

POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION IN EUROPE AND ITS BROADER INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Edited by Mario Zucconi



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Mario Zucconi

GROWING LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL:
EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONAL INCLUSION
AND POLITICAL TRANSITION
IN THE FORMER COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

1. *Introduction*

As the 1990s were coming to an end, conditions began to appear considerably brighter, on the average, for many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Formerly part of the Communist world, those countries had been in a stage of difficult political and economic transition since the end of the Cold War. They had gradually acquired independence between 1989 and 1991. A century of devastating world wars and then of deep division in the European continent was ending, for those Central and Eastern European countries, with a clear future of democratic policies, open society, and market economy before them. Differences persisted among the countries in transition: heterogeneous problems, specific national interests, and diverging levels of economic growth still set them, to some extent, apart from one another. However, they all appeared to have in common that same vision of the future – or perhaps, more homogeneously, a lack of alternatives to that vision – and they were now adhering to the same rules of international interaction and international order. The main motor of that transformation and main homogenizing factor in those countries was the process of integration within Western institutions and especially their preeminent interest in admission into the European Union (EU).

It was only in the second part of the 1990s that the European Union members, hesitant in the early years after the fall of the Berlin wall, began to look at the institutional inclusion of the former Communist countries as to a process with potentially enormous consequences in the restructuring of the European system. The Luxembourg European Council of December 1997 took the first step toward the accession of five countries of the former Soviet bloc – the decision to

open formal negotiation for accession with Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia and Slovenia (in addition to Cyprus). Then, in December 1999, the Helsinki European Council decided to start negotiation with five more Central and Eastern European countries: Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania (in addition to Malta). After that, 1999 must be considered a decisive moment in the consolidation of the EU's will to proceed rapidly with the institutional inclusion of those former Communist countries.

Analyses of the political transformation of the former Communist countries overwhelmingly focus on the changes taking place within the individual countries, on the evolution of those countries' institutions and their progress in settling bilateral disputes with their immediate neighbours. In contrast, and except for the military interventions by international actors in the Balkans, little attention has been given to the outside factors and forces that contributed to that transformation. Besides the requirements of increasingly globalized international politics and economics, there are specific reasons for the strong gravitation of the Central and Eastern European countries toward Western and especially West European institutions. And, while it is unquestionably hard, overall, to separate such external influences from the endogenous causes and process of political change (outside pressures for change necessarily translate into, and combine with internal political options), nonetheless it is important both to assess the role played by external factors in the specific process of political transition of the former Communist countries and to better qualify the very nature of those factors. At the end of the decade the ability of that process to profoundly influence the political transformation of those former Communist countries was clearly manifest. However, some aspects of the dynamics of such an influence were much less clear.

2. Political nature of the new wave of institutional inclusion

While the gravitation of the former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe toward Western institutions and, in particular, toward the European Union¹ was the immediate consequence of the waning of the Soviet system in Europe, the Union's member-states were slow and reluctant, at first, to draw the possible political consequences of the influence that the gravitation toward them implied.

Leaving the Yugoslav federation and joining the Union was one single process in the mind of Slovenia's leaders in 1990 and 1991 – with Austria, itself still solely an applicant country at the time, encouraging those leaders toward secession and promising to bring their independent country along in Austria's accession to the Union². Indeed, the gravitational power of the European institution existed, and produced political developments such as in the case of Slovenia, much

¹ "EU" is used here also for European Community, that is before November 1993.

before the Western European leaders were to make that power into a general strategy for transforming and stabilizing the political system in the continent.

Contrary to some analyses that see in the EU enlargement a European grand strategy devised as the division of the continent ended³, in fact it took the whole decade after the fall of the Berlin wall for the Union's policy of institutional enlargement to turn into a proactive strategy capable of conditioning the evolution of the European political system. For, as indicated, it is only between 1997 and 1999 that the decision was eventually taken to accept ten countries of the former Communist bloc as future member states and thus to start formal accession negotiations with them. The position reached by the Union members between 1997 and 1999 had a strong strategic value. However, as further explained below, that had not been the case in the early years after the end of the Cold War.

The high political value of the decision to accept those ten countries as future members is indicated, first of all, by their being substantially "different" countries from their Western European neighbours. The preceding enlargement decision that brought Sweden, Finland and Austria into the Union in January 1995, concerned countries that everyone wanted to have in the club. Besides their impeccable credentials as democratic states, their GDP was higher than the average of the old twelve Union members. In contrast, the ten countries that by late 1999 were negotiating accession to the Union had, on average, less than 40 percent of the average GDP of the fifteen members, with Slovenia and the Czech Republic hovering around two thirds of that income, but also with countries such as Romania, Latvia and Bulgaria reaching only one third of the income of existing members⁴. Moreover, as trading partners the importance of those countries to the European Union was almost irrelevant, as the largest ones of those countries, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary in the early 1990s made up not more than 3 percent of EU trade. Finally – and needless to say – in 1999 the democratic credentials of those ten aspiring members were still to be considered, if somewhat different from country to country, rather weak.

That, of course, had also been the case with Greece, Spain and Portugal, the three countries admitted in 1981 (Greece) and 1986, and not long after the end of authoritarian regimes in all three of them (though it was a shorter experience for Greece). In this case, too, the new countries' level of income was considerable

² Austria applied for membership in July 1989 and was to become a member in January 1995.

³ See, for instance, Wiarda H. J., *The politics of the European enlargement: NATO, the EU and the new U.S.-European relationship*, Occasional Paper 67, East European Studies, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., February 2002.

⁴ The urban population of those countries was just over 60 per cent as against 80 for the member states. Life expectancy was considerably lower and directly proportional to income – with Latvia reaching as low as 70 years as against the average 78 for member states.

below the average of the older members – though not as low as that of the former Communist countries in 1999. While the accession of Greece, Spain and Portugal had strong political motivations (anchoring those countries to democracy), the main difference with the Central and Eastern European countries is that the three Southern European countries had long had strong ties to the Atlantic alliance. Greece and Portugal had been members of NATO from early on (1949 for Portugal and 1952 for Greece), and Spain had hosted United States military bases on its territory for a long time before becoming a member of NATO in 1982.

3. Evolution of the EU's enlargement policy

Thus, it is the different nature of those Central and Eastern European countries that, as indicated above, qualifies the steps taken by the Union members in the late 1990s as preeminently political. Similar steps were still unthinkable in the first half of the decade, with the EU first excluding and then resisting the institutional inclusion of those countries.

Meeting in Paris in July 1989, the G-7 charged the EU Commission with the task of coordinating all economic aid coming from the countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Then, in September, the European Union created its first tool for intervening in the political transition of Central and Eastern European countries: the PHARE programme (Poland-Hungary Aid for Reconstructing of the Economy), which was extended, one year later, to Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania. This aid programme contained strong elements of conditionality on the policies of the recipient countries (market economy, pluralism, multi-party politics, free elections and respect for human rights). In August 1990 Brussels offered those countries the Association Agreements (called "Europe Agreements"), but in the related negotiations the Commission repeatedly resisted requests for inclusion in the agreement text of references to a possible, future accession to the Union. To the Union members, those agreements were supposed to remain a self-contained process and were not supposed to go any further than the creation of a free trade zone.

In Central and Eastern European countries, in contrast, integration into Europe was becoming increasingly the main focus of their international agenda. It was to them an "issue of life or death", as Hungarian Prime Minister Jozef Antal put it in September 1991 to members of the European Parliament. At that time, the increasingly dense European agenda, its single market, plans for a single currency, and the free movement of people, together with the broader, growing imperatives of the globalization process, made the risk of those countries' marginalization ever more evident. And, as indicated, it took the European leaders a whole decade from the fall of the Berlin Wall before they fully accepted the idea of turning the process of enlargement, that they had considered up to then a

mostly “technical”, neutral issue, into a weighty policy of regional stabilization.

A fundamental step in that direction was taken in June 1993, when the Copenhagen European Council first decided that the Central and Eastern European countries could accede to the Union. Copenhagen also established a number of general criteria (later incorporated in the Treaty on the European Union) for the accession⁵. As a consequence, between March 1994 and June 1996 the above mentioned ten countries formerly part of the Communist bloc (including Slovenia) applied for membership of the Union.

Then, in 1997, the Union readied *Agenda 2000*, indicating for the first time a strategy behind the process of enlargement in the subtitle of the report: “For a stronger and wider Union”. *Agenda 2000* set detailed procedures for admission – as the mandate given the Commission to prepare regular reviews of the applicant state’s progress – and clarified, among others, that membership was a precise concept and that there were no second class memberships and no opt out clauses. It also much broadened the incentives and the instruments of intervention in the aspirant states.

Still, the strongest, decisive impulse toward explicitly making institutional enlargement into a strategy of political stabilization was to come in late 1999 – and largely as a consequence of the Kosovo crisis. Because the operation in the Balkans, in the Spring of 1999, was very much a show of US clout, military power and technological capabilities, Kosovo brought home a number of things to the Western Europeans: how much they still depended on the US for creating stability in their own region, how inadequate their capabilities still were, and how different was the approach to stabilization policies they wanted to have. Most importantly, after the failure to contain the consequences of the break up of Yugoslavia in 1991, the Kosovo crisis was showing once again the inability of the Europeans to deal with political and military crises in their own backyard. Moreover, the management of the war was controversial especially with European public opinion and there was irritation in European capitals for the fact that the US had called most of the shots in the conflict, and had behaved somewhat too heavy-handedly.

Therefore, the earliest European response this time concerned the Balkans. Already in 1995 the experience – no less dramatic and costly – of the war in Bosnia had caused the EU to propose the Royaumont Process: an overall program furthering dialogue and cooperation among regional actors. Then, in 1997, the Union launched its Regional Approach for the Balkans in which financial aid

⁵ Candidate countries must have “achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for, and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union”. European Council at Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993, *Conclusions of the Presidency*, SN 180/93.

and the lowering of trade barriers were conditional not only on reforms in the direction of market economy, but also on the respect of democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law, and the protection of minorities. Then, in response to the war in Kosovo, the Union introduced a more ambitious and comprehensive Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SP) covering both relations with the region and, like the Regional Approach, inter-regional cooperation. The framework for bilateral cooperation was the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), which made it possible to stipulate Agreements with individual countries.

The SAP was supposed to fill the gap between the mere policy of stabilization and the process of institutional integration, even though, at its outset, it contained no explicit commitment in that direction. Still, the inclusion in the SAP of Bulgaria and Rumania, two countries that had already signed the Europe Agreement with Brussels, tended from early on to blur the character of that process and make it appear as a first step in the direction of institutional integration. Later, with the objective of strengthening the EU policy for the Balkans, the European Council of Santa Maria da Feira in 2000 referred to the countries participating in the SAP as “potential candidates” to accession to the Union.

Especially relevant with regard to the post-1999 evolution of the Union’s policy toward the Balkans is the case of Macedonia’s creeping civil war of early 2001. In April that year, Macedonia (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, according to the UN denomination) was the first Balkan country to be given a Stabilization and Association Agreement (ASA, a parallel, in political symbolism as well, with the Europe Agreement for the Central and Eastern European countries) as an incentive to create a government inclusive of all the different ethnic parties. The criticism expressed by part of the Brussels bureaucracy regarding the lack of the prescribed basic conditions for the concession of the Agreement only provides evidence of the political use of institutional integration policy in this case⁶.

Significantly, the Kosovo crisis was a major stimulus for the EU to structure itself better for dealing with critical international issues and, in particular, for the policies of institutional enlargement. While the air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was still in progress, in early June 1999 the Cologne European Council indicated the will to build European military capabilities independently of the NATO context⁷. And in December, the Helsinki Council was to propose a Headline Goal entailing the creation of a European Rapid Deployment Force of 50/60.000 troops. Moreover, it is in this context of attempting to build better institutional capabilities that the position of High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy was created and then followed with the ap-

⁶ From interview with Commission officials by this author in the Spring of 2001.

⁷ For the history of the European Security and Defence Policy see Hunter R., *The European Security and Defense Policy: NATO’s Companion – or Competitor*, Santa Monica (CA), RAND, 2002.

pointment of Javier Solana, a high profile personality and former secretary general of NATO.

With a number of countries expressing an interest in seeing the process of enlargement speeded up, the December 1999 Helsinki European Council added six more countries to the six countries already accepted for negotiation in 1997: former Communist Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, in addition to Malta. Lagging behind in the process of transition and still plagued with political instability, Bulgaria and Romania were especially indicative of the strategic value the Union had now begun to attach to its policies of institutional inclusion. This was further confirmed at Helsinki by the acceptance of Turkey – a country tied to Europe through an Association Agreement since the early 1960s but always kept at arms' length for economic, political and cultural reasons – as a “candidate” country for accession into Europe. Finally, among the escalating initiatives caused by the pressures deriving from the Kosovo crisis and with thirteen countries now in line for accession, the Union established a special Commissioner for Enlargement as part of the EU Commission structure.

4. Changed character of the European state as precondition for the political transition in Central and Eastern Europe

Another important development in the direction of increased integration of the Central and Eastern European countries with the West was the accession to the North Atlantic Treaty of three former Communist countries, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in April 1999. Still, while these and the other former Communist countries involved in the negotiation process by the end of 1999 appear to have assured themselves a destiny within the Western institutions, the long term effects of their institutional integration are hard to predict. Looking at analogous cases and conditions in the past, we can imagine that the former Communist countries will follow the pattern set by Spain and Portugal – two countries that saw enormous economic expansion in the years following their integration into the Union (1986). But Greece (a member since 1981) offers another lesson, as its economy continued to develop with difficulty and the regulation imposed upon it often created important internal tensions and political contradictions. Greece has slipped behind Portugal (the poorest of the members at the time of its entry into the EU) with regard to wages and to a composite index of wellbeing such as the UN human development index⁸.

Even though the long term future of candidate countries is not clear, especially in economic terms (most likely, great success stories will coexist with muddling through situations), the point to stress here is that the process of approaching

⁸ Published regularly by the UN Development Program, the HDI measures overall well-being by combining income, education and health standards.

Western institutions and especially the EU is producing – it has already produced to a great extent – a profound and binding transformation of the institutional setting and politics of those countries. Partial relapses can be expected. However, overall, the new rules of the political game in those countries are being set in this common process of approach to the Western institutions. And this is what sets the present democratic transition of Central and Eastern Europe apart from many other past cases of democratic transition, as it will be explained below.

The precondition for the political transformation of the countries that were once part of the Communist bloc is the transformation of the very character of Western European states and the growing weight of collective institutional arrangements in the political life of those states. Germany is the foremost example of that transformation.

The state most clearly exemplifying the old “territorial and military system” of international relations when it entered the Second World War, in the terminology suggested by Richard Rosecrance, Germany emerged from the Cold War thoroughly transformed in its politics and foreign policy interests. Due to a combination of external constraints and the related evolution of German political culture, the economically powerful West German state epitomized the “civilian power” that was already becoming increasingly influential internationally in the last phase of the Cold War. Looking specifically at Germany and Japan, in the mid 1980s, Rosecrance offered the notion of the “trading state”. “Today West Germany and Japan”, he wrote, “use international trade to acquire the very raw materials and oil that they aimed to conquer by military force in the 1930s”⁹. When, in early 1990, West German leaders renounced what looked like a possible revision of the Eastern border of Germany in the context of the debate on the upcoming German reunification, they signalled to the rest of Europe and to the world that territorial and related issues were no longer part of the political agenda of the contemporary, advanced Western state¹⁰.

⁹ *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World*, New York, Basic Books, 1986, p. 16.

¹⁰ The Federal Republic of Germany had always maintained that final recognition of the existing German-Polish border (the Oder-Neisse border) would have to await a government representative of all German people. And West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl continued to stick to that position even after the fall of the Wall and as the prospect of German reunification began to appear a close possibility, in early 1990, keeping from the unambiguous pledge of his own Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and even compelling the non-Communist Polish Prime Minister Tedeusz Mazowiecki to suggest to reporters that Soviet troops should stay in Poland as a guarantee against “the German problem”. However, as it appears, Kohl was more playing to his party’s right wing than seriously striving to recover Silesia. And eventually, on June 21, with the Chancellor speaking in front of his Western counterpart, both German parliaments passed identical resolutions confirming the Oder-Neisse as the border with Poland. Blaine Harden, «Poland Toughens on Unity», in *International Herald Tribune*, 22 February 1990. On the issue of the German-Polish border after 1989 see Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany’s Road to Unification*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1993, Chapters 14 and 15.

The transformation of the nature of the European state – and the abandonment of territorial, revisionist objectives – was also strictly related to the creation of, and participation in the Atlantic Alliance and, even more so, in Europe-wide institutions such as the European Economic Community and the Council of Europe. In May 1950, in proposing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) – the embryo out of which the European Community was to develop – French Foreign Minister Robert Schumann clarified that by putting “together the totality of the French and German production of coal and steel in one organization open to the participation of other European countries [...] the solidarity of production thus created will show that any war between France and Germany becomes not only unthinkable but also materially impossible”¹¹. Moreover, because of the creation of the ECSC it was possible to solve once and for all the Ruhr issue, with the elimination of the special international authority that France had demanded at the conclusion of the war, and with the return of that most important region to Germany.

And, as time passed, it became ever more difficult to separate the growth of the new German state from its deeper insertion into collective institutions. As the world emerged from the Cold War, one author concluded, “both Germany and Japan [were] defining their interests and objectives in the context of [institutional] integration and interdependence”. And in the case of Germany, that had in addition the most important membership in the EU, in many ways “it no longer ma[de] sense to talk about Germany as a distinct national unity”¹². In this context, it is interesting to remember that the notion of “civilian power” was first used in the early 1970s by Francois Duchene, then director of the London International Institute of Strategic Studies, with reference to the European Community itself as a way to characterize the emergence of an important international actor exerting influence preeminently through forms of power different from military might¹³.

The changed nature of the individual European state and its progressive integration into collective institutions are not sufficient elements, however, to explain the ability the EU showed in the 1990s in guiding politically the transformation of the former Communist countries. The relevant, additional factor here is that the more the association of those countries deepened, the more those countries moved from their traditional, national value-systems, trade preferences, representation of domestic interests, and customary rights-systems to more principled, universally acceptable rules for the management of internal affairs as well as for exter-

¹¹ Cited in Nugent N., *The government and politics of the European Union*, Durham (NC), Duke University Press, 1994.

¹² Maull H. W., «Germany and Japan: The new civilian powers», in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 69, Winter 1990-91.

¹³ «The European Community and the Uncertainties of Interdependence», in Kohnstamm, M. and Hager, W. (eds.), *A Nation Writ Large?*, London, Macmillan, 1973.

nal relations. Trade regulated by the European Community implied that member-states had to give up special positions and protectionist policies and accept higher standards of trade liberalization – not unlike the United States where the federal government is better off in balancing and overcoming individual states' economic interests in negotiations with other countries than Congress¹⁴. And moving decision making to the EU level shields individual governments from the political pressures and retaliations of domestic constituencies and lobbies.

The same mechanism works in the dimension of politics and rights, with institutional integration requiring that the common denominator be found in more general, advanced principles and rules rather than around individual interest or legal and institutional traditions of individual states. The renunciation of the death penalty as a condition for admission into the Union is only one example. And, it may be also useful in this context to recall the first attempt to build Europe-wide principles of coexistence, at the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe in the 1970s, where Western countries pushed precisely for higher standard of political and human rights protection as a basis for mutual legitimation among European states.

Thus, while the prospect of membership is a major motor of reforms in the former Communist countries, the nature of such reforms depends on the new character Western European countries have themselves acquired. As a recent study dealing with human rights policies in Europe points out:

The [European] Union can only achieve the leadership role to which it aspires through the example it sets to its partners and other states. Leading by example should become the leitmotiv of the new EU human rights policy [...] Our analysis thus makes no fundamental distinction between the internal and the external dimensions of the Union's human rights policy. To use a metaphor, it is clear that both must be cut from a single cloth¹⁵.

5. *Most likely a more stable democratic transition than in earlier cases*

What the EU has demanded of those countries for more than a decade has been not solely that they abandon Communist ideology and democratize, but also that they adapt, first of all, to a new rights-system inclusive of more advanced political, minority, civil and human rights. Moreover, at the end of the Cold War, in the Central and Eastern European countries no longer compelled by systemic conditioning, some territorial issues and tensions related to the treatment of national minorities (especially as political elites were looking for new forms of po-

¹⁴ Mark A. Pollack and Gregory C. Shaffer, «Who Governs?», in Mark A. Pollack and Gregory C. Shaffer (eds.), *Transatlantic Governance in the Global Economy*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001.

¹⁵ Alston P. and Weiler J.H.H., *The European Union and Human Rights*, 2000.

litical legitimation) surfaced again. And it is specifically in putting these issues to rest – with the important exception of the crisis in the former Yugoslavia – that the prospect of institutional inclusion worked as a powerful conditioning factor.

Important progress in defusing the critical issue of discrimination against the Russian-speaking residents of the Baltic states was made under strong pressure from Brussels. Urged by Western European capitals, Slovakia signed a Basic Treaty with Hungary, dealing with the rights of the Hungarian minority in that country. And still with regard to Slovakia, analysts recognize that Meciar lost his re-election in 1998 because the public was preoccupied by the deterioration of their country's standing in Europe. In Macedonia, in mid-2001, the ethnic Macedonian parties accepted many of the demands of the Albanian minority (in the Ohid agreement) under pressure from the EU and the United States and with the expectation of acquiring important credits with the European institution.

While the democratic transition of former Communist countries appears at present undoubtedly well advanced, how profound and internalized, and how enduring that political transformation may be is more difficult to establish. Analyses of political transition at global level and over long periods of time can help qualify the political transition in Central and Eastern Europe. (Due to the limited focus of this article, no attempt is made here to systematically discuss the scholarly debate over political transition toward democracy.)

Analyses of political transition spanning long periods point out, first of all, that it can go in two directions – democracy or autocracy. Moreover, the statistical evidence gathered by Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder in 1995, based on cases from the early Nineteen Century to 1980, indicates that in the transitional phase of democratisation – the case of states that have recently undergone regime change in a democratic direction – those states become more aggressive and war-prone. Indeed, democratising states are much more war-prone than states that have undergone no regime change. That means that they are more war-prone than mature democracies. And they are also – what is less obvious – more war-prone than stable autocracies. Some of the reasons for this tendency are intuitive: transition toward democracy is an especially volatile process; the state apparatus is loosening its tight control over the public, while new institutions – especially those that help check raw power – are not yet functioning well; the threatened elites of the old autocratic regime often resort to extreme demagoguery, nationalism and other forms of divisive, competitive policies in an attempt to find new mass allies in the competition with other elites. The likelihood of war or intra-state violence increases as those elites mobilize groups and separate out winners and losers in the process of political and economic reforms, are carried forward by their own rhetoric, and as they pursue prestige strategies in foreign affairs¹⁶.

¹⁶ Mansfield E. and Snyder J., «Democratization and the danger of war», in *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 5, 1995; see also the subsequent debate in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 1997.

Although there are problems with this kind of analyses, especially because of the broad categories in which they lump together different cases, they still offer useful elements to reflect upon and to help qualify the political transition analyzed in these pages. And what is relevant in the context of this essay is that the phenomena related to transition, beginning with demagoguery based on nationalism, which have emerged and endured for years in virulent form especially in the Yugoslav case, in other countries in transition in Central and Eastern Europe have been largely contained. The post-communist transition in Europe, while it has not been an entirely smooth process, has been much less violent than the statistical data on which the studies mentioned above are based had led us to expect.

Of course, it is difficult to identify a single, major factor conditioning the peace process in a development as complex – and to some extent varied – as the political transition of the former Communist countries. And one of the problem with the analyses of the democratisation process mentioned here is that they look at the individual countries in isolation and do not consider other factors that differentiate those countries in qualitative terms. They simply lump together cases with similar behavior with regard to war. Instead, it is possible to separate conditions in which different countries, or group of countries found themselves with regard to transition. The most unstable and with areas of violence proved to be Yugoslavia and the USSR – the latter the power center of the old socialist bloc, the former in a special position, during the Cold War, in between the two systems. In those cases, the breakdown of the overall political system did not have the same consequences as in states in condition of limited sovereignty – such as East Germany, Hungary or Bulgaria. There was necessarily more political continuity in the USSR/Russia and in Yugoslavia, especially with regard to ruling elites. In the other countries, it was the *old* systemic factor that was being disposed of – possibly seen as an extraneous body.

Non continuity in countries that come from conditions of limited sovereignty means also that a new, external factor – the interest *in* Western institutional inclusion – played a larger role in their political transition, dictating a new discipline together with a new, highly consensual vision of the future. And the relevance of that factor may be especially significant in differentiating this democratization wave from previous ones. A useful model here is that established by Samuel Huntington, with “waves of democratization” followed by relapses, or “reverse waves” toward authoritarianism. The last reverse wave that Huntington talks about (his work was published in 1991) concerned the coups and military regimes that took over in Latin American countries since the 1950s through the 1970s. It also concerns Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines and, to some extent, Indira Gandhi’s emergency rule introduced in India in 1975. In Europe, it was the coup by the Turkish military in 1960 and the “royal” and then military coups in Greece later in the decade¹⁷.

¹⁷ Huntington S., *The Third Wave: Democratization in the late Twentieth Century*, Norman,

And – no matter how problematic, such aggregations of individual cases may be – here, too, the point to make is that the present transition process in Central and Eastern Europe may be expected to be on a steadier course than previous “waves of democratization”. The difference is likely made by the external factor in that transition.

The political transformation in the East not only did not happen in a vacuum of external influence, but was in fact primarily caused – with the possible exception of Poland – by external factors beginning with a fundamental systemic change in the region. That is to say, the process of democratisation within the individual state related, first of all, to increasing general difficulties suffered by that state within the context of the Eastern bloc. The whole bloc increasingly lagged behind in the process of modernization, especially with regard to the information and communication revolution. Although inseparable from other factors (security, identity, etc.), the accession to Western institutions, and first of all to the European Union, represented the way out of that earlier condition and possible international marginalization. This second phenomenon is especially important in qualifying the character of the transition, since that strong interest in Westward integration played an important role, as indicated, in offering standards, directives, legal and institutional models, creating international discipline and even creating strong popular legitimacy for reforms in the individual democratising countries.

The fundamentally new, general character of the present democratisation process in Central and Eastern Europe, together with the new institutional inclusion, derives from a type of consensus from below based on individual rights and individual needs (as rules of the political game). Today, old and new elites depend on this type of consensus for their legitimation, no matter what contingent relapses take place in some countries. Thus, most importantly, it is the basis of leadership legitimation that has changed. And that, in addition to the different international context in which those countries live today, is probably the most solid guarantee of the steady course the political transformation of former Communist countries is following at present and will be following in the future.

EUROPE and the BALKANS INTERNATIONAL NETWORK



Università di Bologna

COSTITUITO ALLA FINE DEL 1993 CON IL SOSTEGNO FINANZIARIO DELL'UNIONE EUROPEA (PROGRAMMA HUMAN CAPITAL AND MOBILITY), IL NETWORK INTERNAZIONALE "EUROPE AND THE BALKANS" SI AVVALE DELLA COOPERAZIONE DI ALCUNI FRA I PIÙ NOTI STUDIOSI DELL'EUROPA E DEGLI STATI UNITI. IL NETWORK NASCE COME INIZIATIVA UNIVERSITARIA E CON L'AMBIZIONE DI SVILUPPARE CONVERGENZA STRETTA FRA RICERCA SCIENTIFICA ED ESIGENZE DI INFORMAZIONE QUOTIDIANA NELLA NOSTRA SOCIETÀ.

THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK "EUROPE AND THE BALKANS" WAS ESTABLISHED AT THE END OF 1993 WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (HUMAN CAPITAL AND MOBILITY PROGRAMME) AND RELIES ON THE COLLABORATION OF SOME OF THE BEST-KNOWN EUROPEAN AND NORTH AMERICAN SCHOLARS. THE INITIATIVE WAS CONCEIVED AS A UNIVERSITY PROJECT, AIMING TO MAKE ACADEMIC RESEARCH MORE RELEVANT TO THE WIDESPREAD NEED FOR INFORMATION.

Even though the Cold War was over, the 1990s were still fairly dramatic years in the European continent – with armed conflict waged in the Balkans and in some areas in the periphery of the former Soviet Union, and with most former Communist countries struggling through a difficult economic and political transition. As the new century began, however, such a transition appeared largely accomplished. The Balkans had largely gotten over violent conflict and in most countries the graph of economic recovery was moving steadily up. Most importantly, Western countries had increasingly devised means for intervening in that transition process. That meant even military intervention in the Balkans, and mostly economic and political integration for many countries in transition. Perhaps no other factor was as reassuring about the transition of the former Communist countries as the fact that the process was now firmly anchored to Western institutions and progress. This book explores different issues that were part of the transition in Central and Eastern Europe and looks at the experiences and developments the whole continent went through in that period of time.

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