

## Disparities and Uncertainties: Reflections on Communist and Post-Communist Eastern Europe

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Since World War II Eastern Europe has been generally viewed, with its connotation of Soviet control, as being one region. In Timothy Garton Ash's view, post-1945 Eastern Europe would mean "the formally independent member states of the Warsaw Pact, apart from the Soviet Union" (quoted in Neumann, 1993). There are, indeed, a number of reasons to regard Eastern Europe as a "coherent" region, to borrow this term from Osiatynski (1991). All countries of this region — with the exception of Albania and Yugoslavia, and of course Greece — were in Soviet occupation as World War II ended. They all became, to use the official term, "people's democracies," or as they were labelled at that time, "Soviet satellites." For almost half a century, these societies, albeit in varying degrees, were cut off from the western part of Europe and engaged in the state socialism experiment. Again, except for Yugoslavia after 1948 and Albania after 1960, political developments in all other East European countries were so strikingly similar that most observers at that time came to believe that they followed not only a set pattern but also a timetable that had been fixed in advance (Laqueur, 1992: 70). All these countries adopted constitutions that were similar to or modelled on the Stalinist constitution of the Soviet Union. Viewed as part of the former Communist block, Eastern Europe could be regarded as a geopolitically coherent region in two main respects: first, *politically* — one-party

communist rule was established in all countries throughout the region, destroying the public sphere and any preconditions for the rule of law; second, *economically* — state owned and centrally planned socialist economies, which evolved strictly along the lines of the classic Stalinist model, prevailed in all these countries, destroying the market economy.

Apart from belonging to the Soviet sphere of influence and from having been always the poorest part of the continent, Eastern Europe has never been a homogenous entity. There have always been a number of distinct identities among all East European societies that should *not* be ignored. Remarkable differences have existed with regard to their historical experiences, social structures, economic development, cultural heritage, legal traditions, ownership patterns, languages, ethnic cleavages, religions, and, of course, sizes. If there is one major trait that all these societies had in common, it would be, as Osiatynski (1991) puts it, the historical similarity that "the countries of Eastern Europe did not belong to the West."

### *Multiple Legacies of History*

Hungarian historian Jenő Szucs (1988) traces the origins of three distinctive developmental areas in Europe — Western, East Central, and Eastern — back to different responses to the "First Crisis" of feudalism (1300-1450). According to him, the western response was "the emergence of 'absolutism' and its three-fold solution: preserving whatever was preservable from feudalism, preparing for capitalism,

and forming the framework of the nation-state system." The eastern response was to bind the society in a much tighter relationship with the monarchy. While these were both absolutist solutions, they had very different results. In the West, society was subordinated to the state but was able to preserve certain autonomy and later to reassert itself. In the East, society was "nationalized." While the western response, Szucs argues, prepared the way for capitalism, the eastern variant consolidated feudalism in a new and stronger form.

Most of the peoples in the areas defined as Central and Eastern Europe had lived for centuries under foreign rule, having been subject to domination by four great multinational empires: Austro-Hungarian, Prussian-German, Ottoman, and Russian. Most of them attained national independence only during the nineteenth century or before and after World War I.

There is no doubt that the legacies of their former rulers have powerfully influenced the later political, cultural, and economic developments of all East European societies. For instance, although similar corrosive processes were simultaneously at work in both the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires — by the end of the 19th century the former was called metaphorically "the sick man of Europe" and the latter "the sick man of Bosphorus," — these two empires obviously left very different heritages behind. What the Poles, the Hungarians, and the Czechs inherited from the German or the Hapsburg's rule is clearly distinct from what the Albanians, the Serbs, the Macedonians, and the Bulgarians, thus the Balkan peoples, inherited from the four-to-five-century-long Ottoman rule.

I do not wish to exaggerate the differences between the Austro-Hungarian rule and the Ottoman rule by painting the former in rosy colours and the latter totally in black. It is well known that within the Austro-Hungarian Empire there was a distinct difference between the Austrian and the Hungarian rule, particularly in the 19th century, when the non-Magyar people under Hungarian rule were subjected to a deprivation of fundamental cultural rights and to an intense magyarization process. The vast difference in social, cultural, and economic develop-

ment between the Czech lands and Slovakia is perhaps the best testimony of the qualitative differences between Austrian and Hungarian rule. On the other hand, the Turkish rule was as much characterized by cultural backwardness and economic mismanagement and incompetence as by benign neglect and religious tolerance. However, the differences between the two empires cannot be overstated. The same holds true for their legacies. Ruled by the Hapsburgs, the countries of Central Europe, as Ash remarks, preserved such major elements of Western traditions, as "Western Christianity, the rule of law, some separation of powers, a measure of constitutional government, and something that could be called civil society" (quoted in Neumann, 1993).

Central Europe also preserved and further developed its cultural traditions, maintaining thus its cultural ties with the Western civilization and, more importantly, contributing remarkably to European and world arts, culture, and sciences. Nineteenth century Poland became the motherland of Chopin and Paderewski; neighbouring Bohemia gave birth to Smetana and Dvorák; whereas Hungary and the great salons of Vienna, its neighbouring civilized and glittering capital of the Hapsburgs, became the home of Franz Liszt's famous rhapsodies. All these and other names had given 19th century Poland, Hungary, and Czech lands immense cultural standing among the civilized nations with no parallels to be found in the Balkans.

Until the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the Balkan lands remained deeply backward and cut off from the West not so much by distance as by time. Albania and Macedonia, in particular, which had been ravaged and partitioned by covetous foreign powers, were also oppressed by a legacy of backwardness — pervasive poverty, disease, illiteracy, superstition, vendetta — suffering immensely from social and political disunity, regionalism and, in northern Albania, from semi-feudal tribalism.

Although the Balkan problems have very deep historical roots, which reach back to Byzantine penetration of the Balkans and even before that time, it is undeniable that the centuries of Ottoman domination effectively separated

the Balkan lands from the rest of Europe. This long separation during centuries of immensely significant development in the civilization of the western part of the European continent had profound effects on the development of the Balkan peoples (Kenan, 1993). With the Ottoman invasion in the 15th century, the Balkan lands were sunk in political decay, religious conflicts, and social disorder. The great Balkan culture of the preceding centuries was snuffed out. For the Balkan Christian peoples this was a new experience. Invaders had come before, but each time they had been defeated, assimilated, and converted. The Ottomans, however, were not only the biggest military power of the time, but they were also armed with the "proud" faith of Islam. They managed not only to establish their rule over the whole peninsula, to which they gave the name "Balkans," but also to convert large populations, particularly in Bosnia, Albania, and Macedonia to their Islamic faith.

There is no question that the five hundred years of the alien rule were detrimental for the Balkan lands. A proverb came into vogue virtually among all the Balkan peoples: "Where the Turk trod, no grass grows." Since then, the Balkans, though a part of the European continent, became and still remain another Europe. Referring to the Ottoman-ruled Albania and Macedonia in the early twentieth century, Baron d'Estournelles described these regions as being "unlike Europe" and "more widely separated from her than Europe from America" (quoted in Kenan, 1993). Although almost a century has passed — for Serbia and Rumania more than a century — since the Balkan states won their national independence, it is still very common to hear in these countries the apologetic words: "We were under the Turks for 500 years." What parallels can then be drawn between, say, Czechoslovakia — traditionally the most democratic and economically advanced country of Central and Eastern Europe — or Hungary and Poland, on one side, and Bulgaria, Albania or Macedonia, who were the last to escape from the Ottoman rule, on the other? Although all East European countries — with the exception of Czechoslovakia — were at the outset of the 20th century preponderantly agrarian in character, there were certainly enormous differences among them with regard to infrastructure, ur-

ban life, and cultural development, with Hungary, Poland, Russia, and the Baltic lands being much more developed than the Balkans. These differences are meaningfully expressed by the way in which Central Europeans and the Balkan peoples have usually been portrayed: the Czechs, the Poles, and the Hungarians as *romantic* peoples, whereas the Serbs, the Albanians, the Bulgarians, and the Macedonians as *folkloric* peoples.

Although the historical dimensions alone cannot provide a full explanation to the multiple problems of post-Communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe, as Schöpflin (1993) reminds us, they are helpful in unravelling the complexity of the transitional problems and dilemmas facing all post-Communist societies:

#### *The Different Faces of East European State Socialism*

Differences among East European societies existed also in the process of their *Sovietization* after World War II. The conventional wisdom holds that in countries like East Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Rumania, where there was little or no resistance against fascism, and where liberation was owed entirely to the Red Army, communism was a totally alien system imposed by Soviet tanks and never accepted by a substantial portion of the local populations — hence it was never legitimized. This argument was central in the 1980s debate on the cultural identity of Central Europe, launched by Milan Kundera's (1984) controversial thesis about the "tragedy of Central Europe" as a "kidnapped West." For Kundera Russian communism was not just an abhorred political system but "another civilization" as well.

Be that as it may, such wisdom has been challenged by many scholars (e.g. Osiatynski, 1991; Kozinski, 1991; Michnik, 1993; Heller, 1982; White, 1993), most of them, ironically, themselves east Europeans. Osiatynski, for instance, observes that

soon after their installment, the communists enjoyed quite substantial support, and some legitimacy, particularly among the workers. The victory over the Nazis and the end to the atrocities of German occupation helped the population to look

favourably on the Soviet Army (Osiatynski, 1991: 830).

The fact, however, remains that all these countries — with Romania being somewhat an exception during the 1970s and 1980s — were swallowed up and became part of the Soviet empire, and their sovereignty further limited during the Brezhnev era. In Albania,<sup>1</sup> the only country in Eastern Europe that was liberated with no assistance from the Red Army, the communists seized power without outside help. This holds true for Yugoslavia as well, for though the Soviet troops marched through Belgrade, Yugoslavia was not militarily occupied by the Soviets at the end of World War II. Of all East European communist countries, it was only in Albania and Yugoslavia that the communists' acquisition of power was accomplished by a more or less truly revolutionary process. In both countries, the communists constituted the only political force opposing fascist occupation from the beginning of World War II until its end. They organized and led a strong partisan movement in their countries, while other political forces collaborated with the Italian fascists and the Nazis, and were, thus, defeated along with them. In the political vacuum prevailing in these countries in the aftermath of World War II, the communists immediately seized full power upon their own exertions throughout a long partisan war in which they faced virtually no political rivals. These two factors were of great importance both in establishing the legitimate authority of Tito's and Hoxha's communist rules, as well as in determining their iconoclastic independent paths in the decades to come (Tarifa, 1997; Glenny, 1990; Latey, 1989).<sup>2</sup> Both Yugoslavia and Albania, and to a lesser extent Rumania in the 1970s-1980s, vacated from the orbit of Soviet domination and followed their own independent paths. Tito's Yugoslavia was, indeed, the first country to introduce an alternative to Stalinist socialism, which in communist parlance was regarded as a right-wing deviationism and heresy. However, while the Tito-Stalin clash and the break between Moscow and Belgrade in 1948 was the first fissure in the fabric of communist unity and the most spectacular political and ideological event within the socialist camp, which had significant impli-

cations with regard to the East-West confrontation and the international Communist movement, the break between Moscow and Tirana, although it was of lesser significance for the outside world, had the most far-reaching consequences.

The three Balkan examples, Yugoslavia, Albania, and Rumania illustrate significant differences not only vis-à-vis the rest of the former socialist countries but among each other as well. Tito's Yugoslavia, for instance, was not at any time a member of either the Warsaw Pact or the Comecon and instead approached to the West rapidly after the break with Stalin in 1948. Albania, on its part, moved in the opposite direction. Although the divorce from Moscow in 1960 opened a window of opportunity for Albania to face the West, Enver Hoxha chose Communist China and her Asian satellites as his political and ideological allies during the 1960s and early 1970s, and isolationism as Albania's only policy during the 1970s and through the mid 1980s. Romania, on its part, although it never rejected the Soviet control entirely, gained more independence from Moscow, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. Of all Balkan Communist-ruled states, Bulgaria was the only one whose policy remained during the entire period of state socialism a carbon copy of Moscow's, maintaining thus its traditional attachment to Russia.

Pointing out the differences among East European countries, Osiatynski (1991) suggests the following pattern: the predominance of dissimilarities before 1949; growing similarities under communism, with two peaks, one in 1950-55, and another in the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s; and, finally, a growing differentiation between the countries of the region in the 1980s. This author argues that any coherence in this region had less to do with Russian domination and more to do with the emergence of the national communist elites who voluntarily adopted the Soviet model of social organization.

Significant differences also existed among the communist-ruled countries of Eastern Europe with regard to the degree of their political repression. Communism atomized the East European societies, destroying virtually all institutions

of autonomous collective action — which we usually refer to as civil society — and leaving very little space for any form of private or group initiative based on free association to succeed. This said, however, not all East European societies were equally regimented by Communist totalitarianism nor was civil society demolished everywhere to the same degree. There was significant variation by country, with Poland and Hungary representing one end of the civil society continuum and Albania and Romania the other. In Poland, for instance, formal structures of self-defence — the Catholic Church, underground social organizations, semiautonomous associations, active workers' groups, etc. — had existed for a long time during the socialist period. Their activities played an important role in the self-liberation of civil society in Poland, which, in turn, was a crucial agent for change. After Poland, Hungary was the other East European country in which an organized opposition, albeit not as effectual as its Polish counterpart, played an important role in buffering the fray between state and society and aiding the re-emergence of civil society.

Poland and Hungary enjoyed a measure of freedom unequalled in the socialist block. Many segments of social life there were relatively free from the pressure for uniformity (Reykowski, 1994). Both countries opened up their societies to a considerable extent and, indeed, the totalitarian system there never came fully into existence. As Adam Michnik so expediently phrased it, Polish socialism was "totalitarianism with the teeth knocked out" (quoted in Ash, 1989).<sup>3</sup> Poland and Hungary enjoyed a fairly lively press, albeit subjected to censorship, but nonetheless not as thoroughly controlled as in the other socialist countries. Instead of repression and economic Stalinism, Hungary, particularly during Kádárist rule, aimed for consumer satisfaction and controlled relaxation of political pressure. The general easing of controls encouraged Polish and Hungarian intellectuals to begin open criticism of their regimes' shortcomings much earlier than in other countries. The straitjacket of "socialist realism" — insistence by the Soviet overlords upon the grandiose pictorialization of communist heroes and achievements — was cast off. There was, in

these two countries, considerable artistic freedom. Painters explored cubism, surrealism, and abstractionism, and the works of modern composers were played in the academies. Western newspapers were available to intellectuals and the risk of speaking your mind in public became gradually more calculable and less extreme (Ash, 1989: 266). Polish professors were allowed to visit the West, distinguished self-exiles could return home, and many political prisoners were released. For most of the 1960s-1980s life in these two socialist countries was relatively relaxed.<sup>4</sup>

Czechoslovakia provides a different example. Here, the repressive legacy of the 1968 events were for a long time pervasive and no political relaxation ever occurred. The same holds true for the GDR.

Unlike East Central Europe, a civil society in the hard-line states of the Balkans was almost imperceptible. Besides the detrimental role of the Communist repression, another important factor was, again, the legacy of the Ottoman rule. As Bernhard points out:

the areas of Southeastern Europe, which remained under Ottoman domination into the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, might be understood as akin to the Eastern European pattern, particularly with reference to development of civil society. While Ottoman political and economic development differed greatly from Romanov, it also strongly retarded the emergence of civil society. Ultimately, the autonomous social organization that did emerge in the Balkans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was destroyed, except in Greece, when the region fell within Stalin's sphere of influence (Bernhard, 1993: 311).

Even among the Balkan countries differences were not insignificant. Wide-open-to-the-West Yugoslavia was much freer from political and ideological constraints and enjoyed a range of civil society elements that were virtually nonexistent among the rest of the Balkan Communist states. It is widely known that of all formerly Communist states, Albania and Romania had the most oppressive regimes. No other countries in Eastern Europe experienced such

an uninterrupted exercise of Stalinist repression, so closely foreshadowing the tyrannical and stifling society imagined by George Orwell in his novel *1984*. However, whereas in Romania, even under the utterly unfavorable circumstances of the Ceausescu's regime, the germs of civil society managed to survive (Tiemaneanu, 1993), in Albania virtually no sign of civil society was left even in people's memory. The last token of civil society in Albania was demolished in 1967 with the total abolition of religion. The communist experiment here was carried out to its fullest and nothing changed in Albania's Stalinist body politic until the death of its dictator in 1985. Indeed, of all East European countries Albania was the only one which avoided all revisionist thinking and withstood the pressures from change that periodically affected the other countries.<sup>5</sup>

Differences across the East European countries were strongly evident, particularly with regard to their economic development and, therefore, to the preconditions for starting economic reforms. Although virtually all these countries were "developing societies" (Meyer, 1969) and economically integrated into and strongly dominated by the Soviet economy, one should bear in mind that the Hungarian economy, due to the reforms carried out by Kádár's regime — the "new economic mechanism" — from 1968 throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, experienced an "economic boom" and was regarded as being the liberal and consumerist haven of Eastern Europe. The same holds true, though to a lesser extent, for Poland under Gierek in the 1970s and during the last five years of Jaruzelski in the second half of the 1980s. Both Hungary and Poland were linked to the West to a fairly considerable extent long before the changes began in other parts of the Soviet block.<sup>6</sup> Szelényi and Szelényi (1994) claim that the breakdown of the Communist system began in Poland and Hungary before Gorbachev gained power and that, in many ways, Gorbachev only followed reform scenarios worked out by Poles and Hungarians. When in the second half of the 1980s serious reform discussions started in Eastern Europe, following Gorbachev's Perestroika, individual countries were, thus, at very different stages of

development and preparation.

As was pointed out by Brzezinski (1993), the ability to embark on, and to traverse, particularly the first critical phase of post-communist transition is "heavily conditioned by the degree to which a particular fallen communist regime permitted both political relaxation and economic liberalization in its last years." In Brzezinski's (1993) view, "the final agony of communism also served simultaneously — at least, in several cases — as a period of political and economic gestation for the emergence of post-communism." Hungary and Poland provide the best cases in point. As has already been suggested, profound political and economic transformations were underway in these two countries before 1989. As a consequence, there was no single "big bang" of revolutionary change but rather a "negotiated revolution," which in its Hungarian version, Ash (1989) memorably termed "revorm" or "refolution." Both Hungary and Poland had already embarked on reform by the end of the 1980s. They had a long tradition of studying Western economic theory and of discussing alternative concepts for (and within) the existing socialist models.<sup>7</sup> There were, as previously mentioned, relatively stable trading links and lively exchanges with western markets and institutions which were maintained and bolstered, and access to Western economic literature was less restricted in these two reform-friendly Central European countries than in South-Eastern Europe. The fundamental principles of socialism — the superiority of socialist over private ownership of the means of production — could also more easily be questioned in Hungary and Poland (although in Poland the greater part of agriculture remained in private hands even under state socialism), and the effectiveness of market mechanisms could implicitly be acknowledged. Demands for decentralization and for the liberalization of prices were, therefore, not such absolute novelties in these countries as they were in Albania, Romania, or Bulgaria.

The situation in the DGR and Czechoslovakia was more complicated. Ideological positions there impeded the liberalization of economic thinking, although in these two most developed countries of the former socialist

block, a revitalization of old market traditions should have been easiest.

Lack of earlier discussions and reform attempts, as well as the relatively small number of people capable of taking charge of the political and economic responsibilities, placed the countries of South-Eastern Europe at disadvantage in the race once the moment for systematic change had come. It turned out to be extremely complicated to develop schemes of systemic transition that would match the specific conditions in the respective countries. This then led to what was in effect the copying of the general transformation programs (macro-economic stabilization policies) that were dictated by Western advisers and institutions (the World Bank and the IMF) as a precondition for receiving further financial assistance. While one can speak of a Polish, Hungarian, or Czech way of transition, there is no such notion for the countries of the South-Eastern tier, at least not in the sense of a particular "program" that could be considered custom-built.

#### **Post-Communist Disparities: One or Several Eastern Europe(s)?**

Historical differences that have existed among individual states of Central and Eastern Europe have persisted to the present day and have done so quite independently of the Soviet-type systems introduced into the area after 1948. The traces of Eastern Europe's long, full, and dramatic history have been an ever-present background to the Communist order and remain as such even in its current post-Communist life. Furthermore, these differences have become as clear as ever and are even more pronounced today, as the process of post-Communist transition proceeds (see Altmann, 1993; Clark, 1993). Having begun their transitions at different points, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the successor states of the former USSR have moved on their post-communist road at different speeds. Compared with the countries of Central Europe, the process of democratization started later and is still proceeding rather slowly and more uncertainly in South-Eastern Europe. The degree of economic and social backwardness inherited from the pre-communist and the communist days in different parts

of the region, as well as their socio-economic structures and political cultures are other important variables that help in understanding why some countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia) — though they have not yet fully become liberal democracies and "market societies" — are finding their post-Communist transition to be much smoother and easier than the South-East European countries, and of course, the countries of the former Soviet Union.

The demise of the Communist project has demonstrated to what extent Eastern Europe remains a region of great cultural and national diversity. Post-communist Eastern Europe offers, indeed, a more diverse range of configuration and heterogeneity than any other region of the world,<sup>8</sup> a factor that makes Rupnik (1994) believe that the concept of Eastern Europe has become almost irrelevant today.

Several scholars (e.g. Vogel, 1993; Killick and Stevens, 1991; Altmann, 1993; Bernhard, 1993) have attempted to cluster the post-Communist states in different categories according to their stage of economic and political transition as well as their foreseeable futures. So far, however, the best classification of the post-Communist states has been provided by Brzezinski (1993). Suggesting a three-phase typology of political and economic transformation in formerly Communist-ruled states,<sup>9</sup> Brzezinski distinguishes four categories of countries in the post-Communist world, proposing the following classification:

*First category:* Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Estonia. These countries, Brzezinski demonstrates, have firmly engaged in the process of becoming viable pluralistic democracies and they seem to have essentially positive and predetermined futures. The first three countries can be seen as about to enter, or as entering Phase Three, and are also likely to be members of the EU and of NATO within a decade; the last two are in Phase Two.

*Second category:* Latvia, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia (if it does not get entangled in a new war with Serbia), Lithuania, and arguably Romania. The futures of these countries are believed to be generally positive, although they are politically and economically vulnerable. A

reversal, indeed a political and/or economic failure in these countries, still can not be excluded. Latvia and Bulgaria, in Brzezinski's view, may be nearing Phase Two of transition, while the others are still navigating through Phase One.

*Third category:* Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. The political and economic futures of these successor states of the former Soviet Union are likely to be still unresolved for a decade or more.

*Fourth category:* Serbia, Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia, Moldova, and Tajikistan. Their futures currently and into the foreseeable future look, for a variety of reasons, distinctly unpromising and their leaders' commitment to a pluralist democracy is questionable. None of the countries of the third and fourth categories, Brzezinski argues, can be said to be very advanced (or successful) in traversing Phase One of transition; some may not even have entered it.

Brzezinski wrote his article in 1993. The intervening five years have largely reaffirmed his observations and analyses, which contribute important insights for understanding the nature and the outcomes of political, economic, and social transformation of post-Communist societies. At this point, there is a striking evidence that the gap between East-Central Europe, on one side, and East-Southern Europe and most of the Soviet successor states, on the other, has widened. Soon after the revolutions of 1989, some authors commented that the countries of Central Europe were nearest to Western Europe "not only geographically, historically, and culturally, but also in the progress they have made on the road to democracy, the rule of law, and a market economy" (Ash, Mertes and Moisi, 1991). Today one can agree even more firmly that the areas of East Central Europe — Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and arguably Slovenia — are the only part of the region where progress towards democracy seems unambiguously underway. Other countries are still facing, in various degrees, numerous difficulties with regard to their macroeconomic stabilization and democratic consolidation.

Such a discrepancy has become even more evident due to the differentiated policies of the West toward Central and East European coun-

tries. With the exception of Yugoslavia — which has long been a special case — the Balkan countries have always been regarded by the West as a lower priority than Central Europe. The guideline for Western policy on economic aid and political support to Europe's formerly Communist-ruled countries has been that it should be concentrated on the three Central European "hopefuls": the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. The "Habsburg factor," to use Rupnik's words, seems to be still an important ingredient in assessing the chances of the democratic and market-oriented transition and of a successful "reconnection" with the European Union. Cviic (1995) explains this partly with the direct strategic, political and economic importance of these three countries to the West, and partly also with the fact that the Visegrad countries, in comparison with the Balkan states, are more advanced on the road to the free market and, therefore, they are better prepared to receive such aid and make good use of it. This explains why Hungary and Czechoslovakia (the latter one prior to its division into two states in early 1993), and Poland — not to mention Russia and Ukraine — have been the beneficiaries of much larger capital inflows than all the former Balkan Communist states. Though in desperate need for foreign investments and support for their fledgling democratic systems, the Balkan countries are continuously facing considerable marginalization vis-à-vis East Central European states. This, as Rupnik (1994) points out, might lead to a further fragmentation in Central and Eastern Europe, creating new borders in the East and the danger of "third worldization" of this part of Europe, which, as Bronislaw Geremek warned, instead of going West, "might end up in the South" (quoted in Rupnik, 1994). Bosnia's, Albania's, and Macedonia's recent experiences clearly justify such a concern.

#### *The Unpredictable Outcomes of Transition: General Trends vs. Specific Situations*

Although nearly one decade has already passed since the revolutions in Eastern Europe began, it is much too early to draw conclusions or to make predictions on how future developments in Eastern Europe — enormously uncertain by now — will proceed, or how Eastern

Europe's post-Communist face will look compared to the western half of the continent in the decades to come. Bunce and Csanadi (1993) remind us of how bad social scientists are at prediction: if social scientists and the theories they use could not predict the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, then why should they, armed with the very same theories, expect to do better at predicting the long-term consequences of post-Communist transition?<sup>10</sup>

As a process which started simultaneously — within the span of one year — in all Communist-ruled states of Central and Eastern Europe and which involves fundamental structural problems that are common to all these societies seeking to make the transition to democracy and to market economy, post-Communist transformation displays a number of prevailing features which may allow certain generalizations. However, one cannot speak, as McSweeney and Tempest (1993) do, about “a distinctively East European route to democracy.” Generalizations of processes which are still in their initial stage and which cover an extremely large range of events in a number of societies need neither be an easy nor necessarily advisable task. The history of theoretical fits and starts, methodological cul-de-sacs and academic sectarianism provide an important lesson for those social scientists who study post-Communist transformation in the former Soviet Union and in Central and Eastern Europe: theorizing at the expense of empirical research is always plagued, as Max Weber has pointed out, by “inconvenient facts.” For, as Epstein (1991) rightly observes, there are always questions of transition that are by nature heavily “fact-specific.” In studying the transformation of East European societies and other societies in transition, Lipset (1994) suggests that one should not apply generalizations formulistically. Other scholars also emphasize the relative importance of differences vis-à-vis similarities, arguing that it is more useful to avoid generalizations and focus on every country's problems and solutions separately. While it was perhaps more important to study similarities than differences and to work out basic factors and characteristics that shaped the Soviet-type societies when Eastern Europe was still politically

centralized and economically integrated into and dominated by the USSR, it is more important nowadays, when the Soviet block no longer exist, to study the diversities, the different roads of developments in each individual country.

Cohen and Schwartz (1993) encourage this rationale: Just as it is dangerous, they argue, to apply simplistically narrow concepts of capitalist institutions to the different countries of the former Soviet realm, so it is dangerous to generalize about this region. Lipset (1994) applies here the analogy with medicine, where probability statistics based on thousands of individuals cannot tell the physician what to do about a given case. In Lipset's (1994) view, even our most obvious generalizations concerning the beneficent effects of economic development need not work in any particular country. Brzezinski (1993: 13), on his part, points out that “cultural conditioning and specific circumstances” in all post-communist societies should be taken into account “to a far greater degree than they have been in the rather dogmatic advice that has often been offered.”

It has become clear by now that the initial view of post-Communist transformation was too euphoric, and estimates made by most American and Western European politicians and economists, as well as by numerous scholars, were too rosy. As in previous historical movements towards democracy, particularly in the era of decolonization, which nourished great hopes of exporting “democracy” world-wide, the prevailing predictions about post-communism were generally based on a naive assumption that the democratic and free market institutions would be easily exportable as a “model” and quickly transplanted into the formerly communist-ruled states, and that the transition process would last for about five years.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the political and economic transformation of Eastern Europe was designed en bloc, applying the same strategies to all countries of the region, regardless of their local appropriateness. The specific situations of individual countries were not properly taken into account, thereby nourishing the belief that what is relevant to Poland or Hungary, is relevant to all other countries as well.

In any event, neither scenario has materialized.

The failure of these euphoric assumptions by and expectations of the Western world is admitted most explicitly by Brzezinski:

We have overestimated...the pace of postcommunist transformation. We tended to assume that a few rearrangements, largely of an economic type initiating a free market economy, would produce not only a stable free market but a functioning democracy. We now know that both are much more complex processes than we initially assumed, that real democratization and a real economic transformation will probably last roughly as long as the ideologically motivated phase of Communist rule itself lasted. In the case of Russia that may be more than approximately 30 years. In the case of the eastern and central European countries that duration might be somewhat shorter but certainly in excess of what we initially assumed (Brzezinski, 1995: 9).

It is evident both from a theoretical perspective and from the actual practice of post-communist societies — given the economic, cultural, and political realities of the region — that transition to liberal democracies and capitalist markets in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet republics will not be linear or uniform throughout the region, but will differ in a number of ways. Classic writings, as well as historical experience of other regions of the world — particularly Southern Europe in the 1970s and Latin America in the 1970s-1980s — support this assumption. In his *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville argued that different peoples would follow very different paths to reach democracy. Other scholars (e.g. Lipset, 1994; Lipset and Bence, 1994; Krug, 1991; Amsden, 1993) argue that post-Communist transformation will lead to different outcomes and prospects in different nations. If the only thing that the various East European nations share is a common rejection of their communist past, Epstein (1991) remarks, there is little that should bind them together for a common democratic future. Showing serious concern about possible outcomes of the transition in Eastern Europe, a number of scholars and political ana-

lysts (Brzezinski, 1993; Rupnik, 1994; Vogel, 1993; Kietschelt, 1992) have predicted that the future of post-Communist societies is open in more than one direction. A quick economic recovery and democratic consolidation of these countries is only one scenario — not the most likely one in the case of Russia, Albania, Serbia, and a number of states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. A number of factors — political cultures, social structures, ethnic and religious cleavages, economic conditions — as well as recent events in these countries suggest consideration of other possible (and certainly unwelcomed) developments, such as the emergence of new forms of authoritarian rule — more typically Milosevic's rule in Serbia, Yeltsin's rule in Russia, and Berisha's rule in Albania<sup>1</sup>—which have been usually presented to the outside world as the only way of containing violence and disorder. Lipset and Bence (1994) express justified concern that the process of transition may still lead to violent conflicts on an immense scale. The tragedy of Bosnia, Kosova, Chechnia, entire regions in Siberia and other parts of Russia calling for "sovereignty" as an alternative to Moscow's rule, as well as political clashes in Albania, Macedonia, etc., warn off the uncertainties and the dangers of post-communist transformation. As Brzezinski (1993: 12) puts it, "history is still open-ended as far as the final outcome of the post-communist transformation is concerned."

The post-communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union is one of those rarities which Hegel called history's "unique moments." Political, economic, and social changes in these countries are too rapid and the problems that deserve scholarly concern are too pressing and challenging. I believe that the fall of communism, like all great historical shifts, will be the subject of decades of scholarship and reflection. As Schöpflin (1994) remarks, postcommunism is much more than a transitional stage and may well be the dominant feature of politics in the region for the foreseeable future.

#### Notes

1. Of all Communist states, Albania was, indeed, the only one which openly embraced Stalinism.

- Her Communist ruler Enver Hoxha was widely regarded as being "more Stalinist than Stalin." Even when all the other East European communist leadership groups were reneging on Stalinism in whole or in part in the late 1950s, Hoxha strongly opposed de-Stalinization on the grounds that it would weaken both the "dictatorship of proletariat" and the "vanguard role" of the Party.
2. Other authors (e.g. McSweeney and Tempest, 1993; Karklins, and Petersen, 1993) strongly emphasize the same point with regard to China's and Cuba's communist regimes, which, compared to other communist rules in Central and Eastern Europe, had more legitimacy since they had been established by a homegrown revolution.
  3. In his splendid essay *An Embarrassing Anniversary*, Michnik writes: "From October 1956 on, Poles were able to take part in public life by expressing criticism. And a Poland in which Leszek Kolakowski taught at the university, and in which the distinguished Polish composer, writer, and journalist Stefan Kisielewski, a columnist for the leading Catholic weekly, could speak in the Diet was no longer a purely totalitarian country" (Michnik, 1993).
  4. This atmosphere is best expressed in the following Hungarian joke from the mid-1960s: "Why didn't you go to the last meeting of the party?" a Communist asked another. "If I'd known it was the last meeting," his friend replies, "I'd certainly have gone."
  5. Other policies, too, had set Albania apart from the other communist-ruled countries of Eastern Europe, such as restriction of foreign tourism to Albania in order to minimize the penetration of "alien influences," a ban on travel abroad for Albanian citizens, the absence of private cars — a policy designed to curb "consumerism" — a constitutional ban on obtaining foreign credits and on granting concessions to foreign companies to prevent "economic exploitation by bourgeois and revisionist states," etc.
  6. A member of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since 1982, Hungary was also the only East European country to join the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the International Development Association (IDA). Until 1985 Romania was the only other East European member of the World Bank but was not a member of IFC or IDA.
  7. Important examples include the ideas of competitive socialism by O. Lange, or the original contribution by M. Kalecki, and J. Kornai.
  8. Nelson (1993) emphasizes the same point comparing Eastern Europe with a much larger area, such as Latin America, which — with the obvious exception of Brazil and the indigenous Indian cultures — shares the Spanish language and Roman Catholicism. For an insightful discussion on this issue see also Banac, 1990; Rupnik, 1994; Judt, 1990; Lewis, 1993; Rév, 1994; etc.
  9. Brzezinski's (1993) detailed scheme of post-communist transformation is outlined below: Phase One, anticipated to last 1-3 years, has as its political goal *transformation* and as its economic goal *stabilization*. The basic targets in this phase are: In the political domain - establishment of basic democracy; free press; end of one-party state and police system; initial democratic coalition for change; In the legal/regulatory domain - elimination of arbitrary state controls; In economy - elimination of price controls and subsidies; end of collectivization, haphazard privatization. Western aid in this phase is aimed primarily at stabilization of local currencies and emergency credits and aid. Phase Two, anticipated to last 3-10 years, has as its political goal the transition *from transformation to stabilization* whereas its economic goal is the transition *from stabilization to transformation*. The basic targets in this phase are: In the political domain - new constitution and electoral law; elections; decentralized regional self-government; stable democratic coalition - new political elite; In the legal/regulatory domain - legal/regulatory framework for property and business; In the field of economy - banking system; small and middle scale privatization; appearance of new economic class. Western aid in this phase consist of infrastructural credits; technical/managerial assistance; trade preferences and access; initial foreign investment. Phase Three, anticipated to last 5-15 years, has as its political goal the *consolidation*, whereas its economic goal is envisioned to be *sustained take-off*. The basic targets in this phase are: In the political domain - formation of stable democratic parties and democratic political culture; In the legal/regulatory domain - emerging independent judiciary and legal culture; In economy - large-scale privatization; emerging capitalist lobbies and entrepreneurial culture. Major foreign investment and inclusion in key Western organizations (e.g. EC, NATO, etc.) are to be expected in this phase.
  10. For an insightful discussion on the inability of sociology and political science to predict the particular, such as the collapse of specific communist regimes, see, in particular, Lipset and Benne (1994). Emphasizing the failures or the inadequate prediction of various social sciences to anticipate development, these authors argue that social science is still at its best in advancing what Robert Merton has called "middle-range" theories, and in explaining developments limited in time and space — particularly in the past — where at least there is some possibility of analysing real data. As social science moves outward to deal with systemic trends and tendencies, its capacity to explain diminishes.
  11. See, for example, the U.S. General Accounting Office Report, *Poland and Hungary - Economic Transition and U.S. Assistance*, May 1992, pp. 18-26, 30.

12. The anarchy and the armed rebellion that swept Albania in Spring of 1997 provide the best example of the political myopia of the United States and the Western European powers which gave Berisha unconditional support for five years, although there was ample evidence that Berisha's rule had turned authoritarian and was strongly disliked by most of the Albanian people.

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