky³⁰⁰.

Russian and Belarusian economies are highly interlinked, with investment flowing into Belarus from Russia since the Soviet collapse (Sekhovich, 2010). Viktor Veselberg owns a controlling stake in Belarusian Cosmos-TV. Leonid Mikhelson controls the large Belarusian Molodechno tube rolling factory. Gennadiy Timchenko controls the Belarusian oil and gas company, Yangpur and Vagit Alekperov – the owner of Lukoil – has many investments in Belarus (Vernigorodskiy, 2014). Other investments involve Mikhail Fridman’s ownership of the Mozyr oil refinery, and Aleksei Mordashev’s control of steel company ServerstalBel. German Khan controls many Belarusian retail and telecommunications companies, and Roman Abramovich has a 50% stake in Belarusian pharmaceutical company, Biocad (Adashkevich, 2016).

There is only limited direct investment in Moldova from Russian sources³⁰¹. However, Moldova relies almost exclusively on Russian gas pumped through Transnistria. Russian state-owned company Gazprom owns 50% of Moldovagaz (Shagina, 2018). Moldova is heavily reliant on Russian oil and gas to keep the lights on and the economy functioning which puts pressure Moldovan regimes to accommodate demands from the Kremlin and leave Russia’s orbit. Transnistria uses even more gas than Moldova, and as Moldova has *de jure* control over Transnistria it is liable to pay Transnistria’s debt, as well as its own (Najarian, 2017; Vlas, 2017a). This gives Russia leverage over Moldova, and Gazprom’s court

³⁰⁰ Interview with Irena Taranyuk – Journalist at the BBC Ukraine Service, 30/08/2016, London.

³⁰¹ Interview with a specialist on Moldova, who requested anonymity, 09/11/2016.

case against Moldova for unpaid debts (Newsbase, 2017), and the Kremlin's refusal to split Moldovan and Transnsitrain debt increases Russian influence in Moldova (Vlas, 2017a)

Belarus has a number of oligarchs and business people, but investment – particularly from the older generation – is internal. However, there are exceptions. Leanid Volk invested in a Siberian gold mine; Syarhei Bruker ran Mykobank with branches in the Russia's Kaliningrad oblast; Ihar Pinkevicha owned bakeries around Moscow; and Valieryi Shumski invested in Russia (Bel.biz, 2012). The younger generation has its interests in IT and communications investing mostly in the West. However, there is some investment in Russia, as Alyaksei Istomin's company is based in Moscow and Natallya Kulichenko sells equipment in Russia (ProBiznes.io, 2017). Investment by Belarusians in the other three cases is negligible, but business interests in the four cases maintain the current system, helping incumbent governments keep power.

6.5. Russian Influence in Moldova and Ukraine

While Russian leverage in Belarus is acute, Belarus is an established authoritarian regime whereas Moldova and Ukraine are not, so analysing Russian links in Moldova and Ukraine will explain why Moldova and Ukraine have not democratised. The Kremlin maintains interests in Moldova and Ukraine through political elite factions and pseudo-independent entities. Both Moldova and Ukraine show how Russia exerts leverage which is one reason both have not escaped the post-Soviet authoritarian trap.

6.5.1. *Russian Linkage in Moldova*

Moldovan elites often go to Russia for approval of a decision, like former President Petru Lucinschi, who while on holiday in 2000, flew via Moscow to discuss with Putin Russian support for Lucinschi proposed referendum to increase power (Chubchenko, 2000: 3; Tarasov, 2000: 4). This example emphasises the importance of Kremlin backing for

Moldovan politicians. Transnistria which is Moldova's richest region and is Moldova *de facto* independent and financially supported by the Kremlin, destabilises Moldova, keeping it away from NATO and the EU as these organisations do not want members that do not control their territory³⁰². Certainly, with Transnistria as a part of Moldova formally, but outside it in reality, the political uncertainty makes integration with the EU difficult – meaning that Russia becomes the only alternative by default (Orenstein and Mizsei, 2014). Some Moldovan and Ukrainian elites maintained the status-quo between Moldova and Transnistria because they made money by smuggling (Popescu, 2011: 40). Plahotniuc and Poroshenko were involved in a number of alleged smuggling initiatives in Transnistria, with some of their business interests also investing in Transnistria (Kvitka, 2019). Both Plahotniuc and Poroshenko were willing to maintain the status-quo on Transnistria. Transnistria's existence increases Kremlin leverage over Moldova and to a lesser extent Ukraine. A solution cannot happen without Russia, and the Kremlin is satisfied with the status-quo (Popșoi, 2016e).

Gagauzia is another important territory for destabilisation for the Kremlin to use to control Moldova. The Gagauz opposed the Soviet breakup and Moldovan independence. A 1994 agreement stopped a small conflict (Horowitz, 2005: 118) giving the Gagauz autonomy and cultural protection. Areas of 50% or more Gagauz can hold an autonomy referendum (Protsyk, 2010). The Kremlin has used Gagauz autonomy to influence Moldova, by financing Gagauz politicians. During the 2016 Bașkan³⁰³ elections, the Kremlin supported Irina Vlah as

³⁰² Interview with Mark Mazureanu – Researcher at Universität Mannheim and Lecturer at Rutgers University, 14/04/2017, Chișinău.

³⁰³ Bașkan is a Gagauz word closely resembling the Romanian word Guvernator (Governor).

members of the Russian parliament travelled to Comrat³⁰⁴, praising Vlah and criticising the Moldovan government (Severin and Wagner, 2015; Schwartz and Calugareanu, 2015).

Most Gagauz watch Russian media and are susceptible to Russian messages. During elections to the Gagauz parliament, Gagauz voters elect pro-Russian and nationalist Gagauz politicians. In a 2014 referendum – which the Moldovan authorities saw as illegal – 98.4% of the Gagauz populace wanted closer ties with Russia (Caľus, 2014a). After the referendum, the Gagauz government travelled to Moscow to meet Putin and Medvedev (Caľus, 2014c). As Gagauzians do not vote for pro-European parties, the current government ignores them (Popșoi, 2016c). Gagauz politicians remain pro-Russian and support Russian initiatives³⁰⁵.

With attention focused on Eastern Ukraine, the region around Odessa and Bessarabia became a possible venue for further destabilisation in 2014. The Kremlin played on pro-Russian sentiments among Gagauz, Bulgarians, Moldovans, Albanians and Russians (Sibirtsev, 2014; Yaroshenko, 2015). Gagauz representatives met a group of Russians in Odessa to discuss protests in Gagauzia³⁰⁶. Kremlin influence in Gagauzia and Transnistria are ways the Kremlin maintains leverage in Moldova.

Some Moldovan politicians have a close affinity with Moscow, like President Dodon³⁰⁷, although his rhetoric has been mitigated by inaction on actual integration (Caľus, 2016a). Under Dodon Moldova became an observer at the EAEU and Dodon wants to stop further Moldovan integration with the EU (Falyakov, 2017; Gordonua.com, 2017a).

³⁰⁴ The *capital* of Gagauzia.

³⁰⁵ Interview with a specialist on Moldovan politics who requested anonymity, 17/05/2017.

³⁰⁶ Interview with a specialist on Moldovan politics who requested anonymity, 20/04/2017.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Mark Mazureanu – Researcher at Universität Mannheim and Lecturer at Rutgers University, 14/04/2017, Chișinău.

Constitutionally power resides in parliament, so Dodon does not have the power to change Moldova's course³⁰⁸.

Neguța is close to Dodon and the Kremlin and is ambassador to Russia, although in 2017 he was recalled due to growing tension in relations between Plahotniuc and the Kremlin. Now Neguța advises Dodon on foreign affairs, and in 2015 when ambassador to Russia Neguța, spoke about keeping Russia close (Ursu, 2015) while getting the EU to pay for Moldovan development. While Moldovan ambassador to Russia, Neguța spoke to the newspaper *Novye Izvestiya* (Ivanov, Mi, 2015: 1) about the failure of the EU path for Moldova and the need for integration with Russia. As Moldova is a parliamentary republic with a nominally pro-European government, this overstepped Neguța's role as ambassador and showed that Neguța was conducting an independent foreign policy.

Voronin was elected in 2001 on a pro-Russian platform. After the Kozak Memorandum, his rhetoric on allying with Russia dissipated³⁰⁹. Voronin allied with Russian KPRF leader Zyuganov³¹⁰ and received Kremlin funding to help the PCRM win elections³¹¹. Through Zyuganov, Voronin had close links with the Russian political elite.

There are rumours the Kremlin financially supports Moldovan politicians, but financial dealings are well hidden³¹². In 2014, the political party *Patria* was banned for links

³⁰⁸ Interview with Mark Mazureanu – Researcher at Universität Mannheim and Lecturer at Rutgers University, 14/04/2017, Chișinău.

³⁰⁹ Interview with Mihai Popșoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

³¹⁰ Interview with Mihai Popșoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

³¹¹ Interview with Mark Mazureanu – Researcher at Universität Mannheim and Lecturer at Rutgers University, 14/04/2017, Chișinău.

³¹² Interview with a specialist on Moldovan politics who requested anonymity, 09/11/2016; Interview with Ion Manole – Director at Promo-LEX, 12/07/2017, Skype.

to Russian extremist groups (Popșoi, 2014). *Patria's* leader, Usatîi, has business links with the Kremlin (Nuttall, 2017) and Usatîi's meteoric rise in Moldovan politics as mayor of Moldova's second city Bălți increases those allegations (Gente, 2015). Like Dodon, Usatîi is well financed, although it is uncertain where the money comes from (Ciurea, 2016).

Plahotniuc has business interests in Russia and Ukraine (Cațus, 2016b) and would be unwilling to lose control over these assets and networks, so during his control of Moldovan state structures until 2019 he attempted to balance between the West and Russia. Plahotniuc owns the right to broadcast Russian state television, pointing to the certainty that to get broadcasting rights over Russian television he signed a deal with the Kremlin³¹³. However, relations visibly deteriorated as the Kremlin considered Plahotniuc too independent for its requirements, whereas Dodon was a more pliable candidate (Solov'ev, 2019). There are links between Moldovan and Russian political elites, allowing the Kremlin to maintain its influence and support pro-Kremlin politicians.

Laundromat is another example of Moldovan-Russian linkage. Laundromat was a money laundering scheme where Company A loaned money to company B who would have the loans guaranteed by other companies. Company B would then default and a judge would authenticate the debt. Company A would then transfer money into a bank account and the money moved on to an EU bank where it would disappear (Harding, 2017). The main protagonists were based in Russia and Moldova and it is likely some money came from the Russian treasury via Russian businessmen who had state contracts (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2017c). Russian registered companies took money out and used Moldovan courts to force other Russian companies to pay the debt. The money was deposited in Moldindcombank thereby causing liquidity flooding and \$8 billion was

³¹³ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 20/04/2016.

withdrawn without notice. This and another \$5 billion were deposited in a Latvian bank, disappearing “into accounts of ghost companies,” and ending up in tax havens across the world (Rise.md, 2017).

Three of the businessmen involved in the scheme: Aleksei Kripivin, Georgiy Gens and Sergei Girdin all have links to the Kremlin (Anin, 2017b). However, the main protagonist was Moldovan businessman and politician, Veaceslav Platon. He and American-Moldovan Emmanuil Grinshpun were previously implicated in defrauding Moldovan banks of \$1 billion during the theft of the century banking scandal (Radu et al. 2016). The Moldovan government during Laundromat was headed by Filat. Questions arose to Filat’s relationship with the Russian mafia (Kontsyu, 2010: 1) which made laundromat easier to achieve, but it is likely Filat was a scapegoat³¹⁴.

Laundromat could only have been possible with political acquiescence (Jurnal.md, 2016g). It is inconceivable Moldovan political elites were unaware of the fraud³¹⁵. It is highly likely Plahotniuc, President Nicolae Timofti and President of the Constitutional Court, Alexandru Tănase, were involved (Jurnal.md, 2017b). There are Russian links with the Moldovan investigation showing that most of the Russian banks involved were directly or partly owned by Igor’ Putin, Putin’s cousin (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2017b). The FSB was heavily linked to the scandal (Galyatkin et al. 2017: 2-5), which is probably why the Kremlin has hampered Moldovan investigations into getting at least some money back (Tamkin, 2017; Galyatkin et al. 2017: 2-5). Laundromat highlights linkages between Russian and Moldovan business and political elites.

³¹⁴ Interview with a specialist on Moldovan politics who requested anonymity, 09/11/2016.

³¹⁵ Interview with Dumitru Alaiba – Programme Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms Moldova (CPR) and currently Parliamentarian in the ACUM coalition, 14/07/2017, Skype.

In 2017, the Plahontiu regime stopped Moldovan politicians visiting Russia and holding meetings with Kremlin personnel. However, the new ACUM and PSRM government have lifted the ban on politicians going to Russia. Another lifted prohibition was Russian television broadcasting in Moldova (Alekseeva, D, 2019). Contacts between Moldovan and Russian political elites are extensive, with the Kremlin supporting pro-Kremlin Moldovan politicians and keeping Moldova in Russia's sphere of interest. These networks increase the potential for learning.

6.5.2. Russian Linkage in Ukraine

There are numerous instances of Ukrainian political and business elites like Firtash, L'ovochkin, Khoroshkovs'kyi, Boyko and Medvedchuk retaining close links with the Kremlin³¹⁶. Under Yanukovich, as one interviewee remarked, "all eyes were on Russia"³¹⁷. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is good for understanding relationships between some Ukrainian elites and Russia. Ukraine has not severed diplomatic ties with Russia even after five years of conflict, raising questions of the closeness of ties among both regimes (Evropeiskaya Pravda, 2018b), although Ukraine still relies on Russian gas and markets, forcing it to maintain links to the Kremlin. After 25 years relations between Russian and Ukrainian elites are close and so reducing these links has proved difficult, although the people trying to restrict links are those that have them³¹⁸.

Akhmetov quickly offered to mediate between the DPR, Moscow and Kyiv (Ostryzniuk, 2014). He wants a decentralised Ukraine, allowing him leeway in the Donbas. As Andrew Wilson (2014c: 130) argued, Akhmetov does not want a truly independent Donbas

³¹⁶ Interview with Irena Taranyuk – Journalist at the BBC Ukraine Service, 30/08/2016, London.

³¹⁷ Interview with Mychailo Wynnyckyj – Associate Professor at the Kyiv-Mykola Academy, 18/11/2016, Kyiv.

³¹⁸ Interview with Irena Taranyuk – Journalist at the BBC Ukraine Service, 30/08/2016, London.

or one subservient to Russia as Kyiv's subsidies are important. An autonomous region would benefit Akhmetov's interests, so he supported some DPR militias (Wilson, 2014c: 134). As Akhmetov has many business interests in Russia and Ukraine he did not want to only support one side (Toal, 2017: 255). He allegedly spoke with Kremlin representatives, about the composition of the DPR leadership (Meduza.io, 2016; Apostrophe.ua, 2015).

While DPR head, Denis Pushilin, has publically spoken against Akhmetov and in 2017 assets of Akhmetov's companies in the Donbas were seized (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2017) Pushilin worked for a Donetsk company associated with Akhmetov, so there is likely a working relationship (TSN.ua, 2014). Although this connection may be breaking down there are strong links between Akhmetov and the Donbas (Sukhov and Krasnikov, 2017) with the region still being his power base.

Like Akhmetov, Oleksandr Yefremov, former governor of Luhansk was accused of cooperating with the Kremlin. After visiting Moscow in 2014, he called for a referendum on Luhansk's status (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2014a), and has financed rebel groups (LB.ua, 2015). Politician Andriy Artemenko devised a peace plan apparently with Russian backing (Twohey and Shane, 2017). Allegedly Artemenko had *Kompromat* on Poroshenko which the Kremlin wanted (LB.ua, 2017d). Artemenko claimed he spoke with Kremlin personnel about the peace plan (Kravets and Romanenko, 2017). The Radical Party to which Artemenko belonged, quickly disassociated itself from him (LB.ua, 2017b), but there are questions about who its leader Lyashko met in Moscow in 2014 (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2014).

L'ovochkin, former Opposition Bloc leader Boyko and Medvedchuk (LB.ua, 2017c) were linked to the Artemenko peace plan. The Opposition Bloc was founded after Yanukovich fled and Party of Regions became politically toxic. However, during the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections Medvedchuk and Akhmetov appeared – with

Kremlin support to promote Vadim Rabinovich as a less obvious pro-Russian candidate. Rabinovich's For Life party was endorsed and members of the Opposition Bloc were incentivised to join (Miselyuk, 2018; Kravets, 2018a; 2018b). The expulsion of Boyko and L'ovochkin from the Opposition Bloc in late 2018 appeared to be a power play between two factions in the party for control (Milanova, 2018). Most former Party of Regions members joined other parties, like the Bloc Petro Poroshenko (BPP) (Ukrayins'ka Pravda, 2016). The Opposition Bloc is pro-Russian, so a pro-Russian voice remains in Ukrainian politics (Olszański, 2014), and after the 2019 parliamentary elections the Opposition Bloc – For Life! Party came second, meaning that there is a strong pro-Russian voice in parliament (Talant, 2019). If a solution to the Donbas conflict is found – likely involving a set number of seats for Donbas – the pro-Russian factions in Ukrainian politics will be even stronger.

Medvedchuk is a close Putin ally, and Medvedchuk prepared for the 2015 presidential elections – which never came due to the Euromaidan – by helping pro-Russian parties and candidates (Chevordov, 2012). Medvedchuk ran conferences on Ukraine's civilisational choice which Putin attended in 2013, highlighting which vector Medvedchuk hoped to push Ukraine (LB.ua, 2013). Even after Crimea's annexation by Russia, Medvedchuk owned property there (TSN.ua, 2016a). Medvedchuk has been labelled the "governor of the Kremlin in Kiev" and is the only Ukrainian politician Putin trusts (Kanygin, 2018). Currently, Medvedchuk is involved in the humanitarian sub-group of the Minsk contact group negotiating for the DPR and LPR (LB.ua, 2014b; LB.ua, 2017e; 2017f) and in direct contact with Putin (LB.ua, 2017d).

The current crisis has stopped direct flights between Kyiv and Moscow, but Medvedchuk flew directly to Moscow on three occasions in 2016 (LB.ua, 2016). In 2018 it was found that Medvedchuk had flown 21 times to Russia with Opposition Bloc politician

and ally, Taras Kozak, pointing to negotiations with the Kremlin about the 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections as Kozak is not involved in negotiations over the conflict (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2018a). Medvedchuk is not the only person directly flying to Moscow, other officials and law enforcement personnel have done so (LB.ua, 2017a).

There is conclusive evidence of links between Russian and Ukrainian politicians and businessmen and these links have existed since 1991³¹⁹. The Opposition Bloc has business interests in Russia³²⁰, so they want to talk with the Kremlin to maintain political interests. Medvedchuk is the clearest example of collaboration, and as one interviewee stated: “Medvedchuk is clearly a Russian agent³²¹.” While Medvedchuk is a Putin ally he is useful for Poroshenko, and now Zelens’kyy, to keep channels open to the Kremlin³²². In the last four months of 2018, Medvedchuk held regular meetings with representatives of the Ukrainian presidential administration, pointing not only to Medvedchuk’s growing importance in politics but also possibly to an agreement to draw Ukraine closer to Russia (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2018b). When Poroshenko took power, Putin remarked he knew all the people who had got elected³²³. Poroshenko as a stable figure and founder of Party of Regions was unlikely to alarm the Kremlin³²⁴.

³¹⁹ Interview with Volodymyr Yermolenko – Director of Internews Ukraine, 26/04/2017, Kyiv.

³²⁰ Interview with Irena Taranyuk – Journalist at the BBC Ukraine Service, 30/08/2016, London.

³²¹ Interview with Serhiy Kudelia – Assistant Professor of Political Science at Baylor University, 23/08/2016, Skype.

³²² Interview with Oleg Sukhov – Journalist at the Kyiv Post, 22/04/2017, Kyiv.

³²³ Interview with Sergiy Gerasmychuk – Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism”, 09/09/2017, Skype.

³²⁴ Interview with David R Marples – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

Russia remains an attractive model to the Ukrainian political elite as it is a consolidated regime with little turnover in power³²⁵. Links may be hidden, but Ukrainian political and business elites maintain contact with Russian counterparts. EU integration would lead to power loss, but the Kremlin would never demand changes. Bankova will not publically make overtures to the Kremlin, however, it happens in private³²⁶.

Poroshenko has links to the Kremlin with close links to businessman Hryhoryshin (Sukhov, 2016c), and until 2017, Poroshenko's chocolate company Roshen had factories in Russia and the company paid taxes to the Russian budget. While the Roshen factory closed down, Poroshenko allegedly, owns a starch factory and grain company in Lipetsk (Sukhov, 2018i; TSN.ua, 2018).

Vladislav Surkov was one of the principal Russian *Kuratory* along with Oleg Belaventsev in Ukraine, and Surkov was in Crimea on February 14, 2014, a month before Crimea was annexed (Wilson, 2014c: 22). While it is unknown what the division of labour was, Surkov was a presidential aide on South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and so he should not have been in Ukraine. Once Yanukovich fled the scene, Surkov was in Crimea finalising a list of politicians to be appointed should Crimea secede from Ukraine.

After Crimea was annexed, Surkov became *Kurator* to the DPR and LPR (Socor, 2016b) appointing ministers in both entities (The Insider, 2016a; 2016b). Both he and close Putin ally Gryzlov became Russia's representatives to the Minsk Accords³²⁷ (Socor, 2016c; 2016d). During negotiations, Surkov bargained on behalf of the DPR and LPR forcing them to

³²⁵ Interview with Irena Taranyuk – Journalist at the BBC Ukraine Service, 30/08/2016, London.

³²⁶ Interview with Oleg Sukhov – Journalist at the Kyiv Post, 22/04/2017, Kyiv.

³²⁷ The Minsk Accords, or Minsk Agreements, or Minsk II is an attempt to find a peaceful solution to the war in the Donbas.

sign whatever he agreed (International Crisis Group, 2014: 8-9). Surkov also compiled information on Ukrainian politicians and businessmen, who he could blackmail or co-opt, with leaked emails pointing to thirty potential contacts (Grytsenko and Sukhov, 2016b).

Another person close to the Kremlin is Sergei Glazyev who supported Russia's annexation of south-east Ukraine. A published document by investigative newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* was purportedly a memo from Orthodox oligarch Malofeyev. Although plausibly a draft it spelt out the scenario the Kremlin has so far followed in the Donbas conflict (Lipskiy, 2015: 7-9). Malofeyev denied its authenticity, but he has financially supported the DPR and LPR (Keating, 2015; MacFarquhar, 2015). The DPR and LPR entities supported by the Kremlin limit the chances of Ukraine joining Western institutions (Pifer, 2017). While the EU has become Ukraine's biggest trading partner (Pifer, 2018) the conflict in Donbas is likely to continue to sap the strength of Ukrainian governments, thereby making reforms harder to achieve. This in turn will precipitate increasing public dissatisfaction at the slow pace of European integration (Liik and Wilson, 2014). It is likely this will force Bankova to begin dialogue with the Kremlin, and as mentioned the Kremlin is less likely to demand that the Ukrainian government reform, resulting in Bankova eventually wanting closer ties with the Kremlin³²⁸.

6.6. Conclusion

The chapter analysed external networks of learning assessing post-Soviet regional organisations, which provide opportunities for secret meetings and training exercises to find best practices. One area of interest was the dialogue and actions in the organisations on countering protests. Organisations allow regimes to share best practices and there is much economic cooperation, helping regimes maintain power and alleviating external pressure.

³²⁸ Interview with Sergiy Gerasmychuk – Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism”, 09/09/2017, Skype.

With political elite interactions, there is dialogue on political cooperation and sharing of best practices. Chapter six set out to answer proposition two that 'authoritarian learning has a flattened hierarchy and network, with authoritarian regimes learning from one another, rather than a hegemon dispensing lessons or an authoritarian gravity centre.' While, Russia is the regional hegemon in the post-Soviet space and is the most powerful state in the region, it appears Russia does not dominate learning, but rather the other case studies propose lessons that the Kremlin draws from. Therefore, external networks are flatter than hierarchical.

Chapter Seven:

The Internal Networks of Authoritarian Learning

“The President lives here, but the man who gives orders lives across the street³²⁹.”

Maximato period³³⁰ joke.

7.1. Introduction

Having addressed external networks, this chapter analyses internal networks in the four case studies. As argued networks allow regimes to share information and copy best practices. This occurs in both external and internal networks, but within internal networks authoritarian regimes can place allies in control of state structures to ensure regime control. For example, Putin retains an inner circle of allies, like Arkadiy and Boris Rotenberg, Igor’ Sechin, Sergei Chemezov, Yuriy Kovalchuk and Gennadiy Timchenko (Galeotti, 2018a: 11), and while they have lost some power they remain strong (Stanovaya, 2017d). Most Russian state assets are owned by Putin allies, like Gazprom, Transneft, Russian railways and Rostec (Al’bats and Ermolin, 2011: 4-13; Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 224-228; Aris, 2016). Similarly, Yuriy Kovalchuk who controls Bank Rossiya also controls the National Media Groups which owns most television stations (Taylor, 2018: 121). Many of Putin’s friends from his KGB and St. Petersburg days control the economy and state institutions, thereby having a stake in regime survival (Kaz’mina and Eremenko, 2018; Yaffa, 2017). While there are factional

³²⁹ Svolik, 2012: 19.

³³⁰ In the Maximato period (1928-1934) Plutarco Elías Calle was the most powerful man in Mexico, known as el Jefe Máximo (the maximum leader). Having served two consecutive presidential terms he was constitutionally barred from being president again and his chosen successor was assassinated, so Calle governed behind-the-scenes with placemen as president, but Calle eventually lost control.

disputes, Putin is arbiter and so long as loyalty to him continues conflicts are allowed to continue³³¹.

Similarly, Poroshenko has been a significant player in Ukrainian internal networks, as a minister under Kuchma, Yushchenko and Yanukovych, before becoming president in 2014. Poroshenko led the Party of Labour until it merged, in 2000, with Party of Regions, pointing to a close association with Yanukovych and the main funder of Party of Regions, Rinat Akhmetov (Liga.net, 2017; Liga.net, 2012; Shuklinov, 2014). Links between Akhmetov and Poroshenko persist³³². Another person with significant links to Poroshenko is Medvedchuk, who while head of Kuchma's presidential administration, created the political party, Solidarity, which Poroshenko led (Wilson, 2005b: 139). Solidarity acted as a centrist party to split the opposition vote. Therefore, Poroshenko and Medvedchuk collaborated together (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2000), which continues today. Regular meetings between Poroshenko and Medvedchuk 2018 point to an agreement being negotiated (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2018b), although it is unknown what that entails. Russia remains Ukraine's main oil and gas supplier, with many resources coming through a company owned by Medvedchuk (Gerus, 2018). The meetings may have been about this, but there are pointers to more than this (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2018b) and either way Medvedchuk's business dealings with Russia have not been threatened by Poroshenko, pointing to a close relationship.

To provide conclusive evidence to proposition three that 'internal networks are useful for learning and for preserving authoritarian regimes' I investigate the internal networks of presidential administrations, security services and business and political elites.

³³¹ Interview with Nikolay Petrov – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

³³² Interview with a specialist on Ukraine who requested anonymity for this part of the interview.

For instance, the Russian presidential administration deals largely with domestic issues, so it is important for internal authoritarian learning. The security services and Security Councils have regular meetings, which precipitate learning within each regime. Business elites are often involved in politics and are averse to reforms that might threaten their interests.

7.2. Presidential Administrations

The Belarusian presidential administration is part of the presidency, although it is far more important than other state structures³³³, and its activities are mysterious (Baraban, 2015). The presidential administration constantly develops ways to maintain Lukashenka's power³³⁴. The IAC of the presidential administration allows the regime to gauge the public's reaction to policies, contributing "to...stable and efficient development...through...analysis of various spheres...and the development of proposals for their improvement"³³⁵. The IAC tries to locate political, socio-economic and cultural issues that could precipitate protest (Naviny.by, 2017). During the 2015 presidential elections, there were discrepancies between the IAC's prediction (76%) of Lukashenka's support and the Nezavisimyi Institut Sotsial'no-Ekonomicheskikh i Politicheskikh Issledovaniy (45.7%), raising questions whether a state-run institution can predict future issues (Ivanov, P, 2015).

The presidential administration concentrates on making sure the power vertical' is effective and that regional leaders get Lukashenka re-elected. Presidential Administration Head Nyavyhlas (2006-2008) arranged confidential seminars with representatives from Belarus's six regions to discuss regional issues, ensuring the power vertical' was effective

³³³ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

³³⁴ Interview with Andrej Kazakevič – Director of the Institute "Political Sphere," 26/08/2016, Skype.

³³⁵ This information can be found here: <http://iac.gov.by/> on the IAC website (in Russian).

(Lazyuk, 2007; Gritsanov, 2007). His successor, Natallya Kochanova (2016-), created response loops between the people and local government to feed back to the regime (Pechenko, 2017; Lebedko, 2017; Ivanov, K, 2017). The pro-regime movement, Belaya Rus', is a conduit between the public and the regime (Malashkevich, 2018). This strengthening of the power vertikal' is a direct lesson from the 2017 protests.

The Russian presidential administration is concerned with domestic issues ensuring the president's policies are implemented. It is the "command centre from which the Kremlin manages politics at all levels" (Ananyev, 2018: 33). The presidential administration has a domestic policy unit, with Kuratory working with pro-regime politicians and parties to make sure that they win elections. Different practices are used in different elections to ascertain which tactics work effectively and can be used in future elections (Bocharova and Mukhametshina, 2018). The head of the domestic unit, Andrei Yarin, builds new political parties that could become a new party-of power, as United Russia becomes increasingly unpopular (Samokhina and Inyutin, 2018). During the build-up to the 2019 local elections, Yarin worked with pro-regime politicians to tailor individual electoral strategies (Karpenko, 2019).

Presidential Administration Head Voloshin visited St. Petersburg in 2003 before local elections to ascertain if the Kremlin plan was implemented (Rotkevich, 2003: 3). Presidential Administration Head Sergei Sobyenin (2005-2008) met leaders of the systemic opposition Grigoriy Yavlinskiy, Zyuganov and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy telling each what was expected of them under Medvedev's presidency (Bilevskaya and Kuklina, 2008). As in Russia Ukrainian Presidential Administration Head Serhiy L'ovochkin (2010-2014) regularly tested

how effective regional representatives would be at getting out the vote, helping ensure Bankova won upcoming elections (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2010g).

Presidential Administration Head Sergei Ivanov (2011-2016) gained evidence of corrupt officials from security service and interior ministry personnel. There was no mention he acted on these allegations (Gazeta.ru, 2012), likely keeping it for Kompromat. This is probably what happened to Defence Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov who while officially sacked for corruption was a rival of Ivanov (Vinokurova, 2012; Ulyanova, 2013). Keeping Kompromat occurs in Ukraine with former-Presidential Administration Head Viktor Baloha (2006-2009) referred to as the “all-seeing eye” taking information and storing it for later (Mostovaya, 2006).

In 2013, Ivanov met Presidential Administration First Deputy Head Vyacheslav Volodin (2011-2016) to discuss how to improve dialogue between the Kremlin and the populace (Vinokurova and Ermakov, 2012). This was just after the 2011-2012 protests emphasising learning to rectify these experiences. Volodin held seminars with regional governors to discuss upcoming elections (Kostenko et al. 2012). Presidential Administration First Deputy Head Sergei Kirienko (2016-) re-cast the All-Russian People’s Front (ONF) as a link between the people and the regime (Vinokurov and Falyahov, 2016; Vinokurov, 2016c). In November 2016, Kirienko spoke with political technologists (Gazeta.ru, 2016a) about systemic problems and how to conduct a flawless presidential election in 2018 allowing Kirienko to learn about potential problems (Vinokurov, 2016a).

Kirienko actively ensured Putin’s victory in 2018. Even Trump’s electoral victory was learnt from, with Kirienko using social media and data to target voters with particular campaigns (Atasuntsev, 2016; Vinokurov, 2017). Kirienko spoke to governors, finding out

who should remain in post or be removed (Vinokurov, 2016b). After the 2011 parliamentary and 2012 presidential elections, some governors failed to give United Russia victory and needed replacing (Andreeva, 2012: 7-9; Ozerova, 2016: 1). Volodin constructed the maxim “there is Putin – there is Russia, there is no Putin – there is no Russia” (Rozhkova, 2014: 2), which was pedalled across state media to emphasise that without Putin there is instability.

Like the Russian presidential administration, its Belarusian counterpart is involved in choosing personnel across the regime, allowing the presidential administration to determine which people perform best in implementing policies. For example, Presidential Administration Deputy Alyksandr Papkou (2006-2008) made personnel decisions across all state institutions (Martinovich, 2006). The presidential administration constructs ideology, and Presidential Administration First Deputy Head Uladzimir Zamyatalin (2000-2001) created an ideology encompassing communist ideas and Slavophilia, playing to the feelings of most Belarusians (Volanin, 2000b; BelGazeta, 2001). Natallya Pyatkevich created a Public Advisory Council “to discuss topical issues of the development of the state and society” (Gryl’, 2009), thereby creating another link between the regime and the public in the run-up to the 2010 presidential election.

As mentioned in chapter one, authoritarian regimes want to control the media, and in Belarus and Russia this falls to the presidential administration. Presidential Administration First Deputy Zamyatalin controlled state media to mobilise officials and the public (Podolyak, 2000). In Russia, this role fell to Presidential Administration First Deputy Aleksei Gromov (2012-) (Galimova, 2012: 2) who was Putin’s press secretary (Bocharova and Kuzmenkova, 2012). In Ukraine, Medvedchuk used television to promote Yanukovich

(Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2004b) dictating to television chiefs what to present (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2003b).

There is competition between presidential administrations and other institutions. In 2001, Russian Presidential Administration Head Voloshin appointed former Prosecutor General employee, Nazir Khapsirokov as his assistant. His appointment was seen as the presidential administration exerting control over this institution (Arutyunova, 2001: 1). In another example, Sobyanin collaborated with Sechin against Surkov to control the political system (Levchenko, A, 2006). However, there is also inter-linkage after leaving the presidential administration, Volodin became parliamentary speaker. The Kremlin moves people around rather than replace them. Ukraine has very apparent inter-linkage, for example, Medvedchuk got his brother, Serhiy, into the tax office to use it against opposition politicians (Gutsul, 2004).

L'ovochkin has been in Ukrainian politics since Kuchma's presidency, building relations with people across the political spectrum (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2010i). Former Presidential Administration Deputy and Justice Minister Olena Lukash was close to both Yanukovich and Firtash (Batherin, 2014: 1; Bolotny, 2014: 6). Presidential Administration Deputy Aleksei Ishchenko (2002-2005) masterminded the 2004 electoral fraud which did not stop Tymoshenko employing him (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2008c). Having worked in Bankova for Yushchenko former Deputy of the Presidential Administration Yuriy Bohuts'kyi (2007-2010) advised Yanukovich (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2013g). Presidential Administration Deputy Andriy Honcharuk (2008-2010) worked in Bankova under Yushchenko before becoming Yanukovich's foreign policy adviser (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2014i).

Presidential Administration First Deputy Vitaliy Koval'chuk (2014-2019) was a Poroshenko ally (Mostovaya, 2016: 1) known as the grey cardinal (Pidvezyanyi and Gruzev, 2013) who created political parties to support Bankova (Vedernikova, 2015: 2). Presidential Administration Head Lozhkin was appointed by Poroshenko to head the National Reform Council which under his tenure quickly proposed greater presidential powers (Den', 2015; Dubrovyk-Rohova, 2015). Bankova was building an alliance of politicians willing to support this (Koshkina, 2017a) and the presidential administration was tasked with ensuring Poroshenko's re-election in 2019 (Koshkina, 2016), although this failed as Bankova does not have the capacity to stop the leeching of support for an incumbent.

The presidential administrations in three of the case studies look to control the system. Moldova as a parliamentary republic does not have a strong presidential administration, and there is little information on its actions. The Belarusian and Russian presidential administrations are constantly adapting and learning. Both institutions try to devise new best practices. All three presidential administrations try to control the system, thereby ensuring continued regime control.

7.3. Enter the Siloviki

7.3.1. *The Security Services*

To understand domestic internal networks and authoritarian learning I assess the power ministries of the security services, interior ministry and the security councils. These bodies are widely known as the Siloviki and they play a significant role in learning. Although the KDB has been weakened recently, through the removal of people close to the Kremlin³³⁶, thereby contributing to its current inefficiency³³⁷, it remains important. The

³³⁶ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – a journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

Belarusian regime has fourteen different security services as the regime wants to know what is happening all the time and rules by dividing the security services, and playing them against one another³³⁸.

The KDB with the interior ministry is close to Lukashenka, playing on the latter's fear of losing power to maintain their importance³³⁹. The KDB is averse to economic reforms, seeing them as the first step towards regime collapse, so it tries to stop economic modernisation³⁴⁰. KDB personnel regularly meet other ministry employees to discuss issues³⁴¹. Current and former KDB members are in charge of other ministries. By having former KDB personnel in charge of other ministries, the KDB exerts control over these bodies³⁴².

Although there are nine security services in Russia³⁴³, the FSB has become the main Russian security service (Soldatov and Borogan, 2010: 20) increasing its powers by inventing threats to Russia (Soldatov, 2013). Like the KDB, the FSB is averse to modernisation³⁴⁴. FSB director, Aleksandr Bortnikov (2008-) is close to Patrushev (Burnatseva, 2011) who got

³³⁷ Interview with Pavel Usov – Head of the Centre for Political Analysis and Prognosis, 19/12/2016, Warsaw.

³³⁸ Interview with Dzianis Melyantsou – Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Co-ordinator at the Minsk Track-II Initiative, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

³³⁹ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018; Interview with Alexei Pikulik – Academic Director at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2016, Minsk.

³⁴⁰ Interview with Alyaksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 08/08/2016, Warsaw.

³⁴¹ Interview with Yauheni Preiherman – Head of the Minsk Tack II Initiative, Head of the Liberal Club in Minsk, 18/08/2016, Coventry.

³⁴² Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

³⁴³ Information on each can be found here: <http://agentura.ru/dossier/russia/> (in Russian).

³⁴⁴ Interview with Nikolay Petrov – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

Bortnikov appointed (Stanovaya, 2016b). Bortnikov created stories to keep the FSB relevant, like one claiming that European forest fires in 2012 were Al-Qaeda terror attacks (Preobrazhenskiy, 2012). Bortnikov competes with the modernisers and he and Sechin set-up Aleksei Ulyukayev, the minister of economic development (The Moscow Times, 2017b; Galeotti, 2017c), on corruption charges.

Ulyukayev was found guilty of taking a \$2 million bribe given an eight year jail sentence (Galeotti, 2017c). With the current economic slowdown and possibility that modernisers may convince Putin about economic reform, Sechin – a key Putin ally and Silovik – masterminded charges against Ulyukayev in an attempt to limit the Kremlin modernising (Galeotti, 2018c). However, while Kremlin factions engage in infighting to gain dominance, Putin remains the final arbiter (Galeotti, 2018a: 9).

The Moldovan SIS has monitored judges since 2008, compelling them to rule on decisions benefiting the regime (Jurnal.md, 2017d). SIS leaders have traditionally been affiliated to the incumbent government (Point.md, 2007b), so the organisation is politicised. SIS head Artur Reșetnicov (2007-2009) used the SIS to prepare an electoral victory for the PCRM in 2009 (Point.md, 2007a) and under his tenure, the SIS monitored media, opposition political parties and scrutinised opposition donations (Point.md, 2008b; 2008d; 2008a). In 2019, Dodon gained some control over the SIS and the right to appoint the SIS director, thereby giving him greater control of the security services (Gorchak, 2019).

The 2009 protests were discussed between Interior Minister Aleksei Roibu (2011-2012), SIS head Gheorghe Mihai (2009-2011) and the AEI government to learn from the events (Vesti.md, 2011). Although the AEI government was ‘pro-European’, many members of the AEI coalition were in the PCRM government before 2009 and, therefore, want to

learn from the failure of the 2009 protests and adapt³⁴⁵. SIS head Mihai Bălan (2012-2019) advocated widening the SIS's role and allowing SIS personnel to work in other ministries (NewsMaker, 2015a). Bălan met Prime Minister Filip and Interior Jizdan (2016-2019) to discuss the 2016 protests (NewsMaker, 2016e). As a direct response to this meeting – in August 2016 – Bălan requested increased anti-terror powers (NewsMaker, 2016a). The SIS remains highly politicised and used by politicians to control opponents (NewsMaker, 2016e).

The SBU traditionally has balanced between Bankova and the opposition, although this is no longer the case since the start of the Ukraine conflict in 2014. SBU Chief Ihor Drizhchan'yy (2005-2006) worked for Yushchenko but maintained ties with Yanukovych (Trofimova, 2006). SBU Chief Valeriy Koroshkovs'kyi (2010-2012) was close to Kuchma, Firtash, L'ovochkin, Boyko and Tymoshenko (Ukrainskyia Pravda, 2010f; Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2010d). SBU Chief Oleksandr Yakimenko (2013-2014) supervised Yanukovych's growing business empire and some of Akhmetov's assets before being appointed SBU head (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2013c). Yakimenko created a terrorist group at the Euromaidan, which was responsible for deaths on February 20, 2014 (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2014k). Since coming to power in 2014, Poroshenko has increased the SBU's power while placing allies in prominent positions in the organisation (Ponomarenko, 2018a), giving him control over the security services.

Control of the security services is a necessity for the four case studies to preserve power. Although there is limited internal learning within the security services, control of the security services allows a regime to restrict the opposition and monitor non-regime groups,

³⁴⁵ Interview with Dumitru Alaiba – Programme Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms Moldova (CPR) and currently Parliamentarian in the ACUM coalition, 14/07/2017, Skype; Interview with Ernest Vardanean – Lecturer at Moldova State University (MSU), 14/07/2017, Skype.

like NGOs. Placing allies in charge of the security services increases the likelihood that the regime will preserve power.

7.3.2. Interior Ministries

In April 2009 protests erupted in Chişinău. The Twitter Revolution galvanised demonstrators, against the PCRM's electoral fraud (Wilson, 2009). Protesters stormed parliament (Harding, 2009). This is relevant as some officials who used force on protesters served Plahotniuc after 2009, like former-Interior Minister Jizdan (Jurnal.md, 2016f). Plahotniuc and Jizdan were close as Jizdan stopped a corruption case linked to Plahotniuc's businesses in 2004 (Rise.md, 2015; Jurnal.md, 2016c).

Moldovan Interior Minister Gheorghe Papuc (2002-2008 and 2008-2009) was sacked after a drug smuggling scandal in March 2008. He was brought back that October (Logos-Press, 2008) and was obviously trusted by President Voronin (Point.md, 2008c). The Centre for Combating Economic Crimes and Corruption (CCECC) – part of the interior ministry – had its appointment structure changed in 2012 and now parliament appoints its head. Therefore, it is unlikely to combat government corruption, giving the PDM as the main party in the government until 2019 free rein (Logos-Press, 2012).

Dorin Recean (2012-2015) had no relevant experience when he became interior minister. He was appointed for loyalty to Prime Minister Filat (Nesterova, 2014). Loyalty is important, placing an ally as interior minister is common practice. Telephone intercepts of Recean talking to PLDM politician, Valery Strelts, former Central Electoral Commission chief Yuri Chokan and Head of the Tax Inspectorate Nikolai Vikol about using the latter against the opposition were published (Point.md, 2013).

Ukrainian Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko (2005-2006) was close to President Yushchenko and Tymoshenko. He led the People's Self-Defence (Rakhmanin, 2008) a party in the BYuT-led coalition. Lutsenko was prosecutor general and part of the Poroshenko 'family' (Politeka.net, 2016) bringing corruption cases against opposition politicians and activists fighting corruption (Sukhov, 2018f; 2016g), and using his position to increase pressure on anti-corruption bodies like NABU (Zerkalo Nedeli, 2017). By bringing corruption cases against the opposition, Bankova tarnished the opposition image with allegations of corruption³⁴⁶. However, the Prosecutor General's Office has not prosecuted those responsible for the Euromaidan shootings (Kyiv Post, 2018) pointing to elite collusion.

There was learning from the Orange revolution when Yanukovich became president in 2010. In 2004 Interior Minister Mykola Bilokon' (2003-2005) spoke about introducing "a third force," a people's militia to counter opposition at the presidential elections (Zerkalo Nedeli, 2004) and the Titushki were the conclusion of this lesson. The Titushki were controlled by Viktor Zubryts'kyi, giving then Interior Minister Vitaliy Zakharchenko (2010-2014) "deniability and distance" (Wilson, 2014c: 79). Zakharchenko repeatedly said if he had the powers, he would make sure the Euromaidan was over in hours (Wilson, 2014c: 84). Interior Minister Arsen Avakov (2014-) has allegedly not reformed law enforcement structures because Yanukovich's configuration allows him more power (Sukhov, 2016b).

Belarusian Interior Minister Yuriy Sivakou (1999-2001) exerted control over other state structures. He headed a clandestine clique close to Lukashenka (Podolak, 2000b; Kozhenikova, 2000) and was entrusted with arranging opposition activist disappearances

³⁴⁶ Interview with Oleg Sukhov – Journalist at the Kyiv Post, 22/04/2017, Kyiv.

between 1999 and 2001 (TUT.by, 2001). Lukashenka likely kept him close as Sivakou knew where the bodies were.

As Interior Minister Navumau (2000-2009) headed the president's security service because of his loyalty (Volanin, 2000a). Lukashenka saw what happened to Slobodan Milošević in 2000 in Serbia and feared a similar scenario (Hall, S, 2017b: 168). He needed loyalty so Navamau was chosen. Navamau's loyalty could be seen when during protests in 2008, police brutally cleared Constitution Square in central Minsk (BelGazeta, 2008). During the 2010 protests, the KDB and interior ministry regularly met (Malashenkov, 2010). The Almaz anti-terror special unit was used to great effect, emphasising the broad definition of what constitutes terrorism in the post-Soviet region.

In the run-up to the 2015 presidential election, Belarusian Interior Minister Shunevich said the interior ministry had not trained law enforcement personnel as the "department has a rich experience in carrying out such events" (BELTA, 2015) with plenty of experience from 2001, 2006 and 2010. In 2017, the interior ministry requested the introduction of "cameras and special detectors" across Belarus to monitor country-wide events (BELTA, 2017). That this request was made during the country-wide 2017 protests (Ackles, 2017; Murphy, 2017; Volotovitch, 2017), shows learning.

RosGvardiya was created in Russia in 2013, while partially an answer to the Euromaidan, its creation harks back to the 2011-2012 Russian protests (Baidakova, 2016b: 7). On April 7, 2016, in a field outside Lyubertsy RosGvardiya practised dispersing a potential Moscow Maidan (Otkrytaya Rossiya, 2016)³⁴⁷. Its leader, Zolotov, was Putin's chief bodyguard (Zygar, 2016: 137). RosGvardiya covers some areas of the FSB and interior

³⁴⁷ A video of the practice is here: <https://openrussia.org/post/view/14173/>.

ministry (Zheleznova and Sinitsyn, 2016), ensuring the Kremlin greater control against protests.

In Russia, there are regular law enforcement training exercises. One in 2006 involved more than 32,000 personnel in an anti-terrorist exercise (Poletaev, 2006: 13). Another involved the defence ministry stopping militants seizing government buildings (Kozlova, 2006: 2). This points to devising practices to repress protests, and that this occurred in 2006 points to learning from the Colour Revolutions. Interior Minister Nurgaliev made employees study terrorism to devise appropriate counter-strategies (Falaleev, 2006: 3). In 2007, over three billion roubles was spent re-equipping the interior ministry (Falaleev, 2007: 3), all pointing to countering a Colour Revolution. A 2008 meeting of all heads of interior ministry departments addressed Colour Revolutions (Falaleev, 2008: 2).

Russian Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokol'tsev (2012-) had worked for the Moscow police organising protest training exercises (Sumskoi, 2010; Bocharova and Savina, 2010). In 2014, Kolokol'tsev wanted the number of public law enforcement units increased. Although in 2014 there were 402,000 personnel (Igorev, 2014a: 1; 2014b: 5), the Euromaidan evidently scared Kolokol'tsev. He publically stated that any Yanukovich era Berkut forces would be welcome in the interior ministry (Gazeta.ru, 2014), giving the Kremlin valuable information from their Euromaidan experience that the Russian regime could use for future potential protests.

Like the security services, control over the interior ministry is important for regime survival. However, there is evidence that the interior ministries of the four case studies engage in more learning than the security services. There are training exercises – although

this is a largely Russian phenomenon – and attempts to devise best practices to keep control. Therefore, the interior ministry is an important institution for learning.

7.3.3. National Security Councils

A meeting of the Russian Security Council permanent members is held weekly and consists of people Putin trusts (Levchenko, A, 2007). Putin (2014b), at a 2014, Security Council meeting spoke about Ukraine and how fascism could cause instability in Russia. A working commission in 2016 discussed anti-terrorist problems faced by Russia, where the main issue was “people staying in one place.” This sounds like anti-terrorist measures against protesters. The Council discussed how to stop demonstrators controlling space (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2016a) and addressed forming and equipping RosGvardiya (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2016c).

Belarusian National Security Council Head, Sheyman (2006-2008) has been close to Lukashenka since 1994. Sheyman arranged an assassination attempt on Lukashenka in 1994 to increase Lukashenka’s vote share (Wilson, 2011: 161-162) and ran Lukashenka’s 2006 electoral campaign (Naviny.by, 2006). After the Euromaidan, Head of the Belarusian National Security Council, Stanislau Zas (2015-), met Lukashenka to discuss the Ukrainian situation, the conflict, its potential spill over, the efficiency of Belarusian law enforcement units and how Ukraine’s association agreement with the EU might destabilise Belarus (TUT.by, 2015). Zas devised a new military doctrine giving equal emphasis to internal and external threats (BELTA, 2016) pointing to learning from the Ukrainian situation.

Ukrainian Security Council Head Marchuk (1999-2003) was involved in organising elections so Kuchma and pro-regime political parties won. He regularly met members of all political parties, including the opposition (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2001b). After the Security

Council, Marchuk became defence minister, adviser to Yanukovych and is now working in the security sub-group of the Minsk peace agreement. His presence around Bankova points to a level of trust crossing political divides. It is possible Marchuk and his successor, Volodymyr Radchenko (2003-2005) knew of the Melnychenko tapes³⁴⁸ and approved the recording of conversations in Kuchma's office to serve their interests (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2004a; Wilson, 2005a: 52).

Ukrainian Security Council head Anatoliy Kinakh (2005-2006) used his role to try to construct a power veritkal' (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2006) to control Ukraine. After leaving the Security Council, Kinakh advised Yushchenko, Yanukovych and now Poroshenko. Andriy Klyuyev (2012-2014) was close to L'ovochkin, so the Security Council was brought under the control of L'ovochkin who headed the presidential administration (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2012f) and there were regular private meetings (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2012d).

Both Klyuyev and L'ovochkin supported Pravy Sektor³⁴⁹ during the Euromaidan. L'ovochkin approved Pravy Sektor supporting Poroshenko, so Poroshenko could be labelled a fascist. Klyuyev apparently gave a million dollars to Pravy Sektor for them to stop defending the Maidan when the Berkut tried to storm it in January 2014. Others in the regime also financed Pravy Sektor and Pravy Sektor leader, Dmytro Yarosh had close ties to the SBU (Nayem, 2014).

Klyuyev – with Yanukovych's support – strengthened the Security Council, creating a secret group with experience of national security issues (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2012c),

³⁴⁸ The Melnychenko tapes were hours of recordings by Major Mykola Melnychenko. They record Kuchma speaking with others about killing a journalist, repressing opponents and selling weapons to Saddam Hussein.

³⁴⁹ Pravy Sektor is a far-right group that came to prominence during the Euromaidan. With likely links to the Yanukovych government, they allowed Bankova to label protesters as fascist.

allowing him to learn from previous episodes. Klyuyev ran the Party of Regions 2012 parliamentary electoral campaign (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2012a) and visited parliament to discuss with opposition deputies to support Yanukovich (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2012a).

Klyuyev and his brother Serhiy were involved in money laundering, taking loans from Ukrainian banks and sending the proceeds through their companies to Austrian bank accounts, which affected the monetary reserves of Ukrainian banks (Ekonomicheskaya Pravda, 2017a). Klyuyev has links to Poroshenko with shares in Poroshenko's company, Roshen (Roshchenko, 2017).

Moldova is a semi-presidential republic so the Security Council does not have the same role as in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, but there are instances of learning in the Supreme Security Council (CSS). In 2015, the CSS met to discuss domestic security issues (Jurnal.md, 2015c) as protests started. During the theft of the century and laundromat scandals, the CSS met secretly (Jurnal.md, 2015b). The new strategic doctrine, published in 2016, focuses on domestic issues (Jurnal.md, 2016a) and highlights learning from the 2015-2016 protests. Dodon appears to have re-established the Security Council, giving it a more vocal role in government. At a 2018 meeting, Dodon (2018b) stated that the Security Council would devise the best tactics to deal with protesters who "arrive in Chisinau to destabilise the situation."

7.4. Political and Business Elites: One and the same?

Having discussed internal network learning in Siloviki structures, I turn to political and business elites. Many political elites – especially in Moldova and Ukraine – are business elites. Understanding internal links between elites provides a clear picture of learning explaining why these regimes are either electoral or competitive authoritarian regimes. It is

understandable politicians with business interests or businessmen with political securities want to preserve those benefits. They fall back on what they know, which are authoritarian practices. Elite interlinkage is important for explaining internal network learning.

Belarus is an outlier as its business elites are not particularly interlinked in the political system³⁵⁰. By contrast, the former Ukrainian president was an oligarch and the oligarchic system – which was supposed to end after the Euromaidan – not only survived but re-engaged in politics (Leshchenko, S, 2014b). With their political influence undiminished, the oligarchs stifled political reforms promised to the EU and IMF (Wilson, 2016d). The Moldovan War of the Roses – taken from the PDM’s red rose symbol and the PLDM’s fondness for white roses (Popșoi, 2016d: 85) – saw oligarchs Plahotniuc and Filat use the PDM and the PLDM to conduct a war of personal animosity (Popșoi, 2016d: 85).

7.4.1. Belarus and Russia

Competition in Russia between political elites is less caustic than Moldova and Ukraine. Those in power control the political and business systems. Ulyukaev’s arrest was a skirmish between the Siloviki and modernisers, masterminded by Silovik-in-chief, Sechin (The Moscow Times, 2017b; 2017d). Putin’s approval of the arrest emphasised he wants loyalty, as Ulyukaev has used his position to enrich himself to the detriment of his allegiance to the regime (Miroedova, 2016). Putin trusts people like Sechin whom he has known since his KGB days (Ledeneva, 2013: 56; Petrov, 2011c: 517).

The Department for Presidential Affairs, which is distinct from the presidential administration, controls large swathes of the Belarusian economy and is directly answerable to Lukashenka. The regime has replaced factory managers with regime appointees, giving

³⁵⁰ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

the authorities even greater control over the economy. Although the regime has, for the most part, controlled the rise of independent oligarchs, there are regime factions which control parts of the economy (Frear, 2019: 46).

Oligarchs exist in Belarus but they do not dominate state structures as in Moldova and Ukraine. Andrew Wilson (2011a: 243) classifies Belarusian oligarchs as “minigarchs.” Supporters of Lukashenka can make money, “but only on the president’s terms” (Wilson, 2011a: 243). There are two examples of how oligarchs are treated in Belarus. Alyaksandr Pupeika who supported Kebich in 1994, and funded other non-regime parties after Lukashenka became president, fled to Poland ending up in an asylum after the Belarusian authorities tried to arrest him. He became an example to emphasise that the rules had changed and oligarchs could no longer be involved in politics (Wilson, 2011a: 164).

Another oligarch, Yuriy Chyzh, financially supported Lukashenka (Mozheyko, 2016)³⁵¹. Chyzh was in Lukashenka’s inner circle living in the exclusive Drozdami area near Minsk Sea³⁵², but in 2016 he was arrested for tax evasion (TUT.by, 2016a). However, it is likely Chyzh’s arrest was for something else. There are stories of Chyzh trying to sell oil to a foreign company, or defrauding others close to Lukashenka (Fedorovich, 2016a, 2016b), or falling out with a high ranking KDB official³⁵³. Like Russia’s Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, Chyzh

³⁵¹ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016.

³⁵² Often known as the Minsk sea, it’s official name is the Zaslavskaye Reservoir, a man-made lake and about 22 kilometres from central Minsk.

³⁵³ Interview with Balázs Jarábik – Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21/11/2016, Skype.

became involved in politics³⁵⁴, which contributed to his arrest. It was a warning to others to fall in line.

The Belarusian authorities are susceptible to restricting business activities of businessmen who are not directly part of the regime. Chyzh was an example, although he was close to Lukashenka. The regime wants to diversify the economy, but to do so it must increase business freedom. However, the regime fears that allowing an independent faction to flourish could affect control (Belsat, 2018) and the regime has been unable to manage this dichotomy.

Signals are important to how the Belarusian regime operates. The system is highly tuned to Lukashenka's signals³⁵⁵. Lukashenka does not tolerate those who were in the regime joining the opposition³⁵⁶. Former Prime Minister, Michail Chyhir, was arrested (Klasovskiy, 2009) and former Interior Minister, Yury Zakharanka disappeared (Pulsha, 2009), emphasising to current elites that if they leave the regime they should not join the opposition³⁵⁷. Signals are used by Putin too, although these are often opaque³⁵⁸, allowing Putin deniability if things go wrong and forcing others to interpret his meaning (Pavlovskiy,

³⁵⁴ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016.

³⁵⁵ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

³⁵⁶ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

³⁵⁷ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

³⁵⁸ Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man – Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

2016a). Lukashenka only gives verbal orders and there is little documentation³⁵⁹ allowing Lukashenka deniability like Putin.

Both are involved in decision-making but in different ways. Lukashenka is involved in most decisions, and cannot be seen to be influenced. He listens to different opinions then determines policy³⁶⁰. By contrast, Putin is only involved in about 20% of decisions³⁶¹, which is another aspect of the deniability system (Pavlovskiy, 2016a). Putin relies on other agencies to implement decisions and reacts if mistakes are made³⁶².

Lukashenka has a comprehensive power vertikal'. Like Putin he allows others to implement policy, allowing him to blame them when policies are poorly implemented. It is hierarchical from Lukashenka down³⁶³. Lukashenka allegedly has a folder on all regime elites and uses this Kompromat to control them (Belsat, 2018). Close associates like Natallya Pyatkevich filter information to Lukashenka (Vasilieva, 2014).

Loyalty is key to how the Belarusian and Russian regimes function. Lukashenka is less concerned with personal friendships, if someone disappoints him they are removed³⁶⁴. The teddy bear bombing highlighted Lukashenka's rapid sacking of close allies who displease him (Fedorovich, 2012). However, the inner circle remains similar to when Lukashenka took

³⁵⁹ Interview with Valery Kavaleuski – Consultant at the World Bank and Country Analyst Consultant at Freedom House, 02/08/2016, Skype.

³⁶⁰ Interview with Aleś Čajčyc – Member of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, blogger at Radio Svoboda, 29/08/2016, Skype.

³⁶¹ Interview with Maria Lipman – Editor-in-chief of the Counterpoint Journal, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

³⁶² Interview with Margarita Zavadskaya – Research Fellow at the European University of St. Petersburg, 25/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

³⁶³ Interview with Valery Kavaleuski – Consultant at the World Bank and Country Analyst Consultant at Freedom House, 02/08/2016, Skype.

³⁶⁴ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

power. While the Mahilou clans influence has been reduced the inner circle remains homogenous³⁶⁵. As one interviewee stated, people like Sheyman survive because they know where the bodies of those opposition leaders who disappeared between 1999 and 2000 are³⁶⁶. Sheyman's role is uncertain but he is constant (Satsuk, 2005: 4).

The case of Myasnikovich is enlightening. Though Myasnikovich ran Kebich's 1994 presidential campaign he was secretly talking to Lukashenka (Feduta, 2005: 135; Kravchenko, P, 2006: 365). Myasnikovich apparently grew disaffected with Lukashenka in 2001 and flirted with opposition presidential candidate Uladzimir Hancharyk (Marples and Padhol, 2005: 86). Remarkably he was rehabilitated, becoming prime minister in 2011, due to strong bureaucratic links (Wilson, 2011a: 235). Although he is now chairman of the council of the republic in parliament, having been removed as prime minister in 2014, his rehabilitation remains a rare example.

Lukashenka keeps loyalty by swapping people between jobs, preventing them building power bases. Everyone relies on Lukashenka for rent access, keeping their loyalty³⁶⁷. The person closest to Lukashenka is perhaps his tennis coach, Syarhei Tsyatseryn, who heavily influences Lukashenka, and even advises on policy (Vodchyts, 2014). Loyalty is important in Russia too. Once a person is in the regime it is difficult to leave, and a person may be sacked but often their sacking is short-term or they are promoted sideways (Petrov, 2011c: 502). Efficiency is not necessarily important what matters is a person's usefulness (Galeotti, 2017a). Aleksei Kudrin left the Kremlin and attended the 2011-2012 protests, but

³⁶⁵ Interview with David R Marples – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

³⁶⁶ Interview with Aleś Łahviniec – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Alyaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

³⁶⁷ Interview with Artyom Shraibman – Journalist at Tut.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

he was likely a link between the demonstrators and the Kremlin (Trenin, 2011b). Although he is not in the Kremlin he still advises Putin on economic matters (Hille, 2017).

Like Belarus, there is an inner circle, with Arkadiy and Boris Rotenberg, Igor' Sechin, Sergei Chemezov, Yuriy Kovalchuk and Gennadiy Timchenko (Galeotti, 2018a: 11) being important figures in the inner circle where everything is acceptable, so long as loyalty is maintained³⁶⁸. As a way to maintain control Putin appoints someone to a ministry but their deputy is someone with ties to a competitor, so department heads remain loyal for fear their deputy will inform on them. Competition provides coherent governance as having rivals in top positions means people must be at the top of their game³⁶⁹.

Although the inner-circle around Lukashenka remains largely homogenous within the wider regime there is factionalism, and the KDB is the prime example of this. In 2008 and 2009 the KDB provided protection for businesses but decided businessmen were not making enough money. By removing these middlemen they could cream off more profits which brought the KDB into conflict with the Security Council which had the same idea. The resulting conflict only ended when Lukashenka got involved³⁷⁰. There is competition in all ministries³⁷¹.

Both Putin and Lukashenka are former KGB men. Lukashenka (2019) stated that he was “an inveterate Soviet man.” Putin’s links are clear but Lukashenka’s are opaque,

³⁶⁸ Interview with Maria Lipman – Editor-in-chief of the Counterpoint Journal, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

³⁶⁹ Interview with Nikolay Petrov – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

³⁷⁰ Interview with Alyaksandr Papko – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 08/08/2016, Warsaw.

³⁷¹ Interview with Ryhor Astapenia – Analyst at the Ostrogorski Centre, 03/05/2017, Minsk; Interview with Balázs Jarábik – Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21/11/2016, Skype.

although as a Soviet border guard, he had some KGB training³⁷². The FSB plays on Putin's fears that the West conspires against Russia. It is competing for resources and "whoever comes up with the scariest scare gets the money³⁷³." This is similar to Belarus where the KDB plays on Lukashenka's fears of the West destabilising Belarus³⁷⁴. Lukashenka has a close relationship with the Siloviki³⁷⁵ even getting economic policy from both the KDB and the interior ministry³⁷⁶.

The Belarusian regime appears adept at tracking issues affecting society having developed "excellent polling groups to get an idea of what is happening in society"³⁷⁷. By contrast, the Kremlin relies on political consultants³⁷⁸ and polls. Polls conducted in Belarus highlight possible future problems. The Kremlin uses weekly polls by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (VTsIOM) and the Public Opinion Foundation to assess what problems need to be rectified and then uses state television to reduce tensions among Russians on future problems (Rogov and Ananyev, 2018: 204-205).

³⁷² Interview with Eric Chenoweth – Co-Director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE), 14/11/2017, Skype.

³⁷³ Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man – Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEP), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

³⁷⁴ Interview with Alexei Pikulik – Academic Director at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2016, Minsk.

³⁷⁵ Interview with Eric Chenoweth – Co-Director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE), 14/11/2017, Skype.

³⁷⁶ Interview with a specialist on Belarus who requested anonymity, 29/01/2018.

³⁷⁷ Interview with Balázs Jarábik – Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21/11/2016, Skype; Interview with Andrej Kazakevič – Director of the Institute "Political Sphere", 26/08/2016, Skype.

³⁷⁸ Interview with Wojciech Konończuk – Head of the Department for Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 19/09/2016, Skype.

The Russian system does not have free-flowing information, so “feedback is very twisted. Those in the system have a very specific understanding of what is really going on³⁷⁹.” While, this could lead to problems many in the Kremlin have been in power for a decade or more³⁸⁰ and media control helps the regime form the Russian mind-set. Putin apparently only reads what a select few in the presidential administration put in front of him, so they control the information he receives³⁸¹. It appears that the Belarusian regime has a better system of gathering information, and this can be attributed to Belarus’s size and the extent of the power vertikal’³⁸².

The Belarusian authorities only plan for staying in power adapting according to issues as they appear (Silitski, 2005)³⁸³. The same is true of the Kremlin which reacts to events and tries to pre-empt events by forecasting potential scenarios³⁸⁴. Putin relies on those he knows, mostly ex-KGB officers and old friends (Eggert, 2018: 15). The reconstruction of Crimea is given to old friends, one example being the bridge across the Kerch strait linking Crimea to Russia constructed by Arkadiy Rotenberg (Yaffa, 2017).

³⁷⁹ Interview with Ekaterina Shul’man– Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

³⁸⁰ Interview with Ekaterina Shul’man– Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

³⁸¹ Interview with Michael Rochlitz – Assistant Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 08/11/2016, Moscow (since the interview at the Ludwig Maximilians Universität München and now Professor of Economics at Universität Bremen).

³⁸² Interview with Valery Kavaleuski – Consultant at the World Bank and Country Analyst Consultant at Freedom House, 02/08/2016, Skype.

³⁸³ Interview with Yauheni Preiherman – Head of the Minsk Tack II Initiative, Head of the Liberal Club in Minsk, 18/08/2016, Coventry.

³⁸⁴ Interview with Andrei Melville – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) and Member of the HSE Academic Council, Moscow, 31/10/2016, Moscow; Interview with Ekim Arbatli – Assistant Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 05/04/2017, Moscow.

Corruption does not lead to authoritarian learning, but it keeps the regime in power, and is important for explaining regime survival. Two examples will be highlighted here, the Panama and Paradise Papers. The Panama Papers (2016) were published by a whistle-blower from the Panamanian company Mossack Fonseca. Bank Rossiya was the bank for “sweetheart loans” for Russian elite offshore companies becoming “Putin’s personal cashbox” (Bernstein et al. 2016). Sergei Rodulgin – who has known Putin since childhood and is godfather to Putin’s first daughter, Masha (Novaya Gazeta, 2016e) – was named in the Panama Papers (Anin, 2017a: 11-12). In 2010, Rodulgin bought shares in Bank Rossiya selling them for 32 times their value and making \$420 million in a day! Bank Rossiya was bought out by Gazprom’s former Gazenergoprombank which then sold Bank Rossiya back to its original shareholders resulting in Russian taxpayers losing five billion roubles (Anin, 2016: 2-3; Novaya Gazeta, 2016e). The Panama Papers showed that some governors and United Russia deputies had accounts in tax havens (Novaya Gazeta, 2016a; 2016c). Security Council Head Patrushev and Deputy Interior Minister Igor’ Zubov had bank accounts in their son’s names (Novaya Gazeta, 2016d).

The Paradise Papers (2017) came from documents published from Appleby’s Bermuda office. They were less explosive for the Kremlin than the Panama Papers, but they pointed to collusion between American government personnel and people close to the Kremlin (Chavkin, 2017; Chavkin and Hamilton, 2017; Woodman, 2017b). The Kremlin-controlled VTB Bank invested \$191 million in Yuriy Milner’s DTS Holdings. Milner re-invested the money in Facebook and Twitter. Gazprom provided further funds to another Milner company which bought more shares in Facebook and Twitter. Although there is no evidence that the Kremlin sought to directly influence Facebook or Twitter with these investments, it

is possible information was gained on the intricate working of both social networks (Woodman, 2017a), allowing the Kremlin sponsored Internet research agency to influence the 2016 American presidential elections with 127 million Americans receiving posts from Russian sources (Tadtaev, 2017).

The Panama Papers showed that Ukrainian President Poroshenko had not followed a campaign promise selling his company, Roshen. Poroshenko moved Roshen to British Virgin Island jurisdiction, allowing him to avoid paying millions of dollars in tax. While Bankova legislated against money in tax havens and Ukraine fought in the Donbas, Ukraine's president moved money abroad (Babinets and Lavrov, 2016a; 2016b). The Panama Papers showed that Poroshenko directly owned Prime Asset Partners which owned the Cypriot company CEE Confectionary Investments who owned the Dutch-based Roshen Europe, the parent company of Roshen, which Poroshenko claimed was in a blind trust (Timtchenko, 2016). Poroshenko failed to sell off assets as president and also evaded tax (Kyiv Post et al. 2015; Zhuk and Rodenko, 2016).

The Panama Papers showed Roshen was not in a blind trust or sold, as Poroshenko claimed during the 2014 presidential election campaign (Denkov, 2016; 112.ua, 2016). However, the Paradise Papers showed the blind trust was run by an associate, Vadim Medvedev, and Poroshenko could access information and make decisions (Sukhov and Lavrov, 2017). Another investigation showed that Poroshenko, Ihor Konenko – a business partner and deputy head of the BPP – and Security Council Deputy Oleh Hladkovs'kyi owned Spanish villas. All three 'forgot' to declare these on income declarations (Miller and Sedletska, 2016) making a mockery of legislation requiring Ukrainian political elites to declare all income and assets.

7.4.2. Moldova and Ukraine

The Panama and Paradise Papers raise questions about how Ukrainian political and business elites manipulate the spirit of legislation to achieve or preserve their interests. Factions in Moldova and Ukraine can lose power quickly, so they try to maintain power at all costs and compete to protect interests, creating a situation where factions try to get rich quick, fearing they will soon lose power.

In Ukraine, Yanukovich and Akhmetov knew each other since 1994. Both were involved in the Donetsk mafia state of the 1990s and cooperated to preserve their interests. This brought them into contact with the Nemsadze brothers. Akhmetov and Yanukovich used the Nemsadze mafia gang to coerce others (Chornovil, 2013; Semenets, 2012). Akhmetov in the 1990s was the enforcer for mafia-boss Akhat Bragin. After Bragin died in a suspicious explosion (Grytsenko and Sukhov, 2016a) Akhmetov took control of Donetsk. Using it as his base he went national, backing President Kuchma and Yanukovich. Akhmetov convinced Kuchma to make Yanukovich Donetsk governor (Wikileaks.org, 2007). Yanukovich used his political clout to support Akhmetov in building and increasing his business empire (Leshchenko, S, 2015a: 24; Rojansky, 2014: 427; Salem, 2014; Wilson, 2005a: 13; 2014c: 122). Akhmetov financially backed Party of Regions (Wilson, 2005a: 12; 2007: 106), where he met Poroshenko, as Poroshenko's political party, Solidarity, joined the coalition that became the Party of Regions in 2001 (Leshchenko, S, 2014a).

When Yanukovich became president in 2010 his allies accessed state resources and the state quickly became an appendage of the Donbas clique (Bullough, 2014). Yanukovich created a two ring system. The outer ring involved cronies, like Akhmetov and other oligarchs. The inner ring was known as the 'family'. Blood ties were unimportant for

membership although his sons – Oleksandr and Viktor – were involved (Motyl, 2012). The network included Oleksandr Klimenko, Serhiy Arbuzov, Zakharchenko, Eduard Stavits'kyi and Serhiy Kurchenko (Korrespondent.net, 2013; Konończuk, 2016). The 'family' asset stripped \$8 billion annually between 2010 and 2013 (Wilson, 2014b). One interviewee claimed Oleksandr Yanukovich even ruled the country behind his father³⁸⁵.

According to Wikileaks (2007), Yanukovich was a business partner of Serhiy Klyuyev using his political position to help Klyuyev, like with Akhmetov. Oligarch and businessman Firtash supported Yanukovich through his media's continuous coverage contributing to Yanukovich's 2010 electoral victory (Grey et al. 2014). Having assured Yanukovich victory, Firtash called in the loan, taking control of state assets (Marone, 2010). He pressured Yanukovich to arrest Tymoshenko who was a long time Firtash rival (Salem, 2014).

Yanukovich quickly corrupted the SBU, using it against the opposition (Butusov, 2010b). Regular meetings with close ally and SBU chief Khoroshkovs'kyi set-out what to do with Tymoshenko (Butusov, 2010a). In 2013, Oleksandr Yakimenko (2013-2014) – who was close to the 'family' – became SBU head. He had worked with Yanukovich in Donetsk as an adviser (Kapsamun, 2013).

L'ovochkin remained a key ally and during the Euromaidan, he tried to split the protesters and instigated violence (Chornovil, 2015). Yanukovich made the mistake of giving too much to his 'family', which alienated oligarchs who lost rent access, and some of them had no compunction in supporting the Euromaidan (Neef, 2014). It explains the staccato

³⁸⁵ Interview with Galyna Zelenko – Professor at the I. F. Kuras Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies at the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 25/04/2017, Kyiv.

repression³⁸⁶ (Wilson, 2014c: 76-77) as increasingly deep regime divisions meant there could be no recourse to massive force (Wilson, 2014c: 84-85; Coalson, 2013).

The oligarchs have had close links with all Ukrainian political regimes adapting to maintain their interests. Their flexibility allows them to form and break coalitions depending on their present interests (Konończuk, 2016). Oligarchic wars are – for the most part – played out in the media. The ten biggest media outlets are all owned by oligarchs. President Poroshenko owns Channel Five, so naturally, it has pro-Poroshenko coverage (Fedets, 2015). Inter is owned by Firtash and L'ovochkin (Zerkalo Nedeli, 2013: 1) and openly supports the Opposition Bloc, promoting the party's successes on national television and runs programs about corruption under Poroshenko (Andreitsiv, 2015a; 2015b). Another channel 1+1 owned by Kolomois'kyi promotes its owner's interests while giving Dnipro events national importance (Andreitsiv, 2015a; 2015b).

Many oligarchs were members of the CPSU and Komsomol in Soviet Ukraine, so they mostly know each other and have had years of practice over keeping control of assets³⁸⁷. To preserve their interests they buy government positions, political access or Siloviki members (Leshchenko, S, 2014b; 2014c). As the oligarchs' finance politics, the government maintains their interests³⁸⁸. Poroshenko employed personnel from the Kuchma,

³⁸⁶ This is repression that is not continuous, but the regime oscillates between hard repression and softer versions.

³⁸⁷ Interview with Volodymyr Yermolenko – Director of Internews Ukraine, 26/04/2017, Kyiv; Interview with Tomasz Piechal – Junior Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 20/12/2016, Warsaw.

³⁸⁸ Interview with Galyna Zelenko – Professor at the I. F. Kuras Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies at the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 25/04/2017, Kyiv.

and Yanukovych periods³⁸⁹. Zelens'kyi has continued this trend with some Yanukovych-era personnel returning (Sukhov, 2019b).

Koval'chuk created political parties to undermine the Opposition Bloc, Sampomich and Batkivschyna (Butkevych, 2015: 8; Vedernikova, 2015: 2). By the end of 2016, a counter-revolution was ongoing with anti-corruption initiatives curtailed and most reformers removed (De Borja Lasheras, 2016: 56-57; Eristavi, 2017). Poroshenko was elected promising to depose the oligarchs (Iwański, 2017: 73), but he showed he was part of the old system (De Borja Lasheras, 2016: 57).

Poroshenko became increasingly intolerant of criticism. Journalists, politicians, activists and anti-corruption groups faced persecution. The anti-corruption Action Centre Head Vitaliy Shabunin was accused of beating Vsevolod Filimenko, a blogger and aide to BPP politician Serhi Melnychuk after Shabunin found documents incriminating Poroshenko in corrupt practices (Sukhov, 2018b). Serhiy Leshchenko having exposed corruption was charged with corruption to taint him as corrupt as the regime (Sukhov, 2016a). Head of NABU, Artem Sytnyk, was fined for not giving sensitive documents to the National Agency for Preventing Corruption (NAPC), an organisation controlled by Poroshenko (Sukhov, 2018c). Corruption was ineffectively fought as Poroshenko controlled the SBU and the National Security and Defence Council (Saradzhyan, 2016). The creation of an anti-graft committee appeared independent but was controlled by Bankova as the regime had the final say on the appointment of judges (Tytych, 2018).

An example of Poroshenko dealing with possible threats was the arrest of Savchenko, who with Volodymyr Ruban, was accused of planning a terrorist plot to attack

³⁸⁹ Interview with Oksana Grytsenko – Journalist at the Kyiv Post, 18/11/2016, Kyiv.

parliament and take control. Savchenko having been kidnapped and imprisoned in Russia (Melkozerova, 2015a) had upon her return received the award of the Golden Star from Poroshenko (Kramer, A, 2016b). Having become a politician, Savchenko became increasingly popular in Ukrainian society (Fedoseyev, 2018; Rechinskiy, 2018: 2), although her poll rating had decreased by 2018 (Kazanskyi 2018: 25). Savchenko began campaigning in early 2018 for the 2019 presidential election (Holub, 2018: 18). Having been arrested by pro-Russian forces in Ukraine and sent to trial in Russia, Savchenko was accused of an attempted terror attack in Kyiv (Mostovaya, 2018: 1), pointing to a bizarre storyline where Ukraine's so-called "Joan of Arc³⁹⁰" worked for the Kremlin.

Medvedchuk was touted as the mastermind behind Savchenko (Melkozerova, 2018b), and the link between Savchenko and the Kremlin. However, he has not been arrested, pointing to close links to Bankova (Sukhov, 2018d). The arrest of Savchenko coupled with the earlier trial and arrest of Saakashvili³⁹¹ pointed to Bankova placing restrictions on possible popular candidates standing in the 2019 presidential elections (Sukhov, 2018a), although it is questionable whether Saakashvili and Savchenko had popular support, and Savchenko's arrest for terrorism and being a Kremlin 'agent' led to her popularity dissipating (Melkozerova, 2019).

Poroshenko had a narrow circle of confidantes when he was president, like Makar Pasenyuk, Ihar Kononenko and Oleksandr Hranovs'kyi (Koshkina, 2017b). Kononenko is a Poroshenko business partner since the 1990s (Romanenko, 2017). Serhiy Berezenko another ally tried to buy the votes of non-BPP politicians (Sukhov, 2016g). Prosecutor General

³⁹⁰ See article by Olearchyk and Hille (2016).

³⁹¹ Saakashvili became mayor of Odesa and was tasked with fighting corruption in Ukraine. He fell out with Poroshenko and became a vocal oppositionist.

Lutsenko is an ally (Sukhov, 2018f; 2016h), “tool of the President’s political vendettas” (Kyiv Post, 2018) and part of the Poroshenko ‘family’ (Politeka.net, 2016). Lutsenko pressured the NABU (Zerkalo Nedeli, 2017) taking a NABU case about NAPC corruption and giving it to the SBU and NAPC to investigate (Sukhov, 2017b). At the time NAPC was controlled by Poroshenko (Sukhov, 2017a) and the SBU a state structure, Lutsenko tried to hamper corruption cases. He blamed civil society activists for causing the deaths of their own – like Kateryna Handziuk – because of work which shows “total hatred of power” (Ukrayins’ka Pravda, 2018b).

Former Prime Minister Hroysman was a Poroshenko ally and owed Poroshenko for his meteoric political rise (Synovitz, 2016b). By placing Hroysman as mayor of Vinnytsya in 2006, Poroshenko built a political base (Melkozerova, 2018a), and through links with Hroysman, Poroshenko controlled the government. Poroshenko made shady deals with other political and business elites³⁹² and attempted to consolidate and entrust power to a small group of allies. The presidential administration rolled back reforms and pressured the media³⁹³.

Poroshenko tried to gain control of courts and law enforcement agencies, but as Ukraine is a pluralist political system, there was always competition³⁹⁴. When appointing Hroysman as prime minister, Poroshenko relied on the support of other oligarchs, negotiating with them on which politicians could form the government (Olszański and Iwański, 2016). With the ending of the Poroshenko presidency, information has come out

³⁹² Interview with Olexiy Haran – Professor at the Kyiv-Myhola Academy, 16/11/2016, Kyiv.

³⁹³ Interview with Maxim Eristavi – Non-Resident Fellow at the Atlantic Council and co-founder of Hromadske TV, 16/11/2016, Kyiv.

³⁹⁴ Interview with a specialist on Ukraine who requested anonymity, 24/04/2017.

that many in his government were associated with Investment Capital Ukraine (ICU), with ICU involved in insider trading, making money off of the state (Sorokin, 2019a).

Oligarchs, like Akhmetov and Kolomois'kyi, saw President Kuchma as a godfather but do not see Poroshenko in the same way as he is an oligarch and not even the richest³⁹⁵. All presidents have tried to establish their own clans and Poroshenko was no different, although unlike Yanukovich who tried to take power quickly, Poroshenko tried to reduce the power of others one-by-one³⁹⁶.

In the early days of the Ukrainian conflict, Kolomois'kyi controlled the Dnipro region to stop it becoming a new Donbas (Toal, 2017: 255). His popularity and attempt to control more state assets created a struggle with Poroshenko, resulting in PrivatBank, a large Kolomois'kyi asset, being nationalised (Leshchenko, S, 2015b; Quinn and Rudenko, 2015; Iwański, 2016). By 2016, the tussle ended and while PrivatBank remained nationalised Kolomois'kyi kept the \$2 billion he had syphoned off and avoided prosecution, and his 43% share in Ukranafta was returned (Iwański, 2016). However, Kolomois'kyi contested his losses by refusing to issue chlorine from his Dniproazot concern – the only chlorine producing plant in Ukraine – to allow local authorities to treat water and make it safe for drinking (Kovensky, 2018a).

Akhmetov maintained relations with Poroshenko to reconsolidate his business empire and keep his assets in the Donbas, should the Ukrainian army liberate the territory (Sokolov, 2017). Poroshenko made deals with other oligarchs to gain support in return for

³⁹⁵ Interview with Tadeusz Iwański – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw. At the time of writing (2019) the richest oligarch remains Rinat Akhmetov, having successfully managed to recoup many of his losses from the loss of his business heartland around Donetsk remains the richest man in Ukraine (Sazonov, 2018).

³⁹⁶ Interview with Volodymyr Yermolenko – Director of Internews Ukraine, 26/04/2017, Kyiv.

preserving their interests (Liga.net, 2016a). Medvedchuk and Firtash have not been prosecuted even though they remain close to the Kremlin (Leshchenko, S, 2017; Koshkina, 2015b), leading to questions about their relationship with Poroshenko and now Zelens'kyy. Although there is no conclusive evidence, Medvedchuk retains close ties to the Kremlin (Kanygin, 2018; LB.ua, 2017d), and having held direct meetings with Poroshenko in late 2018 (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2018b), it is possible Medvedchuk is a liason between Bankova and the Kremlin.

During the Poroshenko era there were allegations of an agreement between the presidential administration and media channels to only mildly criticise Poroshenko, to maintain popular support (Kuznetsova, 2016). One interviewee stated that there is an agreement between the oligarchs and presidential administration for positive coverage³⁹⁷. Poroshenko looks to dominate the oligarchs (Grabovskiy, Serg 2018) using divide and rule tactics³⁹⁸.

There are links between Poroshenko and Yanukovych and Yanukovych-era personnel re-appeared under Poroshenko. A close Yanukovych aide, Olexiy Takhtay, was an interior ministry secretary (Vygovskiy, 2017: 3). ICU is owned by Poroshenko confidante Paeniuk, and it helped Yanukovych launder \$1.5 billion in 2014 (Kalenyuk et al. 2018). The money went into offshore companies owned by Kurchenko who was known as Yanukovych's wallet (Sukhov, 2018h). The money was retrieved, although this was only ever stated with no evidence to back it up. It was confiscated by the Prosecutor General's Office raising questions as to where it went (Kalenyuk et al. 2018). Kurchenko was involved in illegally

³⁹⁷ Interview with Maxim Eristavi – Non-Resident Fellow at the Atlantic Council and co-founder of Hromadske TV, 16/11/2016, Kyiv.

³⁹⁸ Interview with Tadeusz Iwański – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

exporting coal from the LPR to Russia and then re-exporting it to Europe (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2017b; Ekonomicheskaya Pravda, 2016). As well as illicitly trading coal, Kurchenko also distributed prohibited petroleum exports from the LPR (Ekonomicheskaya Pravda, 2017b) and he has close links to Gazprom (Ekonomicheskaya Pravda, 2016). His company Gas-Alliance based in Nizhniy Novgorod in Russia used metal from the LPR and exported it abroad (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2017a). While Kurchenko and Gas-Alliance were sanctioned by America they remain off the Ukrainian sanctions list, pointing to close association with the Ukrainian government (Sorokin, 2018). Similarly, Zelens'kyi has brought in a number of Yanukovich-era personnel, pointing to a comeback for these groups (Sukhov, 2019b).

Yanukovich allies secretly agreed not to work against Poroshenko in return for keeping their businesses (Sukhov, 2017e). For instance, Akhmetov and Poroshenko agreed that Akhmetov's assets will not be touched and he will not be arrested (Grytsenko and Sukhov, 2016a). Poroshenko brought in the Rotterdam+ formula for pricing coal, which raised Akmetov's fortune as a large part of his business is in coal (Sukhov, 2018i). With the reemployment of Yanukovich-era cadres and failure to prosecute other Yanukovich allies, links remain strong between the current and past regimes (Vygovskiy, 2017: 3; Kyiv Post, 2018; Sukhov, 2017f; Kovensky, 2018c). Since the early 1990s, there has been an agreement between oligarchs that those in power can take the assets of others but they cannot be jailed. However, Yanukovich broke this agreement by jailing Tymoshenko.

Therefore, Poroshenko has not gone after former Yanukovich elites which would break the rules³⁹⁹ and jeopardise his position. The failure of Lutsenko to prosecute former Yanukovich allies, like Serhiy Klyuyev and former-leader of the Opposition Bloc Boyko, and

³⁹⁹ Interview with Volodymyr Yermolenko – Director of Internews Ukraine, 26/04/2017, Kyiv.

Firtash showed collusion (Sukhov, 2018g). As the case of Mykola Zlochevs'kyi highlights, Poroshenko worked with former Yanukovich allies (Sukhov, 2018e).

Moldova also has competing clans which are fissiparous and constantly changing. There are only a small number of elites and they know each other⁴⁰⁰. The clans fight over revenue streams and state structures⁴⁰¹. People who are presently in power did well in the 1990s, shaping today's rules⁴⁰². Plahotniuc did not try to control everything, rather he influenced financial flows and controlled state institutions, which could limit his wealth⁴⁰³. Plahotniuc built his financial empire in the 1990s getting rich through shady business deals. With Plahotniuc fleeing Moldova in 2019 there is evidence Plahotniuc and Victor Gușan who owns the Sheriff business empire in Transnistria laundered money from their shared companies through Transnistria and Moldova into EU banks (Rise.md, 2019).

During the 2000s, he was close to Voronin's son, Oleg.⁴⁰⁴ The PCRM, under Voronin, constructed a system where a small group of political and business elites controlled most financial resources. Plahotniuc helped create this system using *reiderstvo* tactics to increase Voronin's business portfolio. Businesses were blackmailed too and told to make a payment to be left alone or else the tax authorities would be called and the business closed⁴⁰⁵. After

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Kamil Całus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

⁴⁰¹ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 17/05/2017.

⁴⁰² Interview with Mark Mazureanu – Researcher at Universität Mannheim and Lecturer at Rutgers University, 14/04/2017, Chișinău.

⁴⁰³ Interview with Kamil Całus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with Ion Manole – Director at Promo-LEX, 12/07/2017, Skype.

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with Kamil Całus – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

becoming president in 2001, Voronin purchased a number of buildings and cars that cost more than his official salary and owned a bank, all of which he put in his wife's name to avoid tax. His children, Oleg, Valentina, and Oleg's wife Elena, all had property in their name and the state security services were used as bodyguards to protect these buildings (Codrean and Călugăreanu, 2009). Voronin kept control because the PCRM was subservient to him and he used his control of the party to control the state (Nicolae, 2019). Voronin family members took over businesses using administrative tools like the tax authorities (Cozonac and Guja, 2005). Plahotniuc saw how Voronin put people he could manipulate in positions of power, giving Voronin control over the state⁴⁰⁶. Plahotniuc became one of the five "hunters" who went hunting with Voronin and his son, Oleg, and Plahotniuc was the main funder of the PCRM, known as Voronin's "Wallet" (Cojocaru, 2019). Plahotniuc learnt during the 1990s and Voronin period. Igor Dodon also owes his political career to Voronin, who picked him as economics minister and deputy prime minister (Nicolae, 2019).

As economic minister Dodon was in direct contact with Plahotniuc. Plahotniuc owned supermarkets and needed import licences, which Dodon gave him. The agreement gave Plahotniuc exclusive import rights in exchange for profit share with Dodon⁴⁰⁷. Another example is the Nobil Luxury Boutique Hotel in central Chişinău, which Plahotniuc bought for 20% of its market value and Dodon as economy minister did not question⁴⁰⁸. There are questions regarding which offshore company bought Hotel Codru for €3.5 million, €16.5 million below its market value (Basiul, 2016). The Cypriot company, Daranian Holdings,

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 17/05/2017.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 11/07/2017.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with Dumitru Alaiba – Programme Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms Moldova (CPR) and currently Parliamentarian in the ACUM coalition, 14/07/2017, Skype.

transferred it to Finpar Invest who made a large profit. Finpar Invest is owned by Plahotniuc family members (Sanduța and Munteanu, 2015).

After three years of acting presidents, Plahotniuc allegedly bribed Dodon and Zinaida Greceanîi to support Timofti to break the stalemate between the PCRM and the AEI⁴⁰⁹. In December 2011, Dodon stated he would not vote for Timofti, only to do the opposite in March 2012 (Alaiba, 2016b). Another example of the closeness of Plahotniuc and Dodon was Dodon's statement he would stop PSRM deputies voting to keep Plahotniuc as parliamentary speaker, but Dodon was the only PSRM deputy to vote for Plahotniuc (Aliaba, 2016b). At the time of conducting interviews it appeared they were allies and Plahotniuc even funded Dodon's 2016 presidential campaign⁴¹⁰. Whereas other political parties, like the PCRM, PLM and PLDM lost parliamentarians to the PDM, Dodon's PSRM was left alone (Alaiba, 2016c).

Moldovan political parties have fluid memberships; people join and leave which Grigorița (2016) labels as "political tourism." During the 2015-2016 protests, Filip passed reforms only because 26 parliamentarians from the PLDM and PCRM were paid six-figure sums to support the government (Grigorița, 2016). The PDM with Plahotniuc's financial support successfully got parliamentarians to cross the floor⁴¹¹ and these tactics have existed since the early 1990s⁴¹².

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with Mihai Popșoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

⁴¹⁰ Interview with Mihai Popșoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

⁴¹¹ Interview with Ion Manole – Director at Promo-LEX, 12/07/2017, Skype.

⁴¹² Interview with Mark Mazureanu – Researcher at Universităt Mannheim and Lecturer at Rutgers University, 14/04/2017, Chișinău.

Two interviewees claimed Plahotniuc bought parliamentarians, paying them to remain in their parties, vote for the PDM and weaken their parties⁴¹³. He split the PCRM, seen by the payment to 14 PCRM delegates in 2015 to set-up the political party For Moldova to support the PDM (Jurnal.md, 2015b). Plahotniuc, through his munificence, controlled the judiciary, parliament, state structures (Gherasimov, 2017), the Prosecutor General's Office (Alaiba, 2011), the economic and interior ministries and most judges in the constitutional court (Socor, 2016a; Jurnal.md, 2016d; 2016e), although this changed after he fled in 2019. Although Plahotniuc wrested control of the Prosecutor General's Office before 2013, consolidation really began after Filat's arrest.

The Moldovan 'War of the Roses' was a confrontation between Plahotniuc and Filat for control of institutions (Popșoi, 2016d: 85; Litra, 2013: 5). Like the English War of the Roses the red rose won. In Moldova, the struggle ended when it was found that Filat made \$250 million from the theft of the century banking scandal (Litra, 2015: 1) leaving him exposed. Filat and ally, Veaceslav Platon, were arrested, but Ilan Șor – the main protagonist – was not because of links to Plahotniuc⁴¹⁴.

In late 2017, President Dodon refused to appoint a new defence minister and he was suspended by the constitutional court (Popșoi, 2017b). This happened again in January 2018, when the constitutional court stated Dodon was harming parliamentary sovereignty (Point.md, 2018a). In late 2018 it happened for the fifth time as Dodon refused to accept the appointment of two new ministers (Point.md, 2018b). It was an attempt by Dodon to

⁴¹³ Interview with Viorel Cibotaru – President of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova and Executive Director for the European Institute for Political Science, 11/11/2016, Chișinău; Interview with a specialist on Moldova who requested anonymity, 09/11/2016.

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Mihai Popșoi – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

exert control in the run-up to the 2019 parliamentary elections, but in a system controlled by Plahotniuc (Popșoi, 2018a; Cățus, 2016b), it failed.

Legislation in late 2017 limited television media ownership to two channels creating a message to the EU that Plahotniuc was not a media tycoon (Jurnal.md, 2017d). Plahotniuc and ally, Oleg Cristal, set up a new company with Plahotniuc a minority shareholder allowing Plahotniuc to keep some control of Canal Two and Three while retaining full control of the popular Prime and Publika (NewsMaker, 2017b). Like Lukashenka, Poroshenko and Putin, Plahotniuc relied on people he could manipulate (Alaiba, 2016a).

However, Plahotniuc's consolidation of power and use of kompromat alienated other actors and forced the PSRM and the ACUM together to oust Plahotniuc in 2019. Plahotniuc used kompromat, such as posting sex tapes against opposition leaders (Nemtsova, 2019). During the 2017 protests a sex tape appeared of protest leader Natalia Morari with another woman (Nemtsova, 2017). This use of kompromat was used by Plahotniuc to blackmail others into supporting Plahotnic. However in 2019, Plahotniuc overstepped and used kompromat against Dodon to keep him in line (Gamova, 2019; Kommersant, 2019). This gave Dodon little alternative but to unite with ACUM and oust Plahotniuc. Like Yanukovych, Plahotniuc relied on thuggish practices, epitomised by the suspicious suicide of Yuriy Lunkash, as Lukash was a member of the Plahotniuc family – quite literally he was married to Plahotniuc's sister – and knew where all the money was and his death protected the ill-gotten gains of Plahotniuc (Efremov, 2019).

7.5. Conclusion

Internal networks are important places for authoritarian regimes to learn and preserve power. This was the argument in proposition three and as the four case studies show there is sufficient evidence to assert that this is the case. In Russia and Belarus, inner circles have mostly survived. Belarus is different, as Lukashenka's patronage ensures loyalty, as he uses the carrot of positions in the state to retain loyalty. By contrast, the Kremlin relies on a small cadre of Putin allies who control state structures, thereby helping the regime maintain power.

In Belarus and Russia, the presidential administrations are important as Lukashenka and Putin rely on KDB and FSB information for policy. Both try to scare Lukashenka and Putin to remain relevant. For Lukashenka, the security services are important as he gets his economic policy from them. The Russian Security Council allows Putin to hold surreptitious meetings and find solutions. Internal networks are useful for the Belarusian and Russian regimes to keep power.

While, Moldovan and Ukrainian regimes attempt to place allies in control of state institutions for the same purpose they are competitive authoritarian regimes, so there is competition and regimes are less able to establish control as in Belarus and Russia. In Moldova and Ukraine internal networks are used by regimes to try to keep power, but these networks do not consist of just allies as in Belarus and Russia. In Moldova and Ukraine the political elite is relatively small, so regimes come and go, but people remain. This means that internal networks in Moldova and Ukraine are conducive to learning, as for instance Plahotniuc and Poroshenko have been in previous regimes and so pick-up lessons.

Therefore, while internal networks in Belarus and Russia are more about the preservation of control, in Moldova and Ukraine internal networks allow for attempted control and learning.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

“Autocrats Learn and Adjust”⁴¹⁵”

8.1. Introduction

Learning has become an issue worthy of study in understanding authoritarian regimes. Through learning and lesson-drawing these regimes protect themselves from democratisation pressures. Understanding how they defend themselves helps develop tactics to understand authoritarian regimes survival and how to counteract that endurance. I have shown – as the above quote argues – that authoritarian regimes learn and adjust.

There are a number of factors making this thesis a significant contribution to existing literature. As the number of authoritarian regimes continues to increase – although that rise can decrease – understanding their survival – principally through learning – will better explain the nuances of their persistence. By analysing the post-Soviet region I provide valuable information on regime inter-connectedness, how lesson-drawing occurs, how engaged these regimes are with each other and in which institutions learning occurs.

8.2. Research Findings

Authoritarian learning was an understudied topic, but the topic was increasingly relevant, although existing literature remains limited. This work provides some findings that improve our understanding of authoritarian learning. However, there is a caveat as authoritarian regimes are relatively closed, compared to democratic regimes. Little

⁴¹⁵ Kagan, Robert. 2008. “The End of the End of History.” April 23, 2008. Accessed May 11, 2018. <https://newrepublic.com/article/60801/the-end-the-end-history>.

information permeates out, making it harder to locate definitive evidence that there are one-to-one meetings and what was said. However, there are some clear findings.

8.2.1. Authoritarian Diffusion?

Diffusion has been important to democratisation literature for a long time. Democratic ideas are diffused from one state to another. This helps democratise one country after another. The power of diffusion mechanisms in democratisation has been addressed many times.

However, there has been limited investigation as to whether authoritarian regimes diffuse ideas between each other, or if authoritarian values are an alternative value system to democracy. There has only been a tentative analysis of authoritarian diffusion. Strang (1991: 325) defined diffusion as “any process where prior adoption or practice in a population alters the probability of adoption for remaining non-adopters.” What was shown here is that actors react to changes in other states. There are clear instances of learning and dialogue between regimes which points to something stronger than diffusion. Diffusion certainly plays a role and one interviewee was correct to state that “90% of what to do can be found on Google⁴¹⁶.” Although diffusion is evident there is something stronger occurring. On the one hand, there is emulation, where regimes decide what to implement imitate one another and on the other hand, there is actual dialogue and sharing of best practices.

As seen regimes in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine collude, so authoritarian emulation is important. There are likely processes of diffusion, but there is also a mix of dialogue and emulation. Certainly, our understanding of authoritarian diffusion has been

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Aleś Łahviniec – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Alyaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

expanded here, but more needs to be done to provide concrete evidence. Leaders in one authoritarian regime look to policies to emulate or copy.

8.2.2. Learning is not just Democratic

Authoritarian learning remains under-theorised. There have been notable exceptions, but only a few studies attempt to conceptualise and theorise authoritarian learning. Using literature on learning I combined theories of experiential and social learning to understand how authoritarian regimes learn. I addressed policy transfer, diffusion, linkage and leverage and lesson-drawing to explain authoritarian learning. By analysing these literatures I provide a theoretical basis for authoritarian learning.

Authoritarian and democratic learning are actually similar and comparable processes. However, their aims are vastly different. Although it may seem obvious, authoritarian regimes learn for one main aim, to stay in power at all costs. Therefore, they constantly learn and adapt, as well as collaborating with one another to stay in power.

8.2.3. Authoritarian Interlinkage

Using the four case studies of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine I showed elite interlinkage. I analysed post-Soviet regional organisations, like the CIS, CSTO, EAEU, SCO, GUAM and the Union State. Meetings of these regional organisations provide a perfect opportunity to discuss pressing issues. These organisations offer meeting venues, allowing regimes to share best practices, and they provide training exercises to gauge which tactics are most effective for a particular issue. These organisations offer legislative harmonisation and meeting venues for inter-departmental commissions, meaning that learning is across regimes.

Authoritarian learning is often not at the level of the presidency, but at lower levels and in state structures like presidential administrations and the security services. Interior ministries and Security Councils are also important areas for learning from external and internal examples. Ambassadors also were a further example of learning and they are an important source of bolstering for other regimes, particularly in the case of Russian ambassadors. By analysing interlinkage between the four case studies I showed learning.

8.2.4. *Intra-state Learning*

Existing literature has concentrated on the inter-state level, by analysing interactions between authoritarian regimes. However, this misses a key aspect of authoritarian learning, which is the intra-state level. By analysing intra-state level learning in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine I showed that there is significant inter-linkage between groups and a clear opportunity for learning.

Many people in the Kremlin have been close to Putin since the Soviet days, or in the 1990s in St. Petersburg. In Moldova, Plahotniuc worked with members of the PCRM before bankrolling the PDM and taking a nominally pro-European stance. The same is true of Ukraine, where Poroshenko has been in politics since the 1990s. Elite interlinkage in the four cases means they all know each other, learn from each other and are concerned with protecting their own power and that of their allies. In regards to Moldova and Ukraine, this has been detrimental to their democratisation and is one reason the Belarusian and Russian regimes are consolidated. To get understand authoritarian learning we must understand the internal as well as the external.

8.2.5. *Success is as Important as Failure*

Learning from failure has received much analysis, which is understandable. It is easier to see failure. As authoritarian regimes do not provide many opportunities for the public to replace them non-violently, the demise of authoritarian regimes is often brutal. Naturally, other authoritarian regimes do not want to share that fate, so they develop practices to counter protests. Learning from success is harder to measure, but it is relevant. Internal sources are the main source of learning from success. For example, Plahotniuc and Poroshenko learnt from internal success from previous regimes to control power in the present. Success is hard to measure but it is just as relevant to authoritarian learning as failure.

8.2.6. *The Internal is as Relevant to Authoritarian Learning as the External*

Although the existing literature has concentrated on the external aspects of authoritarian learning, I showed that the internal is crucial for understanding authoritarian learning. This is particularly the case for Moldova and Ukraine, as elites in these regimes have worked in past regimes and learn from previous periods, as well as maintaining contacts that help preserve power and induce learning.

In Belarus and Russia allies are put in positions of power to maintain control. This does not necessarily induce learning from internal sources, but as the Belarusian and Russian authorities are constantly looking to adapt and maintain control, learning from internal examples is important. Therefore, all four case studies show that internal sources of learning are as important as external examples.

8.3. Investigating the Propositions and Research Questions

There were six propositions and eight research questions and. I shall address the propositions before analysing the research questions to ascertain if they have been answered. The propositions are investigated below:

Proposition 1 – Authoritarian learning differs from democratic learning because authoritarian learning is especially concerned with learning from external and internal examples to increase the chances of survival for an authoritarian regime, by providing a full palette of survival practices: Authoritarian regimes are concerned with control and see threats in independent structures. Therefore, they constantly analyse external and internal examples to learn from them and ensure their continued survival. Authoritarian regimes develop a full palette of survival practices. Belarus and Russia are particularly adept at this. By contrast, Moldova and Ukraine as competitive authoritarian regimes look to learn, but do not have the capacity to perfect a full palette of survival practices.

Proposition 2 – Authoritarian learning has a flattened hierarchy and network, with authoritarian regimes learning from one another, rather than a hegemon dispensing lessons or an authoritarian gravity centre: External networks between authoritarian regimes are flatter than previously considered in the existing literature. Of course, Russia as the regional hegemon plays the role of main protagonist, but this detracts from the evidence that the Kremlin learns from the examples of others. This is particularly the case for Belarus, but also Moldova and Ukraine. The idea of the authoritarian gravity centre, while a good model, does not provide the nuances that the four case studies have shown about authoritarian learning.

Proposition 3 - Internal networks are useful for learning and for preserving authoritarian

regimes: Internal networks are particularly important for explaining learning in Moldova and Ukraine, where elites have been in previous regimes and due to the small size of each elite they know one another, thereby helping learning processes. By contrast, in Belarus and Russia internal networks are more about preserving the regimes, as Lukashenka and Putin place allies in position of power to maintain control. Regimes in Moldova and Ukraine do the same, but because of the competitive nature of these regimes they are less able to keep power.

Proposition 4 – Both success and failure are equally important arenas for learning for

authoritarian regimes as each other: Learning from success and failure are both equally important. However, examples of learning from failure are easier to see than those of success.

Proposition 5 – Authoritarian regimes are just as likely to learn from internal examples as

external examples: Authoritarian regimes are just as likely to learn from the internal as the external. While, the reaction may be quicker during times of external failure, the internal is important as regimes see what worked or failed in the past in their own countries.

Proposition 6 – Authoritarian regimes learn to provide a fuller palette of survival practices

than just relying on repressive techniques: As seen in chapter one all four case studies co-opt and legitimate. Of course, repression remains important, but this is not the main tool used. All four regimes try to develop a full palette of survival strategies that is not just repressive.

By contrast, the research questions are listed below.

How is authoritarian learning different from democratic learning: Authoritarian and democratic learning are not different in terms of theoretical background, but their aims are radically different. The ultimate aim of any authoritarian leader is to stay in power. This makes authoritarian learning distinct from its democratic equivalent.

Do authoritarian regimes collaborate, support, engage in dialogue and learn from each other: There is comprehensive evidence authoritarian regimes collaborate, support, engage in dialogue and learn from each other. There is clear evidence learning occurs. One need only look at clear interlinkages between the four cases addressed in chapter six.

What specific circumstances exist for an authoritarian regime to support others:

Understanding the specific circumstances of authoritarian regimes collaboration is hard to measure. However, ultimately it is to stave off power loss in one regime that could lead to destabilisation in others. An example is the economic collaboration between EAEU members to maintain regional stability. When one authoritarian regime is threatened, others collaborate to stabilise the situation, fearing they could be next.

Did the other case regimes react to democratic revolutions (such as the Colour Revolutions, Arab Spring and Euromaidan), like Russia did? Why and when do these

regimes collaborate, support, talk and learn from one another: There is evidence that the Belarusian regime reacted in the same way to the Kremlin. Yanukovich also drew lessons from the Orange Revolution when he became president in 2010. There is less available data that Moldovan regimes learnt, although it is likely they did. Plahoniuc drew lessons from the 2009, 2015-2016 and 2017 protests in Moldova so it is likely that he draw lessons from other protests.

Does the regional hegemon diffuse learning to others, or can other regimes diffuse

methods to the hegemon: There is evidence that the regional hegemon plays an important role, but is not the sole dispenser of learning to others. For instance, limitations on Western funding of NGOs were first begun in Belarus. As Belarus and Russia, especially, have inter-governmental collaboration it is likely the Kremlin takes many lessons from the Belarusian regime. Evidence on this is incomplete, however, there is evidence that Russia as the post-Soviet regional hegemon is not the main learner and then dispenses lessons to other post-Soviet regimes.

How can deliberate support for democracy prevention be distinguished from general

authoritarian collaboration: Democracy prevention is part of the wider authoritarian learning palette. There are instances, like the collaboration of regional organisations which point to learning to undermine democracy promotion.

What tactics or methods do these regimes copy from each other: Extensively tracing copying between regimes is outside the remit here. However, there are a number of copied practices. As ideas and best practices are shared and legislation harmonised, there is a wide range of possible areas, tactics and methods that are shared. This is seen in NGO laws that were passed in Belarus and Russia and appeared in Ukraine. Media legislation that came into effect in Moldova resembles existing laws in Belarus and Russia. With dialogue, legislation harmonisation and meetings regionally much in the four states is likely copied.

Why do authoritarian regimes copy each other: Authoritarian regimes copy one another to survive. Belarus and Russia engage in plenty of copying, and even in Moldova and Ukraine much copying occurs particularly from the Kremlin through emulation.

8.4. Areas for Future Research

There are a number of areas requiring further research to better understand authoritarian learning. I have shown that authoritarian regimes not only infer and diffuse ideas, but dialogue and direct learning occurs. However, this may only be true of the post-Soviet space, and so analysis of other regions needs to be made. Case-specific analyses should provide clearer investigation. This is difficult – analysing authoritarian regimes always is – but there are methods analysed in chapter three, which are useful for increasing our understanding of authoritarian learning.

Learning from success and internal learning remain understudied. Existing literature has largely focused on the inter-state level and on failure. However, two key areas of authoritarian learning are missed. I have addressed these, but further in-depth analysis is needed.

More work could be done on understanding if the regional hegemon is significant to authoritarian learning. I have shown that in the post-Soviet space the regional hegemon, Russia, does not just teach, but also learns. Investigation of other global regions, like South America or East Asia could shed further light on the role of regional hegemons in authoritarian learning.

Determining how we see successful learning and understanding when authoritarian learning is more likely to occur are areas that need further analysis. Ascertaining what events are likely to lead to learning would help improve our existing understanding of authoritarian learning. Do authoritarian regimes only learn when they feel threatened? I have established that they learn from success, but this is not the same as discovering if they learn only when they feel threatened and what the threat levels are.

In regards to the post-Soviet region, Russia dominates. This is understandable but it would be intriguing to determine the role of other regimes in authoritarian learning without analysing Russia. I (2017b) pointed to Belarus as an example of an authoritarian regime learning, which others copy, and I have addressed the likelihood that Moldova and Ukraine do not require the example of Russia, but maybe by investigating the South Caucasus or Central Asia the focus could shift from Russia to ascertain the effect of other authoritarian regimes on authoritarian consolidation.

8.5. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Having addressed the theoretical and academic implications there are a number of policy relevant suggestions to be addressed. Authoritarian regimes are not only surviving but their numbers are increasing. While, Western efforts at democratisation have been dominant since the end of the Cold War there is a growing push-back against through bolstering between authoritarian regimes. Learning is a key part of the authoritarian arsenal to protect against democratisation.

With the increase in the number of authoritarian regimes democracy is no longer the only-game-in-town. As authoritarian regimes learn to survive and collaborate they become role-models for others to drop attempted democratisation, or backslide on reforms to consolidate power. Ideas diffuse both ways, so democratic values are not the only criteria that may spread.

This puts pressure on the West and the promotion of democratisation and market liberal values. The authoritarian model creates a zero-sum game reminiscent of the Cold War where the West – fearful of Communism – was less concerned with promoting its values. With the West reneging on democratic promotion, its values are weakened. For

example, fearing that EU prospective and even current members may backslide, and ally with third states, Brussels is less concerned with maintaining its values than protecting its geopolitical influence.

With authoritarian regime learning regimes can keep power and prevent Western pressure to democratise. In regards to the post-Soviet region, EU policy has become ineffective in modernising these states. Through collaboration and emulation, authoritarian regimes protect themselves from external pressures. This affects the EU's ability to compel these states to democratise.

The EU has faced a decade of crisis. With growing competition from Russia, it needs a success story. Therefore, the EU is unlikely to push reforms for fear of losing two potential success stories in Moldova and Ukraine. Although the conflict in Ukraine makes it certain Bankova will not re-align with the Kremlin, greater EU pressure could lead to balancing between Russia and the West. The same is true in Moldova.

Authoritarian learning provides the West with many challenges. As the closest neighbour to the four cases, there are a number of tools the EU could use to get back on track. Russia's sponsored conflict in Ukraine and wider interference in the EU should be counteracted. This can be done through a Russian language media channel to counter Russian propaganda and strengthen EU support in Eastern Europe. There are services that exist currently like Deutsche Welle, the BBC and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty which all offer Russian language services, however, the EU has left this task to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the Voice of America's new Russian language television channel, Current Time. A more proactive stance from the EU is necessary.

The EU should continue its policy of democratisation in the post-Soviet region. It will be contested but so be it. Promoting civil society and media is not intervention in the internal affairs of a state. That is an argument by regimes afraid of competition. Democratisation efforts may not weaken regimes – in say Belarus and Russia – but they will show that the EU believes its proclaimed values.

Another option is to stop treating the regimes and people as the same. Young people from Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine should have greater opportunity to travel and study in Europe. Visa costs could be reduced and scholarships given to allow more to come and live – for a short period – in EU countries. This will not necessarily make them pro-European, but it would give them experience of what life is like outside the four countries and increase linkages between them and EU states.

Programmes to train youth activists and future politicians should be increased. This can be done by creating more youth parliaments in Brussels or Warsaw or Vilnius to train aspirant politicians in democratic politics and good governance. This would allow them to return to Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine to use skills developed abroad domestically. The EU should provide assistance to civil society groups and activists either through short courses or in supporting their work at home.

The EU should stop worrying about losing Moldova and Ukraine. For an organisation that has had a decade of failure, losing two signatories to its Association Agreement could be construed as failure. However, the EU must uphold its values. This involves pressurising incumbent governments to continue reforms. Monetary support should be made dependent on modernisation. Backsliding will lead to the withdrawal of financial support.

The EU may lose Moldova. Moldovan public opinion has turned towards Russia. However, it is unlikely any pro-Russian government could consolidate power before the pendulum swings back. Eventually a Moldovan regime – in a more pro-European guise – would reintegrate. The Ukrainian authorities have limited options. The EU still remains the choice of most Ukrainians. An attempt to renege on the Association Agreement, especially a clear pro-Russian stance, would lead to new protests.

The EU should state unequivocally that membership will happen if required reforms are made. This would not only give Moldova and Ukraine, but also Georgia and possibly Armenia incentives to modernise and acquire EU membership. It would concentrate minds and provide an end game that the Association Agreement has not given.

Authoritarian learning and the consolidation and collaboration of authoritarian regimes are here to stay. The West should accept this and stand up for its values. By developing civil society, media and alternative politicians the West can show it stands by these values. Authoritarian regimes cannot be beaten into submission. However, a staunch defence of Western values acts as a beacon for those who believe in them in the post-Soviet region. This is the only way to counteract growing authoritarianism. The people of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine deserve that alternative in the battle for hearts and minds.

Appendix One: List of Interviewees

Combined Cases

Chenoweth, Eric (Belarus and Russia) – Co-Director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE).

Dyner, Anna Maria (Belarus and Russia) – Head of the Eastern European Programme at the Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 17/05/2017, Warsaw.

Gerasmychuk, Sergiy (Moldova and Ukraine) – Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism”, 09/09/2017, Skype.

Jarábik, Balázs (Belarus and Ukraine) – Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21/11/2016, Skype.

Konończuk, Wojciech (Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) – Head of the Department for Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 19/09/2016, Skype.

Marples, David R (Belarus, Russia and Ukraine) – Professor at the University of Alberta, 12/09/2017, Skype.

Interviewee requested anonymity (Belarus and Ukraine) (1) – 21/11/2016.

Belarus

Aleshka, Alyaksandr – Researcher at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 17/08/2016, Skype.

Astapenia, Ryhor – Analyst at the Ostrogorski Centre, 03/05/2017, Minsk.

Čajčyc, Aleś – Member of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, blogger at Radio Svoboda, 29/08/2016, Skype.

Charnysh, Volha – Regular contributor to Belarus Digest, 26/08/2016, Skype.

Forbrig, Joerg – Director, Fund for Belarus Democracy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, 16/09/2016, Skype.

Herasimenka, Aleś – Specialist on the Belarusian Internet and media, 19/08/2016, London.

Karbalevich, Valery – Expert at the Analytical Centre “Strategy”, 31/08/2017, correspondence via email.

Kavaleuski, Valery – Consultant at the World Bank and Country Analyst Consultant at Freedom House, 02/08/2016, Skype.

Kazakevič, Andrej – Director of the Institute “Political Sphere”, 26/08/2016, Skype.

Komlach, Serge – Project Coordinator at European Radio for Belarus (Euroradio), 22/08/2016, Skype.

Kulakevich, Tatsiana – Regular contributor to Belarus Digest, 26/08/2016, Skype.

Lastouski, Alyaksei – Analyst at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 08/12/2016, Minsk.

Łahviniec, Aleś – Freelance Political Analyst and former advisor to Alyaksandr Milinkevich, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

Marin, Anaïs – Adjunct Professor at Collegium Civitas, 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

Melyantsou, Dzianis – Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Co-ordinator at the Minsk Track-II Initiative, 04/05/2017, Minsk.

Mickievich, Zmicier – Blogger at the Belarus Security Blog and editor-in-chief of ‘Varta’ Magazine, 05/05/2017, Minsk.

Nazarenka, Artsiom – Lecturer at the Belarusian State University (BSU), 07/12/2016, Minsk.

Papko, Alyaksandr – Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 08/08/2016, Warsaw.

Pikulik, Alexei – Academic Director at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Professor at the European University of St. Petersburg, 12/12/2016, Minsk.

Preiherman, Yauheni – Head of the Minsk Tack II Initiative, Head of the Liberal Club in Minsk, 18/08/2016, Coventry.

Shadursky, Viktor – Dean of the Faculty of International Relations at the Belarusian State University (BSU), 03/05/2017, Minsk.

Shraibman, Artyom – Journalist at TUT.by, 11/12/2016, Minsk.

Smok, Vadzim – Project Coordinator at the Ostrogorski Centre and Research Fellow at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 25/08/2016, Skype.

Usov, Pavel – Head of the Centre for Political Analysis and Prognosis, 19/12/2016, Warsaw.

Yahorau, Andrei – Director for the Centre for European Transformation and Researcher at the Institute “Political Sphere”, 23/08/2016, Skype.

Interviewee requested anonymity (1) – 27/11/2016.

Interviewee requested anonymity (2) – 29/01/2018.

Moldova

Alaiba, Dumitru – Programme Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms Moldova (CPR) and currently Parliamentarian in the ACUM coalition, 14/07/2017, Skype.

Całus, Kamil – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

Cibotaru Viorel – President of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova and Executive Director for the European Institute for Political Science, 11/11/2016, Chişinău.

Manole, Ion – Director at Promo-LEX, 12/07/2017, Skype.

Mazureanu, Mark – Researcher at Universität Mannheim and Lecturer at Rutgers University, 14/04/2017, Chişinău.

Popşoi, Mihai – Blogger at www.moldovanpolitics.com and Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), 25/11/2016, Skype.

Vardanean, Ernest – Lecturer at Moldova State University (MSU), 10/09/2017, Skype.

Vieru, Vadim – Lawyer at Promo-Lex, 18/04/2017, Chişinău.

Interviewee requested anonymity (1) – 09/11/2016.

Interviewee requested anonymity (2) – 20/04/2017.

Interviewee requested anonymity (3) – 17/05/2017.

Interviewee requested anonymity (4) – 11/07/2017.

Russia

Arbatli, Ekim – Assistant Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 05/04/2017, Moscow.

Arutunyan Anna – Senior Analyst at the International Crisis Group. Former Journalist at RIA Novosti. Author of the *Media in Russia* and *The Putin Mystique*, 11/09/2016, Prague.

Balayan, Alexander – Associate Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 25/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

Bennets, Marc – Former Journalist at RIA Novosti and author of the *I'm Going to Ruin Their Lives*, 03/11/2016, Moscow.

Bobrovskaya, Ekaterina – Lecturer at Lomonosov Moscow State University, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

Fishman, Mikhail – Editor at the Moscow Times, 03/11/2016, Moscow.

Gel'man, Vladimir – Professor at the University of Helsinki and the European University of St. Petersburg, 17/08/2016, Skype.

Goble, Paul A – Professor at Institute of World Politics, 22/08/2016, Skype.

Goncharov, Dmitry V – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 06/09/2016, Prague.

Grigorev, Ivan – Senior Lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 24/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

Kabanov, Yury – Lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 24/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

Kirilenko, Anastasia – Investigative Journalist and director of the film Who is Mr. Putin?, 23/11/2017, Skype.

Kolesnikov, Andrei – Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 08/08/2016, correspondence via email.

Kosinskaya, Anna – BBC Russian Service Journalist and co-founder of the magazine Bumaga, 10/01/2017, London (Now at Yandex in Moscow).

Lipman, Maria – Editor-in-chief of the Counterpoint Journal, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

Melville, Andrei – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) and Member of the HSE Academic Council, Moscow, 31/10/2016, Moscow.

Petrov, Nikolay – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

Rochlitz, Michael – Assistant Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, 08/11/2016, Moscow (since the interview Michael at the Ludwig Maximilians Universität München and now Professor of Economics at Universität Bremen).

Shul'man, Ekaterina – Associate Professor and Docent at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 04/11/2016, Moscow.

Sobolyeva, Irina V – Lecturer at Columbia University, 01/11/2016, Skype.

Trudolyubov, Maxim – Editor-at-large for Vedomosti and Senior Fellow at the Kennan Institute, 05/04/2017, Skype.

Volkov, Denis – Analyst at the Levada Centre, 02/11/2016, Moscow.

Zavadskaya, Margarita – Research Fellow at the European University of St. Petersburg, 25/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (1) – 07/11/2016.

Ukraine

Chervonenko, Vitaly – Journalist at the BBC Ukrainian Service, 01/07/2017, correspondence via email.

Eristavi, Maxim – Non-Resident Fellow at the Atlantic Council and co-founder of Hromadske TV, 16/11/2016, Kyiv.

Grytsenko, Oksana – Journalist at the Kyiv Post, 18/11/2016, Kyiv.

Haran, Olexeiy – Professor at the Kyiv-Myhola Academy, 16/11/2016, Kyiv.

Iwański, Tadeusz – Research Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 18/05/2017, Warsaw.

Koshiw, Isobel – Freelance journalist and former journalist at the Kyiv Post, 18/11/2016, Kyiv.

Kudelia, Serhiy – Assistant Professor of Political Science at Baylor University, 23/08/2016, Skype.

Piechal, Tomasz – Junior Fellow at the Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia (OSW), 20/12/2016, Warsaw.

Shevchuk, Tetiana – Lawyer at the Anti-Corruption Centre (TSPK), 06/12/2016, Skype.

Sukhov, Oleg – Journalist at the Kyiv Post, 22/04/2017, Kyiv.

Taranyuk, Irena – Journalist at the BBC Ukraine Service, 30/08/2016, London.

Umland, Andreas – Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, 23/08/2016, Skype.

Wynnyckyj, Mychailo – Associate Professor at the Kyiv-Myhola Academy, 18/11/2016, Kyiv.

Yermolenko, Volodymyr – Director of Internews Ukraine, 26/04/2017, Kyiv.

Zelenko, Galyna – Professor at the I. F. Kuras Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies at the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 25/04/2017, Kyiv.

Interviewee requested anonymity (1) – 24/04/2017.

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