

Typology of countries in historical geography

Historical geography covers a wide range of issues relating to geography and history of world's states.

Typology of countries is one of the most difficult methodological problems. As it is known, the typology is a historical category. Indeed, before the early 1990s it was accepted to divide states into three main types, including socialistic, capitalistic and developing countries. In the 1990s after the collapse of the world socialistic system another not so politicised classification was developed. According to it, all the states were divided into the following types:

- 1) major economies;
- 2) developing states; and
- 3) countries in transition.

However, at the same time two-type classification, including major economies and developing countries, is still wide spread. In this case, usually the common synthetic index is a gross domestic product (GDP) based on expenditures per capita.

More recently, international statistics has adopted more fractional typology of countries and territories, which was proposed by the World Bank. It is based on the same per capita GDP but defines three groups of countries. The first group includes low-income countries. The World Bank defined 42 African, 15 Asian, 3 Latin American, 1 country in Oceania and 6 CIS countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kirgizia, Moldavia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) to be assigned to this type. The second group consists of middle-income countries. It turn they divided into the lower middle-income countries (8 European, 6 CIS, 9 Asian, 10 African, 16 Latin American countries and 8 countries in Oceania) and upper-middle-income countries (6 European, 7 Asian, 5 African and 16 Latin American countries). The third group includes high-income countries: 20 European, 9 Asian, 3 African, 2 North-American, 6 Latin American countries and 6 countries in Oceania.

The main characteristic of any country is a form of government. There are two main forms of government – republican and monarchical form.

Under the republican regime legislative power usually is exercised by parliament, which is elected by nation, while executive power is given to government. Presidential and parliamentary republics are distinguished. In presidential republic president is a head of state and sometimes a head of government. In this case president is given more powers. The brightest example of presidential republic is the United States. All 12 CIS countries are also presidential republics.

Monarchies emerged in ancient times (Ancient Rome Empire) but became the most popular in the Middle Ages and Modern Times. In 2005 30 monarchies existed on the political map: 14 in Asia, 12 – in Europe, 3 – in Africa and 1 monarchy in Oceania. One Empire, kingdoms, duchies, sultanates, emirates, sovereign city-state Vatican are among them. As a rule, monarch's power is lifetime and transmitted to descendants, but in Malaysia and UAE monarchs are elected for a five-year term.

The total number of monarchs is stable as this form of government is a kind of a remnant of the feudalism and looks like an anachronism nowadays. However, over the past decades we have experiences two revivals of monarchy. It happened in Spain in 1975 after the death of general Franco and in Cambodia in 1993 when after 23-year break Norodom Sihanouk again became a king.

Most existing monarchies are constitutional monarchies where real legislative power is executed by parliament and executive power is given to government. Today monarch has mostly representative-ceremonial role. However, monarch's influence in some case is very significant.

Along with constitutional absolute monarchies are still in existence. Elected parliament in such countries is absent. At the very least, monarchs establish advisory bodies, which members are appointed by him, and executive power is under the control of monarch. All existing absolute monarchies are located in Asia, mainly within the Arabian Peninsula.

Oman is the brightest example of such countries. Sultan Kabus has been ruling the state since 1970. Being a head of state at the same time he executes functions of Prime-Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Defence, Finance and Commander of the Armed Forces. There is no constitution in this country. Saudi Arabia is also considered to be an absolute monarchy where the king is prime-minister, commander of the armed forces and chief justice. In Qatar the whole power is given to local emir. The United Arab Emirates, which consist of 7 principedoms, is also in this group. Kuwait and Bahrain have been recently included into the group of constitutional monarchies though they still remain absolute monarchies to a large extent.

Absolute monarchy can be theocratic (Theos means God). In this situation a head of state is a religious leader at the same time. Vatican is a classic example of such state. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Brunei are the same.

In the late 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), including 12 former Soviet countries appeared.

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