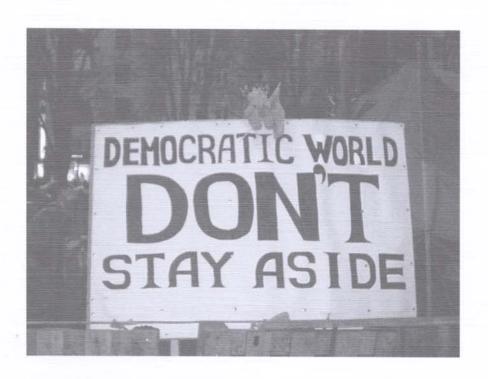EUROPE
and the
BALKANS
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

DEMOCRATIZATION IN POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION PROCESSES IN THE 1990s
LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

Edited by Anna Krasteva and Francesco Privitera

DEMOCRATIC WORLD
DON'T
STAY ASIDE

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IN POST-COMMUNIST
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Contents

Francesco Privitera

PREFACE

On the 1st May 2004, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia have become members of the European Union. On the 1st January 2007, Romania and Bulgaria will have joined the EU too. With the conclusion of the enlargement process of the EU, also the post-communist transition, which started in 1989 during the night of the fall of the Berlin wall, the 4th of November is going to reach its end.

Post-communism has been the dominant political factor of the 1990s of the XX century in Eastern Europe as a part of the post-cold order redefinition of Europe. At that time, with the disappearance of the opposing bloc, the West had to completely re-define its strategies and identity, and this rethinking became part of a wider process of integration and enlargement.

Certainly, it was quite difficult to imagine the soon to be developments during the night of the 4th of November, when a rally of Berlins' people assaulted peacefully the Wall, from the East and the West sides of the town, making its fall possible. In a short while, the symbol of the division of Europe during the Cold War had disappeared. Communist Europe was meeting Liberal Europe, while both sides were discovering themselves as "foreigners".

History had not arrived to its end, as Fukuyama provoked with his famous book, *The End of History* (Fukuyama, 1990), but was coming back to the milestone of the XX century where the century has begun: Sarajevo.

Between 1989 and 1991, in a couple of years, all the communist regimes in Europe, as well as the Soviet Union, collapsed, leaving on their behalf exhausted economic systems, fragile societies, unprepared elites and weak states.

Western Europe was unprepared to face the changes provoked by the rapid communist collapse, too. Western European cabinets were confused because of the simultaneity of different unexpected results, primarily the unification process of Germany and the dissolution process of the Yugoslav Federation.

The German unification process catalyzed the whole attention of the European cabinets for different reasons. While the UK was in favour of the unification process as the way to dilute any action within the EC and downloading the French leading role in Brussels affairs, France – on the contrary – was seriously worried about a large-sized Germany, which in the Balkan affairs was already showing a strong activism. Italy was worried too, the new Germany would marginalize Italian role within the EC, and was making troubles in the relationships between Italy and Yugoslavia. East European countries, which were taking the first steps in their own post-communist transitions processes, were looking with worry at the risk to be surrounded by a new possible German power, on one side, and the Soviet Union, on the other. 1990 was a very crucial year which moved Europe into its two mainstreams: unification/disintegration processes.

Germany's unification process opened the door of the dissolution process of Yugoslavia when Germany exported its own self-determination approach also to the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Between 1990-91, Slovenia, Croatia revenged their self-determinations from the Yugoslav federation, and then Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from the Soviet Union. Then, in 1992 Czechoslovakia split into the two entities, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the same year Bosnia and Macedonia achieved their own independence from the disgregating Yugoslav federation. From January 1st, 1992, the Soviet Union did not exist anymore, and new self-determination processes erupted in different former republics like Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbajgian, Tadjikistan and the Russian Federation too.

Indeed Western Europe was affected by self-determination processes, like in Spain where Catalonia and the Basques' region were becoming more and more aggressive with their own requests for a possible secession (following the Slovenian model), or Belgium which was going very fast towards its own partition into two entities, francophone and dutch. Also Italy was facing the emerging of a radical secessionist movement for the Padania self-determination in the North of the country.

The response to those critical issues has been the reinforcement of the European integration process through the transformation of the EC into the European Union (EU) (Maastricht Treaty, 1991, and Copenhagen Criteria, 1993) as the way to strengthen the internal cohesion of the EC member states and to react more appropriately to the dilemmas of post-communist transition processes in East Central Europe (ECE) and South East Europe (SEE).

The failure of all European policies towards the Yugoslav crisis, as well as the troubles which ECE countries were facing, were clearly showed by the European cabinets in front of the need to develop a strategy.

A kind of new "Marshall Plan" was under discussion for a while in Brussels and the EU capitals but the idea was abandoned soon, because it would require a stronger political cohesion and a leadership by the European Commission which was not very welcomed by many of the members. So that, the EU assumed a low profile in the support of ECE and SEE in transition, launching the Phare/Tacis programmes, and reacted vaguely to the demands by many Eastern Countries to join the EU as soon as possible. On one side it became clear that ECE and SEE countries would face their own transition on the basis of their own efforts and domestic capacities in terms of leaderships and policies. On the other side, the EU entered into its own transition from EC soft institution to a major internal cohesion through a deepening process, which would make it possible to achieve the common currency as a stronger prerequisite for a future supranational unity.

The 1990s have been so dominated by a double face transition process involving simultaneously East and West of Europe in two different transformations of their political institutions, which would be merged during the first decade of the XXI century.

Actually, at the end of the long story of the post-communist transition process, it appears more clearly the size of the changes occurred both in Eastern Europe and in the West. It can be possible to start evaluations on the decade which changed the face of Europe.

This book, as part of a series of four[1], is the attempt by a group of scholars belonging to different disciplines to analyse from an inner point of view the most crucial achievements which have been got by a representative of ECE and SEE countries during the 1990s, marking their own transition processes and making then a positive outcome possible.

In many occasions post-communist transition processes have been compared to post-authoritarian democratization processes as for examples the Greek, Portuguese and Spanish transitions during the 1980s, or Latin American experiences between 1970s and 1980s. In all these cases it is quite

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difficult to achieve a real capacity of comparison, at least for a very important detail, that these areas where already belonging to the political, economic and cultural concepts of the West. This was not the case of ECE and SEE countries which experienced a more complex transition to democracy and market economic systems, because they had to show, meanwhile, their integration within the cultural concept of the "West", which would mean to belong to a certain idea of Europe and to a specific model of socio-political and socio-economic organization.

Comparing to the so-called "second wave" of democratization processes, ECE and SEE experiences have been more radical, investing the whole of the societies with a cultural shock to be managed in a very short time, a decade, as it happened during the 1990s.

This consideration can explain why in post-communist transition processes the nature of the changes invested all the pillars of a political society, from a new state building process, to the national identity; from the achievement of a new sovereignty to the inclusion into the globalization flows; from centralization processes to new forms of decentralization.

At the beginning of the 1990s the positive results of the post-communist transitions, as the achievements of democratic systems and the functioning of market economic systems, which as a whole would permit the joining of the EU in 2004/07, could not be sure and already determinated. On the contrary, it could risk to degenerate into new forms of authoritarianism, or parademocratic systems.

Between 1993 and 1997, more or less, all ECE and SEE faced very problematic moments, like the emerging of increasing tensions within different ethnic groups, of chauvinism and xenophobia, antisemitism and racism especially against weakest minorities groups like the Roma people; leaderism and populism and economic bankrupt.

The possibility of experiencing in ECE and SEE a kind of "latinoamericanization" of the post-communist transitions as a non ending story of weak states, strong elites supported by a *borguesía compradora*, and dramatic discrepancies within those societies, was very close to be realized. ECE and SEE where close to live again their experiences of the inter-war period when they failed the democratic achievement and a real economic growth, able to bridge themselves out of their own backwardness.

During the first part of the 1990s the transition processes in ECE and SEE acted in a chaotic way, moving between big spurt and neo-conservatism within a very fragile institutional framework. The weakness of the political institutions made the wild access to the market economic system possible, following with the shock therapy a truly liberist approach. The way the market economic performance was achieved became a kind of boomerang affecting the political institutions more and creating a kind of

vicious circle: the more the market system was implemented, the more the institutions were becoming fragile. Like in the inter-war period new but narrow westernized elite and middle classes where acting as predator social groups, instead of promoters of stability and growth.

This situation has been interrupt by the enlarging process of the EU, which started to produce new dynamics among these countries.

As Anna Krasteva is showing in her paper, conflict has been a powerful lever for changing the society during post-communism. It offered new opportunities for local political cultures to renew themselves. As conflict was avoided by communist societies, then those societies were also unprepared to manage possible socio-political conflict and generally unprepared to political mediation. In the end they cracked, because of the inability of these regimes to adapt themselves to the changes they had produced in terms of modernization of their own societies and the need of mediation occurring to more complex and sophisticated societies. Actually, new democratic systems are much better equipped in term of political management, but conflict, as Rudolf Rizman points out, remains still very intense and could affect the fragile political institutions. The attempt to bypass political mediation and the ritualization of conflict (as it happens in mature democracies within institutional bodies like the Parliament) remains very strong and also in the case of Slovenia, for example, often mentioned as one of the most successful experiences in ECE, chauvinism and populism are still very political components of the daily political life.

The way political elites have been renewed after the communist collapse is investigated in the book by Adela Seidlova and Martin Vysin following the Czech case study. This aspect can be generalized if taking into consideration how all ECE and SEE experienced this radical change and how deep has been the process during the 1990s. Actually, the major part of MP and policy maker also at the local level are coming from a complete different socio-political environment replacing the previous communist representatives.

The local level, through the devolution and decentralization processes supported by the EU in the second half of the 1990s have played a crucial role in the stabilization of post-communist democratic transitions. A "bottom up" process of democratic participation at the local level has been one of the most important political lever to speed up the consolidation of democratic systems in ECE and SEE as Monika Ewa Kaminska has described in her paper, which is devoted to the Polish case as a possible case in order to understand the "political revolution" related to such a change. Local governance was not existing during communism, with the exception of Yugoslav self-management, and the whole system remained highly centralized.

The Romania's case, as described by Camelia Beciu, can show the difficulties of the social changes occurred in ECE and SEE in the 1990s. The

collapse of the communist welfare system, the gloomy privatization processes, as well as the transformation of the economic system through the reorientation of the production, produced a very large social conflict, not at all extinguished nowadays. Different social groups have been the losers of the game. They have lost the few achievements produced by welfare communism, whether they were supporters of the changes. Shock therapies have been possible because of the naivety of large sectors of the society, unprepared to face the social costs of a market economic system without any social grant.

The connection of the social factor and the political factor in the Moldovan case is introducing the issue of self-determination as the tool for a transition strategy. Igor Munteanu has analysed, through the Moldovan case, how the new elite-building process could be a failure, when democratic tools are used in order to produce nationalism and through nationalism, populism and corruption.

Ethnic tensions have been dominant in the 1990s in the Balkans too. Nationalism as the predominant political discourse has been used in order to forge the new states and whether in the Western Balkans this factor erupted into wars, in the rest of SEE nationalism has been experienced, too.

In Bosnia, the most suffering area within former Yugoslavia, the most important achievement after the dramatic war which lasted between 1992-1995 has been the inclusion on Human Rights protection within the constitutional reform. Zarije Seizović's paper comments the contents of the reform and the impact on the reconstruction of a political society in BiH in the democratic framework.

Dušan Janjić analysis of the tortuous democratic transition in Serbia has showed how the 1990s have been also the moment of crucial occasions and missed opportunities in order to overcome Milošević's nationalism.

At the end Deema Kaneff offers an insight of the importance of area studies in the local studies as a key for better understanding the logical framework of post-communist transition processes.

The entrance process into the democratic system has been more difficult than expected by common sense, both in the public opinion and within the elite. Although ECE and SEE can be described as democracies the 1990s have been a dramatic period in terms of attempts of distortion of political institutions and tones often based on populism and demagogy. Both in ECE and SEE in the first part of the 1990s nationalist public discourses prevailed as the ideological prerequisite for a new national policy. Looking for new legitimation sources, not only based on communism, Baltic, Hungarian, Czech and Slovak or Polish elites tried to connect in the post-communist present a direct tie with pre-war political experiences, as the way to refresh

a continuity with the past before the communist experience. In the Romanian and Bulgarian cases the attempt was similar but less constructive because of the clearer link between the post and the communist elites. The attempt to bypass the communist experience with the use of nationalism and the link with the inter-war political era, has been the way to mobilize consensus within societies not used to political participation in a public discourse as well as a pre-political manner of managing the political life. The national question as the way to reaffirm the sense of belonging of the political community has been the leitmotiv promoted by the new elites in power in the first wave of post-communist transition processes.

How dangerous the manipulation of the national question would be appeared very clear not only in the Yugoslav case, but in all ECE and SEE cases. It was a danger not only for the domestic stability of those countries, but also for the international relations when different countries were directly involved too, like Slovakia and Hungary (for the Magyar minority), or Romania and Hungary (for Transylvania), or the Baltic countries and the Russian minority, or Bulgaria and Turkey (for the Turkish minority) or Moldova and Romania and Russia and so forth.

The danger became clear to the EU too, which decided to change its own reluctant attitude towards enlarging eastwards and started to promote a new policy based on negotiations with ECE and SEE countries preparing the ground for a future integration in the EU.

Thanks to this change of attitude, the EU has been able to stabilize through conditionality the democratic transitions of post-communist countries and to push them into real democratic tracks able to strengthen their own capacity of institution building, overcoming partially the state weakness. Undeniably, the principle of conditionality imposed by the EU through the requirement to comply with the *acquis communautaire* represented *de facto* a form of interference. On the other hand conditionality is by now the mechanism of internal working of current member states, as far as it is the 'stability pact' in the monetary policy.

At the same time, the simultaneous negotiations among different ECE and SEE countries with the EU offered room for Brussels to mediate between local national controversies, through the application of human rights and minority rights and favouring strong decentralization processes and the devolution of the states. In fact, among the primary objectives of the EU conditionality is the recognition of the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights, which has became a requirement for access to the Community *acquis* and hence to integration.

The suspension in 1995 by means of the Dayton accords, of the most serious conflict, the Yugoslav, which had involved Bosnia-Herzegovina, rump Yugoslavia and Croatia, meant that it became possible to ward off the

spectre of war, at least temporarily. But conflict broke out again in 1999 with the war in Kosovo and the direct involvement of NATO. However, in the period between 1995 and 1999, it was possible – and here the conditionality policy proved very effective – to strengthen stabilisation and democratisation in Romania and Bulgaria: thus did the post-communist opposition reach governance, the minorities obtained political representation and a dialogue between the various communities became possible. The advances made have been so remarkable that Bulgaria has been then often addressed as a model example of democratic and civil development, respectful of national issues and showing that, especially in the Balkan area, inter-ethnic conflict needs not to be the only way to redefine the balance of post-communist political transition.

So doing it became possible to fast the European track and legitimize post-communist elites not on the basis of their nationalist attitudes but on the basis of a common European project based on a strong democratic concept. By the way, the fact that association agreements between EU and the majority of ECE and SEE have been signed by center-left coalitions made the legitimation of new socialist parties possible (as the democratic transformation of the previous communist parties) as truly democratic parties able to run the transition processes appropriately. In general, the second half of the 1990s demonstrated the maturing of Eastern European policy makers, and also of their Western counterparts, who came to realize just how complex the process of transition was and to what extent it involved the EU directly, by reason of the Yugoslav disaster. At the same time, Western Europe witnessed a growing conviction that the process of integration was a function of the strengthening of Community institutions.

In fact, whether still there are difficulties in the young democracies of the new member states of the EU, actually the achievement of a stronger democratic system has became a European problem, as the issue of democratizing more European institutions in order to promote a real policy making process by EU bodies, like the Commission and the Parliament. The managing of diversity has became the most urgent issue in the democratic political life of the European Continent as the way to guarantee the stability of the EU. The reshaping of identities and consciousness during the 1990s of European peoples, who for several decades have been told that Eastern and Western Europe were two distinct entities, needs now to be overcome. The negative response of the referenda in France and the Netherlands in the spring of 2005 on the new European Constitution, has showed the fatigue of Western Europeans to accept the new Eastern members as co-citizens, and how difficult is the way to create a community of peoples, of cultures and citizens which the European Union wishes effectively to build.

EUROPE and the BALKANS
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

Università di Bologna

Post-communism has been the dominant political factor of the 1990s of the XX century in eastern Europe as a part of the post-cold order redefinition of Europe.

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The book try to explains with a series of different case studies why in post-communist transition processes the nature of the changes invested all the pillars of a political society, from a new state building process, to the national identity; from the achievement of a new sovereignity to the inclusion into the globalization flows; from centralization processes to new forms of decentralization.

Cover Illustration: *Photograph taken in Kiev during the Orange Revolution.*

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