Chasing the Meaning of 'Post-communism': a Transitional Phenomenon or Something to Stay?

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Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds., *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 743 pp., ISBN 0–521–57101–4

Bruno Coppieters, Alexei Zverev and Dmitri Trenin, eds., *Commonwealth and Independence in Post-Soviet Eurasia* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 232 pp., ISBN 0–714–64480–3

Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: an Introduction* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997), 260 pp., ISBN 0–745–61311–x

Michael Mandelbaum, ed., *Post-Communism: Four Perspectives* (US Council of Foreign Relations, 1996), 208 pp., ISBN 0–876–09186–9

Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 443 pp., ISBN 0–521–57157–x

Richard Rose, William Mishler and Christian Haerpfer, *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), 270 pp., ISBN 0–745–61926–6

Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder, *Post-Soviet Political Order* (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), 201 pp., ISBN 0–415–17068–0

Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr and Edward Allworth, *Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 304 pp., ISBN 0–521–59045–0

Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 217 pp., ISBN 0–691–04826–6

Gordon Wightman, ed., *Party Formation in East-Central Europe: Post-Communist Politics in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria* (Vermont: Edward Elgar, 1995), 270 pp., ISBN 1–858–898132–8

It is now about 10 years since the communist bloc ceased to exist (1989 is the year when communism was defeated in central–eastern Europe, and in 1991 its bastion – the Soviet Union – fell). What it left behind are a couple of die-hard communist survivor-states, an urge to 'rethink' or 're-define' many fundamental concepts of political science, and a large swathe of land that is still to be properly categorised in

registers of comparative political science. 'Post-communism' is the most popular term to cover this territory. But does it refer to something real today, or does it just express some kind of intellectual inertia? How much do the 'post-communist countries' still have in common with each other and to what extent are they different from any others?

The second term that readily comes to mind as soon as you say 'post-communism' is 'transition': these are countries that are trying to introduce a different political and economic system instead of communism. Hopefully, the transition should be to liberal democracy and a market economy. But is it? Some authors prefer not to use the word at all, thus stressing that the final destination of the movement is unknown, and prefer to speak about 'transformation' or just 'change' (Rose et al., p. 7; Bill Lomax in Wightman, *Party Formation*, p. 180). A new kind of authoritarianism may be an alternative destination point. Or perhaps 'post-communism' is a new kind of social-political reality that is not moving in the direction of democracy but does not fit features of 'authoritarianism' either? Leslie Holmes, whose book is the only one that tries to give a comprehensive picture of what post-communism is, appears to reify the topic he studies: he says that it is difficult to define post-communism since 'the phenomenon is still crystallising' (p. 3), and speaks about countries that are 'building post-communism' (in the same sense in which they used to 'build communism'?). This makes one think that post-communism is a special kind of political system, or at least a set of political practices, ideology, whatever, something that can be 'crystallised' or 'built'. However, when Holmes proposes his fourteen-point model of what post-communism is, there is no single characteristic of such a kind of 'crystallised' system: while one of them deals with the international context of post-communist transformations, all the others are linked to communist legacies, or the starting point of change (pp. 16–21).

Rather than starting with definitions, it would probably be safer to sort out problems that are most widely discussed with regard to the formerly communist countries. Three main problem areas emerge (however interdependent they might be). First and foremost is the one already mentioned: the direction of post-communist transitions or transformations. If they lead to liberal democracy and market capitalism, then what specific routes are taken, what impediments have to be overcome, and what are the relative chances of different countries of 'making it'? If this is not the direction they are taking, then where are they heading?.

The second and no less popular topic is nationalism. A series of ethnic wars in the former Yugoslavia were the centre of international media attention for several years, and culminated up in the direct military involvement of NATO. The Caucasus is the second region which has made itself notorious for ethnic-related turmoil. Other countries might have avoided violent conflicts, but not necessarily the fears thereof. No wonder that, especially for the Western public, 'post-communism' is firmly linked to 'ethnic conflict'.

Thirdly, the collapse of communism meant the end of the bipolar global international system known as the Cold War. What is going to replace it? Will Russia, the successor state to the Soviet Union, become a partner or an adversary of

the West? What kinds of new regional organisations and coalitions – if any – will emerge as a result of the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact and the creation of new nations? How do the relations of post-communist countries both among themselves and with powerful Western states make an impact on their internal development?

This particular set of books appears to confirm the usefulness of this categorisation. While Leslie Holmes's *Introduction* tries to give a comprehensive summary, four books deal with problems of transition, two discuss problems of post-communist nation-building, two others deal with both conflict within new post-Soviet states and their relations with each other, while one specifically explores the link between national identity formation and international politics in three newly emerged states.

Transition to what?

If this is the question of post-communist studies, the answers may be scaled between poles of optimism and pessimism. Optimists claim that as a rule, post-communist transitions lead to democracy. While there may be exceptions, they need special explanation. Pessimists claim the contrary: while several post-communist countries may become really democratic, most others are problematic at best or are going to become slightly modified autocracies.

Michael Mandelbaum, in his very thoughtful introduction to the book that represents four different perspectives on post-communism, links variety in assessments to different disciplinary approaches. The optimists emphasise the role of institutions, the pessimists that of culture. Therefore, 'Economists, whose professional worldview puts incentives and institutions at its core, tend to be optimists; historians and sociologists, who study long-term trends, gravitate towards pessimism' (pp. 7–8). In the same book, John Mueller expresses the optimistic view in the most consistent, not to say extreme, form: '. . . the transitional experience in many of the post-communist countries and elsewhere suggests that democracy as a form of government and capitalism as an economic form are really quite simple, even natural, and, unless obstructed by thugs with guns, they can emerge quite easily and quickly without any special development, prerequisites, or preparation' (p. 104).

Charles Gati represents the pessimistic view, and bases his assessment in this book on the self-perception of post-communist nations: 'the public mood in post-communist countries points to unsuccessful transitions to democracy' (p. 169), although he concedes that several countries will probably 'make it'. In his book, Vladimir Tismaneanu has a similar view: 'Perhaps the only safe prediction is that some of the post-communist countries will develop stable democratic institutions and join the European and Atlantic political, economic, and military structures. Others will persist in a hybrid semi-liberal, semi-authoritarian order that combines populism and nationalism as forms of expedient legitimisation based on mass enthusiasm' (Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation*, p. 19). Bill Lomax's approach may be defined as that of radical pessimism: what happens in post-communist countries is 'not the transition from one system to another, but the resolution of an intra-system crisis and the recuperation of a system of authoritarian power'; although there are

changes, 'they are, more often than not, serving only to reproduce the very worst features of the old system' (Wightman, *Party formation*, pp. 179, 180). He recognises no hopeful exceptions: he takes Hungary as his case study exactly because he believes that this country has, relatively, the best chance to transform itself into a democracy and market economy, but even it is not going to make it.

There is probably no necessity to dwell on reasons for optimism, as the main one is very clearly formulated in the short quotation from John Mueller. It appears all too obvious and empirically checked that democracy and the market are preferable forms of government and economy, and since people are basically rational, they will make rational choice unless stopped by force. The international context may be another important basis for optimism: by the time of the collapse of communism, democracy has become the only game in town within the developed West, so there is even less rational justification not to choose democracy. Even if Leslie Holmes is right in contending that so many simultaneous democratisations restrict the availability of Western resources to support each of those countries (Holmes, *Post-communism*, p. 21), unqualified support for democracy and the market on behalf of the developed world still is a positive factor.

What should be the reasons for pessimism, then? First of all, there was the unprecedented complexity of the task post-communist countries faced in the moment of the collapse of communism: as most authors stress, they had to change dramatically both political *and* economic systems at the same time. In most countries the transition was really triple, with the especially sensitive task of nation-building having been added to political and economic transformations. Even if most countries succeeded in avoiding violent ethnic conflicts, it took additional efforts to avoid them. And it was not just that there were too many tasks to undertake: measures aimed at reaching one objective got in the way of another. Economic change required unpopular measures, thus putting additional pressure on unconsolidated democratic institutions and fragile pro-democracy coalitions. Some necessary concessions to regional and ethnic minority leaders within countries might impede democratic and economic reforms as well.

Even if the task of political transformation is singled out, there are still considerable impediments to democratisation that may be formulated under headings of 'lack of social pre-requisites' and 'post-communist mentality'. First of all, totalitarian policies of communist regimes wiped out any trace of the *civil societies*, preventing any spontaneous self-organization and expression of social interests that could later underpin political institutions of democracy. This – together of course with the absence of private property and a market economy – is what makes post-communist transformations so different from post-authoritarian transitions in southern Europe and Latin America, with which they are most often compared. As Richard Rose et al. stress, 'The ideal starting-point for democratisation is an oligarchic regime in which civil institutions of representation are already in place', so that – especially if the rule of law is also present – all that is required to turn a regime into a democracy is the introduction of 'universal suffrage in free elections, and the accountability of the government to the electorate' (p. 64). Post-communist

transitions, on the other hand, are – as aptly characterised by Stephen Fish in his book of the same title – attempts to build 'democracy from scratch'.[1] They cannot enjoy the 'luxury of evolution' (*ibid*., p. 46) and post-communist transitions have to start 'from backwards' (p. 66): they introduce free competitive elections *before* civil society institutions that provide the basis for mass political parties come into existence. So, as Gordon Wightman concludes, political party formation has been much less successful in post-communist eastern Europe than in post-authoritarian southern Europe. Thus he thought that by 1993 (when he finished his paper), 'it was too early to conclude that the demise of communist regimes had been followed by a successful transition to pluralist democracy' (p. 238). Describing Hungarian political parties, Bill Lomax says that they, 'almost without exception, are elite groups of intellectuals, often long-standing personal friends. They do not represent social interests or constituencies, nor even any commitment to common beliefs, programmes or ideologies' (*ibid*., p. 185).

The post-communist mentality, or post-communist moral condition, may be a phenomenon difficult to describe in precise terms, but this does not necessarily diminish its influence. Many items on Leslie Holmes's fourteen-point list describing major features of post-communism, such as 'near absence of a culture of compromise,' 'high expectation of leaders', 'cynicism towards and/or mistrust of political institutions', 'an ideological vacuum' and 'moral confusion' come under this heading. If different features of the post-communist mentality are summarised under the single heading, this may be 'infantilised society', a phrase Leslie Holmes quotes from George Schöpflin. Infantilisation is the result of total control of communist institutions and the abolition of the institution of private property, leaving the human capacity for making decisions in the public sphere utterly untrained. This author has elsewhere described this phenomenon of mass infantilisation as 'playful creativity without the ability of doing real things, abstract yearning for something without clear knowledge what it is and how it is to be obtained, fear of responsibility, expectation that somebody else will make ultimate decisions within the pre-given general framework'.[2]

Vladimir Tismaneanu's *Fantasies of Salvation* is focused on post-communist mentality as an essentially important impediment to the transition. Instead of following rationalist enlightenment traditions embodied by the dissident opposition to communism, writes Tismaneanu, the post-communist mind fell prey to illiberal, neo-romantic, anti-modern mythologising, which pins hope of salvation on individual saviours, scapegoats minorities for all failures, and thinks it can exorcise all its demons by a one-off act of *decommunisation*, that is, by instituting retroactive justice against communists. Tismaneanu laments, 'Some of the famous dissidents of yore declare that what they have been witnessing in the first half-decade of post-communism is not what they fought for' (p. 14).

[1] Stephen M. Fish, *Democracy from Scratch: Opposition and Regime in New Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[2] Ghia Nodia, 'How Different Are Post-Communist Transitions?', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, no. 4 (1996), 113.

But maybe this purist liberal mentality as represented by dissidents also contains an impediment to successful transition? Stephen Holmes appears to think so: he believes that the transition made dissidents superfluous and that is why their picture of transitions is so bleak (*Post-Communism: Four Perspectives*, p. 73). He praises the pragmatic Czech premier, Vaclàv Klaus as 'the most talented state-builder of the post-communist Europe' (p. 61), in contrast to Vaclàv Havel, a carrier of abstract dissident ideals. This may be a case when the rapidly moving target of post-communism takes revenge on its scholars: Klaus, having been immersed in corruption scandals, was discredited, and the Czech Republic is no longer seen as a showcase for post-communist success, while Havel is still widely appreciated for his moral leadership. But this issue is much broader than an assessment of specific personalities or even of a very thin stratum of people such as eastern European dissidents. 'Dissident thinking' is often linked to the concept of anti-politics, a term coined by the Hungarian dissident György Konrád in early 1980s. Konrád defined anti-politics as the 'ethos of civil society',[3] which means that *civil society* – the key term used by eastern European dissidents – is defined as an antithesis to the state, and permanent moral opposition to *any* state power is considered the only noble position.

The liberal ideals of dissidents might not be as universally shared in post-communist societies as they themselves might have hoped, but their anti-political ethos was influential enough, largely defining the discourse of the new elites most of whose members did not publicly challenge the communist regime when it was in place but who then formed the core of anti-communist parties. Dissident-defined discourse greatly contributed to the de-legitimisation of communism, but under post-communist circumstances principled mistrust of state institutions as such becomes a factor of *the weakness of the state*. But there cannot be a successful democracy if the state cannot carry out its functions. Wightman considers the distaste for political parties that had developed during the one-party political regimes to be another impediment to the formation of post-communist political parties, and he praises the same Vaclàv Klaus for overcoming that distaste sooner than anybody else in eastern Europe (*Party Formation*, p. 248). Tismaneanu, aware of this charge of anti-politics against dissidents, tried to define 'so-called anti-politics' as just the 'non-Machiavellian form of politics' (p. 19) – without describing, though, what this can mean in practice.

While different disciplinary approaches may matter for the assessment of post-communism, there might be an even greater correlation between optimism/pessimism on the one hand and internal/external perspectives on the other: in general, 'locals' tend to be more pessimistic than 'neutral' observers. One of the most pessimistic of these, Charles Gati (who happens to be an economist), bases his assessments on the self-perceptions of post-communist societies as measured by polls. Bill Lomax, who drafts the gloomiest picture, quotes almost exclusively

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[3] George Konrád, *Antipolitics* (San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), p. 92.

Hungarian authors. Vladimir Tismaneanu, although now based in the United States, spent his formative years as a Romanian dissident. This difference may be explained by noting that the 'outsiders' look at the 'big picture' and assess it according to 'objective' parameters of democracy (or 'poliarchy') as defined in Western democratic theory by such authors as Joseph Schumpeter,[4] Robert Dahl,[5] Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan[6] and others. According to these parameters, there are reasonable grounds for optimism. According to the authoritative Freedom House survey carried out in 1998/99, out of twenty-eight post-communist countries, twelve were free, eleven were partly free and five were not free[7] (although 'freedom' is the term used here, the Freedom House survey measures those parameters that are usually associated with liberal democracy in general). Being achieved in less than ten years, this result is not so bad. The 'locals', on the other hand (as well as those outsiders who base themselves on local self-perceptions), look at the 'substance' that goes beyond those 'purely formal' measurements. They find that commitment to liberal ideas is weak and superficial, corruption is endemic, political parties have no social base, non-governmental organisations (considered almost synonymous with the 'civil society') are small groups sponsored by Western foundations, formally independent media may be really controlled by some 'Mafia' groups, and so on. The discourse of post-communist democrats, being defined by idealistic dissidents on the one hand and, albeit indirectly, by the Utopian tradition of Communist ideology on the other, may be more and more reluctant to tolerate those unavoidable but unseemly aspects of democratic politics that Western societies have learned to live with. This 'local' perception, shared by some Western observers, may be summarised as follows: this may be 'formally' a democracy, but it does not 'feel' like one.[8]

As I said, the 'rootlessness' of post-communist democracies is often measured against southern Europe and Latin America, where there had existed some socio-economic preconditions for successful democratisations. While this may be right, it should also be noted that the most frequently quoted scholars of 'Latin' transitions, such as Philippe C. Schmitter, Guillermo O'Donnell or Giuseppe di Palma, based their interpretations on criticising the theory of 'preconditions' or 'premises' of democracy (the north-western democratic experience was *their* point of comparison), understood democratic transitions as basically elite-level deals and spoke about 'democracies without democrats', that is, the possibility of consolidating democratic rule even when democratic values are not internalised by the majority of the population. 'Diffusion' or 'the demonstration effect', that is, external factors,

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[4] Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952).

[5] Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

[6] Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[7] *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1998–99*, at www.freedomhouse.org/survey99.

[8] This feeling is very well expressed by Anne Applebaum, 'Nice Guys Finish Last', *Freedom Review*, Vol. 27, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1996), 24–30.

become especially important for democratisations: elites decide to follow democratic rules because they know that these are the rules that work in the most advanced countries (and also because they may be rewarded by those countries for following these rules).[9] Democratic 'habits of the heart' as described by Tocqueville may be learned along the way (or maybe not at all?). If this is true of 'Latin' transitions, then post-communist cases may be just more extreme manifestations of the same logic: they can occur under even greater 'lack of preconditions'.

Whatever we make of this comparison, however, the generic assessment of the post-communist world becomes more and more difficult, since there are dramatic differences between different post-communist countries, and these differences get deeper as the time passes. The share of optimism–pessimism depends not only on the approach or the background of the beholder, but also on the region that is considered. The most powerful variable explaining relative success or failure appears to be cultural–geographical: 'the unsurprising conclusion is that honouring political rights and civil liberties is a function of physical and presumably cultural proximity to western Europe' (Charles Gati, in *Post-Communism: Four Perspectives*, p. 173). Or, as Michael Mandelbaum puts it, 'The most successful post-communist countries are those closest to the part of the world from which the definition of success comes' (*ibid.*, p. 13).

Freedom House ratings confirm this view pretty strongly. The post-communist world may be divided into three large cultural–geographical areas. North and central Europe, including the Visegrad and Baltic countries – the closest to the source of democratic 'diffusion' – is the area of consolidated democracies: all seven countries are rated 'free'. Islamic Central Asia constitutes the opposite pole of authoritarianism: four out of six countries were rated 'not free', one 'partly free' and only Mongolia was rated 'free'. Countries of south-eastern Europe (including the Balkans, the European members of the CIS and Europe-aspiring South Caucasus) constitute predominantly the area of semi-democracy or semi-authoritarianism: out of fifteen countries here, only three were rated 'free', two as 'not free', and ten as 'partly free'. Culture and geography are far from being the only determining factors (if so, the positions of Belarus and Mongolia should be reversed), but the variables should not be underestimated either.

Although all ratings should be treated with caution, there are good reasons to consider 'free' and 'not free' countries as generally fitting into conventional categories of 'democratic' and 'authoritarian' rule respectively. The grey area of semi-freedom is probably the most problematic for political science. It includes, among others, such important states as Russia or Ukraine, which makes adequate interpretation even more important. Are these countries going to relapse into 'real authoritarianism', or are they just somewhat belated in becoming 'normal' democracies, or is their condition between democracy and authoritarianism going to be

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[9] 'For all its historical geographical ups and downs, diffusion remains a key (nowadays writ large) ingredient of democratic development' – Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: an Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), p. 14.

stabilised for the foreseeable future? Charles Gati, who believed in 1996 that 'at least twenty [post-communist] countries are facing the prospect of neither democracy nor totalitarianism' (*Post-Communism: Four Perspectives*, p. 169), seemed to support the third option and tried to give a description of such a 'semi–' regime: 'Several parties would compete for power, though only those that accept the self-styled rules of the game could win. Legislatures would function, though the critical decisions of state would be made by the chief executive and his acolytes. The press would be free, though it would apply self-censorship to forestall state censorship. Private enterprise would be tolerated, even encouraged, but through taxation, control over the banking system, and strict regulations the government would make sure its priorities are observed. Trade unions would be allowed to organise, though their right to strike would be circumscribed. And if massive popular discontent should still surface – as it would – a few cabinet ministers might resign, but the system would remain in place' (p. 195). Only fear of the West explains why will they not go all the way to fully-fledged dictatorship: 'If elections were *obviously* fraudulent and human rights *blatantly* violated, Western governments would undoubtedly protest. If there was *conspicuous* state intervention in the economy, the issue of membership in the European Union might be removed from the agenda' (*ibid.*).

If Gati is right, then post-communism is *not* a transitional phenomenon but rather a special kind of political and economic regime. There are many things in his description that definitely ring a bell. Eight-ten years is not such a short time, after all, and if certain group of countries did not manage to shape a regime which is either democratic or authoritarian, it is reasonable to expect that it will continue to stay that way for some time to come.

However, something is still lacking here. First, this is *ideology*. Those who believe that there may be some kind of relatively stabilised 'post-communist' political regime that neither can be described as democracy nor as authoritarianism think that ideology does not matter, because nowhere can an ideologist of special 'post-communist' regimes be found. While many authors speak about the weakness of ideology in the post-communist world, general democratic principles are accepted in principle and, as one can also judge from Richard Rose et al. analysing the *Eurobarometer* data – results of public opinion surveys on attitudes to democracy and the market in post-communist countries – alternatives to democracy do not enjoy public support. But in 'normal' or consolidated political regimes there is usually some correlation between political reality and ideology. Not only was communist totalitarianism based on special ideology, so are traditional autocratic regimes (these may be 'Asian values', ideologies based on instrumentalisation of Islamic traditions, and so on).

Secondly, Gati's description implies that post-communist semi-democracy may be treated as stabilised and consolidated at some point. The government knows what it controls and what it does not, and exercises effective authority in these defined areas. Even if there is no ideology that justifies this, there should at least be some elite-level consensus on the legitimacy of exercising power in a certain way for a certain period of time. However, it is highly questionable that 'partly free'

post-communist countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and others have such regimes. What is more typical for them is the *weakness* and *inefficiency* of the state, and the uncertainty or shapelessness of political life. It is not that semi-democratic regimes regulate the economy more than liberal economies do: Mafia-type intermingling of state and economy cannot be called 'regulation' at all. It is not that the media are allowed to criticise the political regime less than in advanced democracies: they can and do so, and they criticise the general situation as well as digging up unseemly facts about key political players. If this criticism is ineffective, it is because moral standards of the society are damaged. It is not that rules effective in semi-democracies are somewhat more liberal than in classic dictatorships but are still not liberal enough; the problem is that there are no clear and effective rules at all, hence there is no consolidated political regime of *any* kind. These countries keep *oscillating* between democracy and authoritarianism without having found any predictable 'synthesis' of both. They are *stuck* in the transition period and are *muddling through* (the term used by some scholars with regard to African states, and now increasingly applied to post-communist ones).[10] Some of them may develop into 'normal' democracies relatively soon (as Croatia is expected to do following the January 2000 election results), some may relapse into more blatant authoritarianism (as has happened to Belarus), but many are probably going to 'muddle through' in their grey area of semi-whatever for some time to come.

Until these countries develop some kind of distinct political identity, they will be just addressed as 'post-communist', the latter term not denoting any specific political system, but rather being an emblem of failed transition. But it does not mean that the term should be reserved for them only. More successful countries may be recognised as consolidated democracies according to all the ratings, but their democracy will probably still 'feel different' from traditional Western democracies as perceived both by their own constituencies and by outside observers. This special and mostly unpleasant flavour will be covered by the concept of 'political culture', a concept many political scientists find too 'fuzzy' but still cannot avoid.

Multiple faces of nationalism

In 1989, what we now call the 'post-communist world' consisted of 10 states: the Soviet Union, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania and Mongolia. Of these ten, three (the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia) broke up and one (East Germany) was incorporated into another state. As a result, there are now twenty-eight internationally recognised post-communist states (plus a post-communist region within the united Germany), and only six of them existed within the same borders ten years ago. This means that at least twenty-two new states should have redefined their national identities and

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[10] Analogies between Africa and the post-communist world were discussed extensively at the conference 'Beyond State Crisis? The Quest for the Efficacious State in Africa and Eurasia', University of Madison, June 1999 (the conference volume is forthcoming).

sorted out problems with their minorities and neighbours. That many have failed in their nation-building projects is witnessed by the presence of eight separate state formations: Serbian and Croatian enclaves in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Chechnya, Nagorny Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transdniester. All of them achieved this volatile status as a result of bloody wars, and the fate of one of them was being decided on the battlefield while this review article was being written.

Thanks to wars such as those in Kosovo or Chechnya most scholars consider the role of nationalism in post-communism transition to be obviously pernicious, something that develops into wars and ethnic cleansings, and constitutes the major impediment on the way to post-communist transitions. While this is true to some extent, the role of nationalism in a post-communist world cannot only be seen in a one-dimensional way. Tismaneanu, although very alert to various dangers stemming from ethnic nationalism, still does not forget to note: 'I insist on the key distinction between anti-liberal, integral nationalism, which asserts the primacy of ethnic values over any others, and liberal or civic, nationalism, which admits the compatibility of civic and ethnic identities in a political order based on mutual trust and tolerance. The revolutions of 1989–90 had a dual nature: they were simultaneously revolutions of political and national liberation' (p. 8).

But how can we distinguish between different kinds or aspects of nationalism? There are no hard and fast rules here: there is an illiberal side to every nationalist movement, but in most cases mass anti-communist movements have had both democratic and nationalist aspects. To put it otherwise, nationalism was a force that mobilised people into mass movements against communist rule and *for* democracy, but *at the same time* many aspects of nationalist thinking obstructed the development of liberal–democratic policies.

The role and face of nationalism also changes from one country or region to another. In almost all post-communist states (including post-Soviet ones), communism was imposed by an outside power, Russia. Hence, the movement against communism and for democracy coincided with that for liberation from the foreign power. Especially in those countries where Soviet troops were still stationed at the time of the communist collapse, pro-democracy movements could not fail to have some anti-Russian flavour. Later insistence by the same countries that they join NATO was also partly based on a lingering anti-Russian sentiment, and this was one of the reasons why Russia resented NATO enlargement so much. But since these countries had already the formal status of sovereign states and almost no permanent Russian residents, their anti-Russian nationalism was less prominent and not ethnic in character.

Baltic nationalisms were different because Baltic states were incorporated into the Soviet Union, and Soviet occupation was followed by mass settlement of ethnic Russians, presumably with the long-term goal of ethnically Russifying the region altogether. Hence, in these countries nationalist slogans were central to the anti-communist movement. However, these nationalist movements were at the same time the first and the most powerful mass movements for democracy in the Soviet

Union. Their democratic credentials were later confirmed by the fact that so far Baltic countries have become the only fairly successful democracies in the post-Soviet realm. But they also had an ethnic nationalist component targeted against local Russian populations, and Baltic states continue to receive criticism for their treatment of Russian minorities, and not only from Russia. Mass nationalist movements emerged as the major form of anti-communist and pro-democracy political mobilisation in other former Soviet republics such as Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, but in none of them were they simultaneously orderly, powerful and consistently democratic, so the post-communist record of those countries is also mixed. The same is true of republics of former Yugoslavia such as Slovenia or Croatia, with the former much more successful than the latter. Central Asian states had no pro-independence movements to speak of: they were just left independent after the Soviet collapse. This correlates with the current lack of democracy in the region.

But just liberating themselves from the foreign power did not exhaust the nationalist agenda at all. Constituent republics of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia had symbolic attributes of nation-states, hence newly emergent elites considered them as nation-states in readiness that just needed to establish their international credentials by getting away from the rule of Moscow or Belgrade. However, most of them included sizeable minorities which in some cases enjoyed the special status of ethnic–territorial autonomies or, one can say, were quasi-nation-states of the second order. Hence, mass nationalist movements were challenged by 'minority within the minority' counter-movements, more often than not with outside patronage. In some already mentioned and widely known cases, these conflicts led to mass bloodshed. In other, much less famous cases, violent conflicts were avoided: this includes Crimea in Ukraine, the Polish minority in Lithuania, Russian minorities in all the Baltic states, the Gagauz minority in Moldova, and so on.

Why wars occurred in some cases but not in others is a question that students of post-communist affairs continue to explore. According to Jack Snyder, 'where proto-state structures inherited from the Soviet period were too weak to manage ethnic divisions, they were also too weak to prevent conflict among clans, regions, factions, and mafias' (*Post-Soviet political order*, p. 5). Although weakness of the state in the period of the Soviet collapse is an obvious generic explanatory factor, Snyder's view may be contested when it comes to comparing different cases, because 'proto-state structures' inherited from the Soviet Union were quite uniform everywhere. A chicken and egg question emerges here: did state collapse contribute to ethnic conflicts, or, on the contrary, was it the power of nationalist mobilisation that made it possible to dismantle the Communist state institutions?[11] Since national liberation movements and ethnic conflicts started when almost nobody had yet predicted the speedy break-up of the Soviet Union, a strong argument may be made that it was

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[11] For instance, Ian Bremmer believes that 'it was nationalist conflict that proved the most fundamental threat to Soviet stability' (*New States, New Politics*, p. 3).

the inability of the liberalised communist regime to deal with issues of ethnic nationalism and emerging conflicts like that in Nagorny Karabakh, that became the primary reason for the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Last but not least, even if independence is achieved and ethnic violence avoided, *nation-building* still cannot be taken for granted. As has become a commonplace observation in studies of nations and nationalism, political nations are constructed by nationalist elites from the ethnic material at hand; people are not naturally born as patriotic citizens of respective nation-states, they have to be *mobilised* into political nations. This means that ethnic symbols and mythologies have to be elaborated, new national holidays instituted, national heroes incarnated, streets and cities renamed, national histories properly reinterpeted and disseminated through educational systems, friends and enemies sorted out, policies towards minorities developed, and so on. Considerable parts of this work had been done before and even during the communist years. However paradoxical it may sound with regard to the ideology of communist internationalism, the Soviet system of a federation of quasi nation-states largely contributed to nation-building in each of its constituent republics, and a similar argument may be put forward in relation to the former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. However, these were still communist states that wished to maintain their integrity, so that new or old elites in at least those twenty-two states that experienced post-communist transition in new borders had a lot to do to instil or strengthen the sense of nationhood into their constituencies. Specific techniques of nation-building, both during and especially after the Soviet regime, are carefully analysed country by country or region by region in the two volumes *Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands* and *New States, New Politics*.

Entering new international relations with old fears and hopes

With the abrupt change of political system, the new states also had to develop their places in the new system of international relations. As Ilya Prizel shows very convincingly with regard to the Polish, Ukrainian and Russian cases, national mythologies and self-perceptions were decisive in defining their foreign policy strategies: 'the interaction between national identity and foreign policy is a key element in both established and nascent polities, but this interaction is particularly important in newly emerging or re-emerging states since nationalism and national identity are often the main, if not the sole force binding these societies together' (p. 2). This linkage might have been even more prominent in the case of post-Soviet states, which had to build a new system of international relations after having coexisted in the same state, and where boundaries between internal and foreign politics are especially difficult to draw.

There were three major areas in which post-communist states, however new, had to define or re-define their foreign policy. The first is relations with 'the West'. What is primarily meant by this term are the major Western powers and the two major international institutions that represent them: NATO and the European Union. 'The West' symbolises power, prosperity and democracy, so it is obvious

that as a rule, post-communist states give priority to establishing the best possible relations with it and line up for membership of two of its most powerful organisations (or at least try to participate actively in their apprenticeship programmes such as the NATO Partnership for Peace). Exclusions from this rule should be explained as special cases, Russia being the most important among them. Having shed their communist regime, Russians, aptly defined by John Dunlop as 'a people in quest of an identity' (*New States, New Politics*, p. 29), had a short honeymoon with the West, but later suffered great disenchantment after the dramatic demotion of Russia's international status was made obvious through NATO enlargement and especially its military actions in former Yugoslavia.

The second area is relations between Russia, former imperial metropolis or hegemon of the communist bloc, and her former satellites. Whatever Russia's achievements or failures on its way to democracy might be, for other post-communist countries it symbolises the communist past and foreign domination, while some of its post-communist movements make former 'junior brothers' think that Russia's neo-imperial ambitions still threaten their sovereignty. Thus, relations are strained and complicated as a rule. Continuing fear of Russia (justified or not) explains why most post-communist states give priority to relations with NATO over those with the European Union. Relations between Russia and newly independent states are especially soured by a 'new form of collusion . . . between Russia and the titular and non-titular nationalities outside Russia – with the intention of undermining the fledgling sovereignties of the successor states' (*New States, New Politics*, p. 21). This implies Russian patronage of ethnic separatist movements in Trans Dniester, Abkhazia and so on. Likewise, exceptions to that rule should be treated as special cases. For instance, Serbia, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan (different as these three states are from each other) need Russia as an ally in their own regional conflicts.

Which moves us to the third area, which is building new systems of regional relations. It is a common feature of different regional organizations created in the post-communist space that they failed to develop into effective frameworks for economic and security co-operation. The reasons for this failure are most systematically analysed with regard to post-Soviet space in *Commonwealth and Independence in Post-Soviet Eurasia*. Not that such organisations were not created, they were created in almost all of the regions. The West was usually strongly supportive, because prioritising regional co-operation seems 'rational' from the Western viewpoint. But all these organisations hardly work. Unresolved regional conflicts, such as that between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorny Karabakh, is one obvious reason, but why then should regional co-operation fail in peaceful Baltic or Visegrad zones? The above-described first tendency may be the most important explanatory factor: post-communist countries overlook projects of co-operation within their 'small regions' because their priority is inclusion into the big and most prestigious region called 'the West'. NATO and the European Union are overly strong magnets that outpower any intra-regional forces of attraction.

The bottom line here is that, despite all changes in the diplomatic jargon, the

foreign policy priorities of the post-communist countries are still to a large degree dictated by the paradigms developed during the cold war: Russia still sees the West as an opponent (although both pretend to be partners), its former satellites are still preoccupied with the drive to consolidate their independence from Russia through gaining Western protection (although they might be pretending to be friends and partners of Russia as well), while bread-and-butter issues of regional co-operation are neglected (despite all rhetoric about their importance). As long as this is true, the foreign policies of these countries may be defined as 'post-communist' in their character. How long will this continue to be so? The same central European 'frontrunners' who have consolidated their democracies have also started to join major Western institutions, so that their foreign policies have a greater chance of emancipating themselves from post-communist fears. But NATO and the European Union can only accommodate a small number of former communist countries in the foreseeable future. Russia, on the other hand, still has to process its imperial past and find its new identity, which would include a new international role which it and its neighbours can live with. This may take some time, and until then the term 'post-communism' will make sense in the area of foreign politics as well.