The Transition to Democracy in Central Europe: A Comparative View

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ABSTRACT

The collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe has also caused the collapse of old-fashioned studies of Communist systems that subscribed to a simple notion of totalitarian uniformity, or a static belief in the continuance of self-equilibrating cycles within socialist states. To understand what is happening in Central and Eastern Europe today we need to be discriminating in a choice of paradigms. European conceptions of democracy as having a socio-economic as well as political dimension are more relevant than formalist American definitions. Moreover, Europe, in the form of the European Community, is also a much more immediate influence than the United States upon what is happening in Central or Eastern Europe. The transition to democracy in Southern Europe provides encouraging models for ex-Soviet satellites. The failure of Latin American countries to democratize provides warnings, such as the risk that Presidential government can produce dictatorship or instability, a risk that is present in new democracies in Europe too.

All fundamental social changes require the rethinking of the whole conceptual framework in political science. Such is now the case with the democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe. For too many authors nowadays the concepts of democracy and dictatorship (or authoritarian rule and totalitarianism) as well as the transition between them seem to be self-evident. In such a way the triumph over communism risks being at the same time a triumph of the simplistic views, e.g. in the form of Brzezinski’s The Grand Failure or Fukuyama’s ‘end of history’.

Democracies and world systems are different and they change rather frequently. The postwar period has had a constant flow of transforma-

tions in the democracies and also in the world systems with the emerging democracies. But such revolutionary changes in Central and Eastern Europe as the collapse of the state socialist regimes have been connected with the most radical change in the whole world system. Therefore it cannot be just another democratic transition. In fact, it is about the disappearance of the cold war as a world order in a 50-year cycle of the bipolar world system, and about the emergence of a post-cold war world order as globalized, multi-polar world system.

In a bipolar world the negative or positive ideal types of societies or polities are born from inimical images. The promotion of democracy means assisting an ally in the world struggle, which makes definition of democracy rather arbitrary. In an atmosphere of global confrontation there is no place for empathy for the societies and states on the other side of the great divide. There is no place even for their heterogeneity; therefore mainstream thinking produces stereotypes by homogenising all countries both in the free world and in the Soviet bloc. In such a way it creates ‘strictly scientifically elaborated’ concepts and preconditions not to understand the particular situations on the other side and not to be able to foresee the coming changes over there. Comparative communism did this by the sweeping overgeneralization of the ‘World Marxist governments’ from Albania to Vietnam (Szajkowski, 1981), albeit their heterogeneity proves to be enormous, even if we only take Eastern Europe from Albania to Poland.

All social changes shed a new light on the societies concerned and discover their hidden capacity for change, and by so doing they raise some doubts whether the previous concepts and analyses of stability and rigidity were correct. With all transitions the promotion of democracy gets a new meaning and functions. Now the period of the promotion of democracy against the global enemy has ended. The victory of the new democratic governments in Central Europe and the collapse of the Soviet external empire, with the erosion of the internal one, requires a new program in the promotion of democracy, but it is still missing. Political scientists, first of all comparativists, have to work out a new conceptual framework for democracy and dictatorship in a global context.

This paper tries to contribute to the new comparative studies revolution by generalising the experiences of Central Europe in a comparative perspective. It is based on the following:

(i) Comparative communism as a separate discipline has come to an end; it has to be fitted into the new globally oriented comparative politics;

(ii) In postwar history there are two global waves of democratiza-
tion, their comparative analysis may be the starting point for the new comparative politics;

(iii) The regional approach may solve the problem of overgeneralization in comparative politics by avoiding the dominant legalistic-formalistic approach;

(iv) The debate about presidentialism and parliamentarism has a direct relevance for the contemporary theory of democracy and dictatorship, if (a) the focus of the discussion is to be shifted from the formal to the substantive side of the old and new democracies and (b) the historical and structural role of parliamentarism during the democratic transition is put to the forefront.

This is a policy paper for comparative politics while it cannot deal with all the above mentioned problems in detail, by being based on the generalizations of previous studies and hopes to be a useful introduction to the dialogue.

I. Comparative Communism Versus Comparative Politics

The process of rethinking democracy and dictatorship, at least in Central Europe, cannot start without a reassessment of comparative communism. Comparative politics and comparative communism are twin disciplines produced by the Cold War, one for friends, one for enemies. But with the revolutionary transformations in Central and Eastern Europe, all the preconditions of comparative communism have dramatically changed. Communism itself has almost completely disappeared, and if comparative communism as a discipline survives for a short period it is only to deal with its own history compared to the real history of the countries and regions concerned. A final scientific excursion to the necropolis of comparative communism would show both the historical relevance of the accumulated knowledge in area studies and the rapidly changing ideological functions of comparative communism during its history, leading now, after the end of the global confrontation, to an end of ideology.

The whole conceptual framework of comparative communism has presupposed some overgeneralizations: homogeneity, rigidity, and stability of the communist system. In this comparative trap of overgeneralizations, comparative communism has accepted the official ideology of the system to some extent, albeit from the reverse side, since the system has presented itself as all-embracing, homogeneous, stable and dynamic, and ruled by an exclusive Marxist ideology. This reversed image, in which the claimed positive features are turned to the opposite, is classically represented by the theory of totalitarianism, originating in the fight against Nazism and transferred immediately to the new enemy
in the first days of the Cold War. Through this theory and ideology, comparative communism studies became a prisoner of cold war, although there has been a constant fight for independence against the concept of totalitarianism since it appeared for the first time, in an elaborated way, in the work of Friedrich and Brzezinski (1956), summarising the essence of all totalitarian systems in those well known six features. Lovenduski and Woodall (1987) correctly stated thirty years later that ‘the totalitarian checklist suffers from an overstatement of its case, in particular from the inability to reflect change’.

Totalitarianism has meant also a preference for some bigger countries and was, in fact, a Soviet-centric approach, although for the experts ‘a temptation to overdraw on their knowledge of particular systems leads often to unfounded generalizations about others’. Lovenduski and Woodall also point out in their comparative textbook on East European systems that these systems have been victims not only of a negative ethnocentrism, i.e. Soviet-centrism, but also of positive ones, being compared directly to Western systems so many times by direct transfers of Western concepts and features from pluralism to legitimation theory, without any specification of regional and national differences, that is, without any account being taken of the applicability of Western concepts in Central and Eastern Europe (Lovenduski and Woodall, 1987: 7, 11).

We can see the same assessment of totalitarianism from the introductory chapters of almost all textbooks of comparative communism. Stephen White co-authored at least two introductory pieces about the comparative study of communist political systems and in the later version he states: ‘The totalitarian paradigm which was still dominant in the 1950s came under increasing scrutiny as the 1960s advanced. By the 1980s it was probably fair to say that no alternative orthodoxy had become dominant, rather a plurality of approaches had become accepted as legitimate’, including regional and more general case studies (White and Nelson, 1986, x). Not even the early stage of communism, such as classical Stalinism, had managed to reach the ideal of totalitarianism, with a real homogeneity of the whole socialist camp. In later history communist states have moved from a more concentrated power system to a more pluralistic one under internal pressure and resistance, and under the external pressure and demonstration effect of the Western democracies. Totalitarianism, as the reversed picture of ideal Stalinism, has remained the bogey or scarecrow of Western anticommunism.

White generalizes the history of comparative communism into two generations. The first generation literature was completely Soviet-centric and over politicized; relatively little attention was paid to the relationship between politics and society; finally this approach was more
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The second generation literature, emerging from the mid-seventies, differs from the first in the following essential points:

(i) it reflects the widening of the geographical boundaries of communism, with no single world model or center;
(ii) with the opening up of these societies, the statistical yearbooks and other data began to appear as a basis for empirically founded research;
(iii) closer links are formed with the parent disciplines, i.e. with comparative politics and economics, and other fields of research, e.g. political culture and legal studies etc. (White, 1987: 220–221).

The most important achievement of the second generation literature, according to White, was the extension of the geographical boundaries. In my opinion, it was its grand failure, accepting world communism as a dynamic system. Its extension in space proved to be a crisis phenomenon of the core territories, i.e. compensation for the missing development of structural accommodation, resulting in the global crisis in the whole Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from the early 1970s onwards. Consequently, second generation literature that is ‘more broadly based, empirically better founded and theoretically more sophisticated’ appears to be a comparative trap, assuming positive prospects for communism in a stable bipolar world, so to say, objectively accepting not only the existence but also the dynamism of world communism, in its heterogeneity, yet not being able to realize its increasing erosion and the coming final crisis.

The prevailing idea of continuity and stability has evidently been based on the recurrence of small cycles in the history of state socialism in Central Europe. These short cycles, ten years or so, usually started with some liberalization efforts but after some time met the resistance of the hard core of the regime; therefore, they led to conservative reactions and then to rearrangements or conservative restorations. As recurring crisis-cycles, these reform-cycles were the typical negative development pattern of state socialism in Central Europe, and provided a solid and reliable approach for comparative communism. The small cycle theory, had become a deeply embedded routine exercise of this discipline in the late 1980s. At the same time it was a very comfortable standpoint, since if nothing new happened in Central and Eastern Europe, the well known crisis cycle repeats itself, so nothing new is to be prepared for. The final crisis of communism has thus become the cause of the final crisis of comparative communism itself.

Until the late 1980s the small cycle theory explained major events in Central Europe. If the social tension deepened, it was easy to take this
phenomenon for the start of a new small cycle as most of experts of comparative communism thought just before the collapse and not for the end of the longer cycle of world communism. The pattern of recurring crisis was so widely accepted that this idea precluded the discovery of the real nature of the coming fundamental changes, although the ‘native’ experts in the countries concerned warned about the coming final crisis long ago. In the West the ‘more of the same’ cyclical approach dominated. Its stubborn continuity led area experts and comparativists to predict not the future, but the past, i.e. the repetition of the small cycles as before. For example:

I base this prediction on the fact that the current critical situation in the alliance is not unprecedented, and that Eastern Europe has faced worse crises before. Each of the previous crises was followed by some institutional changes accompanied by appeals, promises and exhortations from Moscow, and once the dust had settled things returned back to the normal Schlamerei, so characteristic of Communist systems in the region . . . I see little difference between the situations in 1988 and that twenty years ago, and hence I do not expect radical changes in Soviet relations with Eastern Europe, at least in the foreseeable future (Korbonski, 1989: 22).

This text is, in fact, the obituary of comparative communism in its second generation. It is true that comparative communism, with all of its theoretical and ideological weaknesses, has accumulated a large treasury of knowledge. But now, in the process of the final crisis it is high time to leave it behind, even in its promising and more sophisticated variant, the third generation literature of the late 1980s.

We have to realize that the more of the same approach was a very comfortable position for both politicians and political scientists. Therefore, during and after the 1989 revolutions a big resistance was felt among some Western experts to accept the new realities and to start the tiresome business of re-interpreting everything. With growing unease the slogan ‘West is West, and East is East’ again appeared, and later as another extreme position, the ‘no-nonsense’ approach emerged, stating that everything will be changed beyond recognition overnight. But the most important danger for comparative politics and Central European area studies is that the theory and ideology of totalitarianism returned with a vengeance. This simplified concept triumphs nowadays in social science, journalism and official declaration, both in the West and East, precluding the correct analysis of the real transition and the perspectives of new democracies.

Transitions never fit into previously well arranged rules and concepts, such as the rigidly closed alliance-systems and totalitarian theories. In the nicely arranged and regulated world generalized in the form of comparative politics versus comparative communism, some ‘commu-
nivist' countries like Hungary and Poland in the early 1980s began to move to the barren land of the in between, and felt themselves to be in the middle of nowhere. This sphere of nowhere has recently been extended to all formerly socialist countries, mostly to those which still resist changes, to the unsplendidly isolated China and Albania, themselves showing the first signs of the final crisis as well.

The study of world Marxist governments in the 1980s brought some meager results and missed the opportunity to grasp the real changes, because of the neglect of regional or even continental dissimilarities. This is why, in my opinion, the comparative revolution in this respect failed, since it was a doubtful exercise skating on the thin ice of global overgeneralizations about world communism (Ágh, 1990).

Comparative politics has had a series of revolutions and counter-revolutions (Mayer, 1989). Now we can afford some optimism that these fundamental changes in Central Europe may lead to a real comparative revolution by abolishing the Cold War type separation of comparative politics and comparative communism. To bridge the gap between the two, first of all, intensive cooperation of Western and native area experts is needed. But before suggesting the slogan, 'comparativists go East!', we have to state that the present rigid juxtaposition of democracy and dictatorship, which is an artificial and mostly ideologically motivated contrast, has to be overcome by shifting the focus of our research to transitions. In the comparative study of democratic transitions from authoritarian systems, Central Europe is a relevant case.

II. Two Global Waves of Democratization

Looking back at the postwar history of democratization from the standpoint of the Central European transitions in the early 1990s, what we see is not democracy but different democracies, and what is more, the processes of democratization, i.e. transitions to or changes in democracies. Not a theory of democracy but a series of discussions about democracies and transitions as a continuous flow of events and arguments. We can separate the first global wave of democratizations and its discussions in the early postwar period from the second one, starting from the mid-1970s, by an era of failures and breakdowns which makes it necessary to specify both periods in their major domestic and international characteristics.

Strangely enough, the real history of the first wave was written only after the beginning of the second one because this contrast removed false appearances and showed its actual achievements and limitations. The milestones for the presentation of the second wave were the works of Linz and Stepan (1989), with the central idea of breakdown, and of
O'Donnell et al. (1986), focused on transitions. They were, restricted to comparative politics and not extended to comparative communism, since the major effort for this extension could come only after the revolutionary changes in Central Europe in the late 1980s.

Early discussions about democracies and the promotion of democracy in the world were running parallel and closely interwoven, starting in the 1950s from the home-made American definition of democracy, designed for export to the Third World as well, to the outspoken statements of Huntington (1981, 1984) about the direct connection between the success of global democratization and the undisputed world hegemony of the United States.

By now the time has come to lay the foundations for a new paradigm of global democratizations by creating the small 'islands of theory' called for by Stanley Hoffman for the comparative politics (Wiarda, 1985: 209). These independent islands or suggestions make it possible to present a set of ideas about comparison between different regions in the democratic transitions before the big international projects, like the Transitions program of the Woodrow Wilson Center, are launched.

My small island of theory is built on the presumption that moves to democratization are first of all a function of the world system and not an exclusively domestic political formation. The existing democratic structures are special political organizations of the core countries, and post-war history has shown that stable democratization in other countries has been possible only by the extension of the core of the world system, i.e. the sphere of the economically successful and politically powerful countries. Democratization beyond the core may only be partial and superficial, fragile and transitory, because only these countries can afford the luxury of the two major features of democracy (Dahl, 1982), participation and competition, creating a pressure of demands by the whole population on the political system. Those countries which are unable to attain economic consolidation, being also politically weak and dependent, can reach at most the state of semi-democracies with the constant danger of sliding back to authoritarian rule. I admit, this may sound too deterministic but it seems to be supported by the postwar history of democratizations.

The major features of the first wave of democratization are the following:

(i) Geographical extension of democracy in the early postwar period concerned only the West European core with some American efforts at liberalization in the Far East, and consisted of rede- 
ymocratization of some countries after the war (France, Benelux states, etc.) and democratization of others (Germany and Italy);
(ii) Early democratization stopped at the Southern fringes of Europe (Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey) and at the same time an American dilemma emerged when faced with including allies that were dictatorships, and it was decided in favour of maintaining alliances;

(iii) As a result of West European democratizations, the rapid economic recovery and the accelerated European integration, a new contradiction was born between the American and European approach to democracy, as far as the domestic ‘definition’ and the international promotion of democracy are concerned.

The mainstream American approach to democracy can be characterized by the Schumpeterian idea of the procedural, formal or electoral democracy (Huntington, 1984). This goes well with the idea of the promotion of democracy in the world as a function of American foreign policy. The European approach is a substantive definition of democracy with a large body of social and political rights to help people exercise democracy. The promotion of democracy appears as a ‘binding contract’ between partner countries for implementing the same project of substantive democracy. The contrast of the American and European approaches manifests itself in government policies as well as in theoretical deliberations. In the marketplace of international political science in the last decade we witnessed a process of the Europeanization of the major products of comparative politics.

In ‘International Aspects of Democratization’, Whitehead (1986: 39, 31, 35) contrasts the major features of the American and European approaches in much more detail: ‘The United States has been the dominant power in the Western world and has taken over prime concern for the stability and the security of its alliance system’. As American power expanded round the world, Washington acquired direct interests in many areas where any attempt to promote genuine democracy would tend to prove quite destabilising. Consequently, American policy makers have learned to exercise great caution and discrimination in pursuing this objective, and have stretched the meaning of the term to embrace an extraordinary variety of friendly but repressive regimes. American political scientists have designed rationales to systematize this evolution (the emergence of the middle sectors was followed by crises of modernization, and most recently, the authoritarian/totalitarian dichotomy), but the more traditional view still retains its hold over significant sectors of American public opinion. The promotion of democracy as a foreign policy rhetoric may be seen from different angles but, Whitehead declares, as a result of the diverging foreign policy strategies in the recent period of the new transitions to democracy ‘the
European sphere of influence looks better than the U.S. sphere', although, he thinks, in the 1980s the American way of promoting democracy was to a great extent Europeanized. The National Endowment for Democracy, established in 1983, 'apparently represents an attempt to bring U.S. practice closer to the European pattern'.

The analyses of the Transitions (O'Donnell et al., 1986) were mostly written from the standpoint of successful South European states, most of all Spain. The European sphere of influence means that the Mediterranean region becomes part of the European integration process, so Whitehead considers that 'U.S. support for democratization will be viewed by all concerned as a superficial commitment, whereas in Southern Europe the EEC could offer something more closely resembling a binding contract'. To complete the contrast, he also mentions that 'European definitions of democracy seem to give more stress to social and economic participation, whereas Americans give almost exclusive emphasis to the electoral aspect' (Whitehead, 1986: 23–24, 17). I think myself that the American foreign policy has recently been streamlined to the emerging needs of the multipolar world and particularly to a much more flexible approach in the promotion of Central and East European democracies. Yet Central and Eastern Europe continue to look first to some 'binding contract' from the EEC.

The now dominant American definitions of democracy reflect both the uniqueness of the US development and the early postwar situation, with not only American domination in the world but also in international political science. The summary of the experiences of the new democratizations by A. F. Lowenthal (O'Donnell et al., 1986: vol. 1, ix) warns us against this simplification: 'All authoritarian regimes are not equated with each other. No authoritarian regime is regarded as monolithic, nor are the forces pushing for democratization so regarded. Distinctions are drawn between democracy and polyarchy, between democratization and liberalization, between transition and consolidation, between hard-liners and soft-liners or accommodationists within the authoritarian coalition, and among maximalists, moderates and opportunists in the coalitions supporting abertura (liberalization).' This claim for a new approach to transitions or democratizations expresses the spirit of the second wave and challenges the first wave formulated in the American definitions of democracy. Although the list of new terms of differentiations was collected in the Latin American and Southern European transitions, it applies too well to the Central and East European region. The most common mistakes of the Western analyses of Central European transition are also listed there, i.e. the neglect of the internal differentiation on both sides of the 'opening up' (hard-liners and soft-liners in all political organizations), and what is
more, under the common label of totalitarianism all previous regimes are equated, and by that all transitions are considered to be essentially similar from Poland to Roumania.

Finally, the first global wave of democratizations may be qualified as the Cold War pattern of transitions, with unilateral US dominance in the Free World and in political science with an ‘electoral’ mode of democracy. After the failure of the Almondian modernization-cum-Westernization model, the stability of the political system came to the fore and this was widened with the newly emerging democracies to a theory of transitions. The second global wave of democratizations, qualifying as the Post Cold War pattern, began in Latin America and Southern Europe and was extended in the 1980s to Central Europe.

III. The Central European Case: Regionalism or Globalising Formalism?

The idea of transition has appeared as an intermediate system type between dictatorship and democracy, questioning the black-and-white contrast between them. But with the new type the issue of regionalism has also appeared. Instead of a contrast between perfect democracies and ideal dictatorships (totalitarianism), slowly a new contrast, that of different regions experiencing democracy began to appear in the late 1970s between the fragile democracies of Latin America and the consolidated ones in Southern Europe. Thus, the regional approach in its cultural, historical and socio-political complexity also emerged during the second wave of democratizations. It offers a theoretical alternative in comparative politics to the formalistic typologies moving only on the surface of socio-political reality, separating the legal-constitutional and other features from the regional and national complexity, and comparing remote countries and continents, thus neglecting the regional similarities in the deeper structures of the societies concerned. After the Latin American and Southern European ‘studies’ in comparative politics, Central Europe has again raised the issue of the regional approach as a sine qua non of the correct explanation or theorising about the transition to democracy.

After the modest Bucharest repeat of the Tianamen massacre one year earlier, American newspapers discovered a ‘split in Eastern Europe’, although there was nothing to discover. Or it may be something new just for the Americans, since Central Europe and Eastern Europe proper (or the Balkan region in this case) have ever been very different, so any split between them might have taken place much before the discovery of the Americans. But in the whole postwar period the Westerners usually have operated with the misnomer of Eastern Europe, meaning the Soviet bloc or the external empire of the Soviet Union as a
military and political unit. This artificial creation of the Cold War appeared to be homogeneous with very small, similar and basically insignificant countries. In this Eastern Europe, evidently, it is just a waste of time to look for individual or regional differences. Although the official American foreign policy in this part of Europe allegedly was that of differentiation, it was not too much felt in theory or in practice.

No doubt there was a great effort by the Soviet Union to introduce political, social and economic homogeneity in their external empire, which was formulated in the so-called Brezhnev doctrine fixing the definition of socialism with its obligatory criteria for ideology and politics. This homogenization, however, was never able to reach the deep structures of societies and transform them. Westerners were too willing to accept the reinforced military and political unity for the all-embracing reality. The half-a-century long cycle of Sovietization in the external empire left behind a lesson of history that armies can harm a lot but they cannot liquidate centuries-old differences in state, economy and civil society between and within regions. The contrast is now bigger than ever between Central Europe (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the North-Western part of Yugoslavia) and Eastern Europe proper (Roumania, Bulgaria, Albania, the South-Eastern part of Yugoslavia), and opens the possibility of an extending zone of emerging independent states in the Western part of the Soviet Union.

There have been a lot of debates about the coherence of Central and Eastern Europe and there will still be many, as has also been the case with Southern Europe. The question remains whether they are separate regions indeed, and if it is so, what are their major distinguishing features? The answer is not simple; still the regional approach seems to be more fruitful than a legal formalism that neglects the common regional features. I accept, on my side, that these regional similarities and common features, rooted in history and expressed in the relative same level of development, cannot and should not be overstretched. Thus, the study of democratic transitions offers itself as a test case for the regional approach and vice versa. The regional approach, if it proves to be fruitful, may also be applied in other fields of comparative politics. Latin America, as such is too big and heterogeneous for a region, so it is considered here only as a general background of the analysis. The Latin American regional approach can be exemplified here by some major states (Brazil and Argentina, see O'Donnell, 1988), but Southern Europe, Central Europe and the latecomer, Eastern Europe, are certainly real regions on their own and they may offer a more solid foundation for comparative analysis in a regional approach.

The comparative analysis of Latin America and Southern Europe has been by and large accomplished in the Woodrow Wilson Center volumes
The ambition of Central European political scientists is evidently, to extend it to their region, by focusing on three countries on each side, namely Spain, Portugal and Greece in Southern Europe and Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland in Central Europe, albeit the early comer Italy and the latecomer Turkey may enter the picture on the Southern side, and the early comer Austria and the latecomers Slovenia and Croatia cannot be neglected in Central Europe. This comparative endeavour is especially important for Hungarian political scientists, since the analysis and presentation of our democratic transition is, at the same time, also a test case for the maturity of the Hungarian political science, which has played a very significant and unparalleled role in the democratic transition (Ágh, 1990a).

Following the general models of Transitions, I have tried to extend it to Central Europe, using as the two major indicators the international system and the internal development patterns. I think that differences between the American and European approaches to the promotion of democracy abroad are largely responsible, indeed, for the divergence of democratizations between Latin America, with democracies fragile and unconsolidated, and Southern Europe, with an almost completely finished economic and political consolidation process. Thus, it is mostly from longue durée historical trends and the present international factors that the asymmetrical relations between major Latin American countries and the United States, and the symmetrical ones between the Mediterranean region and the Brussels-based European Community, have produced different transitions in the first two stages of their democratizations. It is not by chance, but because of this factor, that we have in Latin America a development pattern of recurring crisis, i.e. the constant historical move from dictatorship to democracy, and from democracy to dictatorship. In southern Europe, there is an evolutionary development from the mid-seventies after the long cycle of the authoritarian rule. An evolutionary and gradualist development started, progressing towards democratization by pacts in a peaceful way (ruptura or reforma pactada).

The same model with two major indicators gives a point of departure also for the analysis of Central Europe, which shows, in my opinion, a composite picture of both Latin America and Southern Europe. There was in Central Europe a long cycle of dictatorship for half a century, it is a general frame of reference of all historical and political analyses, and very similar to Southern Europe. Within this long cycle, however, we have a series of small cycles of reforms and conservative rearrangements, which makes Central Europe similar to the Latin American development pattern of recurring cycles with a constant move from liberal to conservative periods and vice versa. This development pattern in
Central Europe, again, was determined by the special international set-up, but this time much more closely and directly than in the other two cases, because of the direct involvement of the Soviet Union and the imperial nature of dependence. The whole internal structure and domestic development, from the security dimensions to cultural fields, was determined very strictly from outside by the external empire, and the reform cycles could move only within this framework, touching the 'walls' each time. The reform movements, even though very cautious, had really hit the 'walls' (1956, 1968, 1981) because the reform process had its inner dynamism and once started, it was almost impossible to stop it, even for those who initiated and led it. Due to its internal contradiction, the term 'reform' has turned out to be a misnomer, meaning originally the correction of the system but after having realized that this was impossible it has come to be used as a term for systematic change. The major conclusion of the reform politicians of Central Europe, at least in Hungary after 1956, 1968–71 and 1985–89 was that state socialism as a system cannot be reformed, it should be abolished.

After Latin America and Southern Europe, we can take Central Europe as the third stage of the second global wave of democratic transitions; Eastern Europe may be the fourth one. Latin America still has no consolidated democracies, Southern Europe has its success story in democratization, but the fate of Central Europe is still undecided; it can go either way. The 1990s will be a decade of chaos and uncertainty for Central Europe, and the future for Eastern Europe is much more problematic for a longer period. The decisive issue is whether Central Europe could become a part of the European integration process with its binding contracts, i.e. with growing intensive ties and substantial assistance by the advanced states to overcome the present economic crisis in a form like Marshall aid, using this term conditionally to indicate a parallel process of what is going on currently in East Germany. Can the three Central European countries become involved in European integration with its standards and safeguards in economic development and political democratization?

The first issue for the new democracies is how to promote equitable economic development which is at the same time democratically responsible, i.e. how to contain social unrest which could jeopardize democracy if it is identified with disorder and decreasing living standards. This decisive issue of the stabilization of new democracies is formulated by President Vaclav Havel in his statement; 'We have done away with the totalitarian system but we have yet to win democracy'. The Central European transition has had so far an evolutionary development pattern, it has been rather peaceful, moving by pacts, but the real similarity with Southern Europe can be only in transition, after the initial crisis
with a combination of the old and new socio-political systems, and finally in the third phase of the consolidation process, if we are involved in European integration.

If Central Europe is only marginally involved in European integration, then we can expect a protracted process of the deepening crisis with a possible return to the authoritarian rule in a development pattern similar to Latin America. The re-emergence of the right-wing dictatorship as a new edition of the traditional type in the period between the two world wars will be very likely, and some signs of preparations may be seen in all the three countries in extreme right, populist-nationalist movements, openly launching an anti-liberal campaign. This is why the ‘Europeanization’ of Central Europe could mean not only economic and political assistance but also a safeguard against the newly organized anti-liberal and anti-democratic movements and ideological tendencies, fixing the European standards of the liberal-democratic constitutional state for the new entrants, as was done for the countries of Southern Europe.

The second wave of democratizations has not ended yet and the preconditions now are present for its further dynamism. The world system has changed beyond recognition, using Karl Polányi’s term, it is the period of the ‘Great Transformation’. In these fundamental changes the Central European countries have played an enormous role by eroding the Soviet empire from inside. In a world system turning from bipolar to multipolar, the Post-Cold War generation of new democracies can consolidate. Since I consider democratization as a function of the extension of the core, it is possible only by a widening of Europe as an integrated unit (see Bunce, 1990: 428) which could be described by future historians as the extension of the West European core first to Northern, then to Southern, and lately to Central Europe in the long and painful process of the 1990s. In the risky and not predetermined process of democratization of Central Europe, the signs of the geographical limitations of the further extension can also be clearly seen in the case of Eastern Europe because of its strong state, undeveloped economy and weak civil society. Although no countries are happy with neighbours in permanent crisis, I guess that the countries of Eastern Europe have to wait for the third wave of global democratization. After this second wave a new period of breakdowns may start with the Balkanization of the Balkan and ‘Africanization’ of Latin America as new-old semi-peripheries (Castañeda, 1990).

This optimistic prediction for Central Europe may be criticized in several ways, both as a theoretical project and as a plan for action. It suggests that instead of a formal-legalistic typology of transition we need a regional and historical analysis of democratization, and also a regional
organization for cooperation to assist at the birth of the new democracies, such as the Pentagonale, linking Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy and Yugoslavia.

IV. Presidential or Parliamentary System: The Direct Relevance of Recent Debates for Central Europe

At first glance the recent debates of political science in the West, including that about presidentialism, seem to be far away from the current problems of the democratic transition in Central Europe. Yet by raising the issue of presidentialism and parliamentary systems in the process of democratization, this particular debate touches upon the most controversial and timely question of transition.

The stability of the presidential system has been taken as given in American political science without questioning its rationale and the reason for its uniqueness. On the other side, the presidential systems outside the US are not only very fragile but also conducive to dictatorships, especially in Latin America, being one of the political factors in the recurring crisis development pattern (see Riggs, 1988; Schmitter, in O'Donnell et al., 1986: vol. 2, 9). This leads us to question the political preconditions of consolidated democracy as well as to those of democratic transition. Attending to the advantages of the parliamentary system in the creation of a consensual mechanism instead of a majoritarian dictatorship (cf. Rose, 1991) may help to discover the secret of the proper political mechanism and devices for the consolidation of the democratic polity in Central Europe.

There is a paradox in the democratic transition for the countries in deep economic troubles and widespread unrest, namely, the democratic transition itself needs stability and governability as a concentrated political effort to overcome the crisis and establish a new framework for the economy and polity. This concentrated effort creates a need for a power concentration in the hands of the new parties and political forces, but this power concentration acts against the consolidation of the new democracy itself and reproduces some forms of the previous authoritarian rule. This is not a theoretical paradox but a living contradiction in the Central European countries. As Lijphart (1990) indicates the Kanzlerdemokratie resembles the presidential system, and it was introduced by the new government in Hungary with the same model of the positive non-confidence vote as exists in Germany but without a German consolidated democracy. In Hungary it means a great concentration of power in the executive or in the government, and within the government in the hands of the prime minister, acting as a Chancellor with big personal power, being indeed a strong president, but we find
these pseudo-parliamentary and actual presidential systems in Poland and Czechoslovakia too, with illusions of the benevolent dictator. Within the emerging democratic-parliamentary framework we have a revolutionary aristocracy in power in Czechoslovakia with a new philosopher-King and a constitutionally unclear situation in Poland between the newly elected president, Lech Walesa, claiming full powers, and the old parliament elected two years ago in a semi-democratic way. I think, again, that the statement, that the foundations of democracy are weak in Eastern Europe is an overgeneralization, mixing as usual, Central and Eastern Europe (Bunce, 1990: 401), but the danger is real. With a deepening crisis, the parliamentary systems in Central Europe may turn out to be facades for presidentialism in a Latin American development pattern.

The word ‘transition’ can be the solution; parliaments may authorize governments and prime ministers to have some concentrated power to facilitate a surgical operation on the ailing economies, but only for a short period and under strict parliamentary control. The danger is, that these institutions may be transitory in character but because of the new elites the whole process of democratization could run into a blind alley. The new political class tries to stick to these transitory forms as final ones, not being ready to resign from a quasi-monopoly of power. Therefore, any power concentration in the democratic transition should be handled with extreme care and the parliament must be strengthened constitutionally against the executive, relying on the remnants and the traditions of the power concentration. We cannot be happy with any kind of emerging semi-democracy leading to hidden or open presidentialism. The danger of a presidential system is most imminent in Poland with the split in Solidarity and Walesa as President in a partnership with right-wing forces. The charisma and extreme popularity of President Havel is also not without a danger of becoming a benevolent dictator, and beyond this mixed blessing Slovakia has produced also strong right-wing extremism striving for the independence of Slovakia. The Hungarian case with Kanzlerdemokratie or a semi-presidential system is also very complicated. This is why the intensive interest of the Hungarian political scientists in the recent debates is not an academic luxury of experts but addresses the necessity of everyday politics.

In Central Europe we need a new type of democracy and not just a new democracy. The narrow definition of democracy as electoral or procedural may work in consolidated or well-established polities like the United States. As the West European case suggests, the new social movements have raised a demand for the ‘new politics’ with much wider rights for participation as the new challenge for democracy (see Rödel et al., 1989). Democracy is, in one of its substantialist definition, a socio-
political framework for efficient conflict regulation (see Przeworski in O’Donnell et al., vol. 1, 1986: 56). The establishment of an efficient mechanism of conflict regulation and crisis management based on a large national consensus and participatory rights is on the agenda of current history in Central Europe.

In the democratic transition of Central Europe a formalistic or procedural model of democracy would not work properly, even functionally, and it would certainly alienate people from politics, which is an acute danger. The peaceful revolution or transition has been a limited participation model, the population is tired, it has been exhausted by overwork and an increasing economic burden. Any legal formalism without meaningful participation would turn people against politics, even with competitive parties and rival ideologies. The peoples of our countries need a clear commitment of the new democratic state to all citizens to make them able, by providing them with all the necessary social and economic preconditions, to exercise fully their democratic political rights. To avoid the separation of politics and people, participation is now much more important than in the consolidated democracies. Without a clear identification with the process of transition by doing it themselves, the unsatisfied masses can sweep away the whole politics, old and new, by outbursts of lawlessness, strikes and mass manifestations.

We are at a turning point. As it was written on the walls of Prague in November 1989: ‘Who, if not we? When, if not now!’

REFERENCES
The Transition to Democracy in Central Europe


