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Democratization in Post-Communist Countries

Perhaps more than any other region of the so-called 'third wave', the post-Communist world challenges the assumption that democracy is an automatic result of the collapse of authoritarian rule. For, while political change in *some* post-Communist countries fits the lens of democratization well, in others, the ex-Soviet Union and the Balkans most notably, the collapse of Communism has led to the implosion of the state, civil war and the rise of power contenders whose aim is state disintegration rather than state building. Explaining why that should be so is at the heart of this chapter. Has democratization in East and Central European countries fared better because these countries exhibit higher levels of capitalist development or more dynamic civil societies? Or can the difference be explained by the fact that East and Central European countries have greater state capacity or more unified states? Alternatively, can the distinct trajectories be explained by political leadership, statecraft or luck? Finally, can the different outcomes (different, at least, so far) be explained by geopolitics: is the relative success of countries such as Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary a consequence of proximity to the democratic countries of the European Union (EU)?

This chapter presents an overview of political change following the collapse of Communism. The dominant theoretical approaches used to explain those changes are also discussed. The chapter then moves on to analyze post-Communist democratization in its three dimensions, namely: the role of the state; the significance of civil society and social organizations; and finally the impact of global change, geopolitics and external actors in determining the nature of post-Communist transformations.

Democratization in the Post-Communist World

Communism in Crisis

Communism was established in Russia after the October Revolution of 1917 when the Soviet Union was created. The Soviet system extended to the territories of East and Central Europe, which the Soviet Union liberated from the Nazis, after the Second World War. This meant the creation of Communist party-states across the part of Europe that was under the control of Moscow. An alliance system was established through the Warsaw Pact, which brought these countries together to ensure the defence of Communism against the capitalist West and which also created a hierarchy of domination in Eastern Europe under the aegis of the Soviet Union. Similarly, Soviet central planning was extended across Eastern Europe, with only partial exception being made for Poland. Yugoslavia and Albania also went on to establish some diplomatic and economic independence from Moscow.

The fall of Communism, symbolically at least, took place on 10 November 1989, when the Berlin Wall which divided Europe into East and West was forcibly torn down. But the disintegration of Soviet control over Eastern Europe had been signalled months earlier, by the Round Table negotiations established between the government and Solidarity, the independent trade union in Poland. Furthermore, the decision of the Hungarian government to do nothing to stem the flood of East Germans escaping to the West via Hungary during the summer months of 1989 was a clear indication that the Soviet Union was no longer in control of events in the region.

The collapse of Communism, then, was sudden. But it was the result of a long-drawn-out, multi-layered crisis, which was a combination of:

● severe and prolonged problems with centralized economic planning;
● profound political exhaustion, state decay and public apathy; and
● imperial overreach – that is, the increasing incapacity of the Soviet Union to rule legitimately outside the frontiers of the Russian heartland.

These three elements of crisis fed off each other. It is impossible to understand the economic crisis of Communism without reference to the political system. Communist political economy suppressed the market and was based on public ownership, the command economy and centralized planning. It was assumed that, together, these would unprob-

lematically deliver a rational and efficient system of production and a just allocation of goods throughout the community. Communism's moral claim of superiority over capitalism rested ultimately on its promise to deliver more, and better, in material terms. To some extent, initially this seemed to be the case. Stalinism coincided with significant economic growth across the Soviet bloc. Industrialization, modernization and investment made economic expansion possible. The 1960s, however, witnessed serious problems with the planned economy inside the Soviet Union and also in the Eastern European countries. The emphasis on heavy industry, established during the 1950s, proved difficult to reorient towards the production of more consumer goods partly because of bureaucratization. Supplying and distributing goods was equally problematic. The situation worsened in the 1970s as consumer expectations increased. As a member of Solidarity strikingly put it, 'forty years of socialism and there's still no toilet paper' (Garton Ash 1999: 16).

'Politics in command' and the planned economy worked best in its initial phase in the Soviet Union, as Maravall (1997: 59) explains:

> [t]he economic efficiency of the model was greatest when the main task was accumulation, the level of development low and the priorities few and simple. In these circumstances it was possible to mobilize domestic resources, control popular consumption, generate high levels of savings and investment and transfer resources towards high priority objectives. But when the problem was no longer one of accumulation and investment rate but the productivity of these, the rationality of resource allocation and innovative activity, the model was inefficient.

Central planning travelled very badly to East and Central Europe, where it was applied almost in textbook form in the early 1950s. Its inefficiency in the more industrialized countries of Hungary, Germany (the German Democratic Republic) and Poland led to political dissatisfaction which, in Hungary and Poland at least, diminished the control Moscow exercised over national policies by the 1970s. The reforms did lead to some economic improvement in Hungary, but they also increased the spaces for dissent, as economic activities outside the state sector were tolerated and the party loosened its hold over social activities. As a result, the reforms led not to a re-legitimization of Communism but to the emergence of opposition and the development of an independent civil society (Lomax 1997).

In any case, partial reform such as that in Hungary and Poland was simply not enough. Ultimately, the emphasis on heavy industry was

impossible to reform. Enormous investments had been made in immovable plants, machinery and production chains. Disrupting that system would have caused an unacceptable and severe dislocation of the economy. Furthermore, there were those who did not accept that there was a need to shift towards a more consumer-based economy. In particular, heavy industry was justified by the military and defence complex. In fact, a significant contribution to the structural economic crisis besetting Communism was the high cost to the Soviet Union of defence and security spending. Soviet economic problems were thus an integral result of East–West tension. Indeed, Gorbachev's foreign minister, Edward Shevardnadze, attributed the economic stagnation of the Soviet Union in the 1980s principally to the cost of defence. According to Linz and Stepan (1996: 240), Soviet military expenditure was three times that of the US and six times as great as the European Union average. In the light of all of this, it is not surprising that the partial reforms of the 1970s and the more radical attempts of Gorbachev in the 1980s were blocked. They were ambiguously received and there was little incentive for party officials to adopt them. As a result, they failed to halt economic stagnation. All this suggests that, from the very beginning of the Communist experiment until the 1980s, it is impossible to separate purely 'economic' problems of the command economy from the 'political' problems resulting from single party control, bureaucratization, central planning and the Cold War.

Nevertheless, despite these problems, the depth of the Communist crisis was only evident in hindsight. The implosion of Communism was unforeseen by either academics or policy-makers, in the East or West. Most believed that a reform of the Communist leviathan state was possible. This suggests that the Soviet Union had, in fact, been chiefly sustained by the bipolar antagonism that structured the international system between 1945 and 1989, allowing its faults to be hidden from view and encouraging the West to inflate its economic and political strength. Communism actually survived far beyond its 'natural' lifetime.

The Disintegration of the Soviet Union

The vast underlying structural crisis which beset the Soviet Union and its satellites was only revealed after Mikael Gorbachev became Secretary General of the Soviet Communist Party in 1985. Gorbachev is often credited with being the author of Communism's demise. His plan was to confront the economic crisis through reform (*perestroika*). Reforms aimed to increase the flow of investment in the public sector

and in industry, expand external trade and introduce new forms of technology. He recognized, however, that economic reform would not succeed without some democratization of power. In the early 1980s, as a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Gorbachev had advocated political opening (*glasnost*). Neither the economic reforms nor process of political liberalization were designed to bring about a liberal democracy; Gorbachev's intention was to introduce a programme of reforms in order to preserve the Communist system (Gill 1995). What happened was that in the process the reform movement gained its own momentum.

According to Sakwa (1996), the reforms can be divided into three distinct phases: rationalization (1985–6), reform (1987–90) and transformation (1990–1). Rationalization stopped short at identifying and acknowledging the economic problems affecting the Soviet Union. It promised moderate reform and some openness as solutions. This was not enough to rein in those radical members of the Communist Party who had taken heart from Gorbachev's initial statements, or to solve the material problems in the system, and more far-reaching reforms, political and economic, were attempted. In 1988, Gorbachev promised to reform the political institutions. As a result, the elections in March 1989 were freer than ever before and some non-Communists were elected to the new legislative chamber, the Congress of People's Deputies. This new agenda of reform changed the balance of power within the Communist Party. As more radical reforms were introduced, Soviet politics was caught in a struggle between radicals, committed to seizing the moment for reform, and conservatives, who wished to stop it completely. None of the party elite was, of course, committed to democratization in the sense of the introduction of liberal democracy. However, by 1990, a combination of popular pressure, from within Moscow especially, and events elsewhere in the Communist bloc began to drive the pace of events. In the course of this, a liberal parliamentary system emerged as an option for the first time. The governing elite, in attempting reform from above, found itself outpaced by pressures from inside the Communist bloc itself.

In particular, the tensions between centralization of decision-making and the demands for autonomy by the republics that made up the Soviet Union were the cause of the final dissolution. The first republics to demand greater autonomy, then independence, were the Baltic states. Meanwhile, Russian nationalism also re-emerged as a separate force. Boris Yeltsin was elected Chair of the important Russian Congress in 1990. Under Yelstin's leaderhsip, the Congress asserted Russian state-

hood by adopting a declaration of sovereignty in June 1990. This was followed by yet more nationalist demands from other parts of the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian declaration, the most radical of all, called for democracy and the creation of an Armed Forces under Ukrainian, not Soviet, control. It was thus pressure for self-determination, rather than democracy, which drove politics between 1990 and 1991. Increasingly, each component part of the nominally federal but in fact highly centralized Soviet Union was beginning to search for its own response to the disintegration of central control. Furthermore, as power shifted to the republics, it drained energy and authority from the centre and, crucially, from the Party itself. The shift was not orderly or controlled; nor was it clear which institutions or organizations of civil society would be empowered by the collapse of the centre. In the worst of cases, power leaked from the Communist Party to mafia networks and 'uncivil' nationalist groups; in almost all cases 'the media, the black economy and corrupt networks also became residual legatees of the declining system' (Sakwa 1996: 9–10).

Gorbachev accepted that reform had to go further and he offered a renegotiation of the terms of federation, as well as a series of economic reforms designed to increase the role of the market. But by this time, the Soviet Union was suffering a crisis of credibility and Gorbachev's promises were simply not enough either to halt the economic crisis, or to stem the collapse of the Communist Party. Consequently, the political crisis worsened. In August 1991 the opponents of reform attempted a coup while Gorbachev was away from Moscow. The August coup was a last-gasp attempt to save the Soviet Union from disintegration. Its aim was to turn the clock back. Yelstin, as President of Russian Federation, led a successful counter-coup, and, at the time, was hailed internationally as the saviour of the tentative process of democratization. The success of the counter-coup sealed the fate of the Soviet Union. It showed clearly that the forces of centralism did not have sufficient resources to resist the nationalist demands for autonomy. Rather belatedly, democratization was then grafted onto what was essentially a set of nationalist aspirations.

As the Soviet Union disintegrated, its component parts, the republics, found themselves effectively in a political vacuum. The way forward was not clear, either to society at large or to political elites. There was no clear political project beyond independence. Of course, in theory, the republics were free to attempt the transition both to statehood and to democracy. But there were – and are – considerable obstacles to democracy. In many independent territories of the ex-Soviet Union, there are

neither social structures supportive of democracy nor a state tradition that can assist the process of political transformation. Democratization appears neither as a project from above nor from below. Furthermore, the way that new states emerged, by default almost, scarcely increases the chances for democratic outcomes. Indeed, it would be hard to disagree with Sakwa's assessment:

> the break-up of the Soviet Union fragmented the single large dictatorship into numerous small dictatorships, many worse than the decayed communist regime because of the energy with which they imposed themselves on the population, demanding conformity to communities defined by culture and ethnicity. (Sakwa 1996: 367)

Russia itself is struggling with severe economic restructuring, problems of political leadership, the difficulties of creating a democratic party system, the legacy of the strong state, revanchist nationalism and unresolved issues relating to where its legitimate borders should be – leading to a bloody war in Chechnya, which claims independence from Russia. Democratic institutions are only weakly legitimate, leaving a vacuum in politics that the Russian state, and the local elites who represent it, find all too easy to fill. Civil society is undeveloped, and the market is both contested ideologically *and* practically unrestrained. The conditions for democratization, at least in the short term, are poor.

East and Central Europe

The distinguishing feature of the collapse of authoritarianism in East and Central Europe, is its simultaneity: all the national communisms of 'the outer empire' collapsed at more or less the same time (Pravda 1996). This suggests a single common cause. The reforms introduced in the Soviet Union, and especially the beginning of *perestroika*, were important catalysts for change in East and Central Europe. The withdrawal of Soviet support was the most important of the multiple causes of the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe (Waller 1993; Pravda 1996). Quite rapidly, however, the pace of change in East and Central Europe outstripped events in Moscow. According to Linz and Stepan (1996: 235) the 'domino-like collapse' of Communism in East and Central Europe was so swift that in some countries, such as Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, there was no significant domestic pressure for change and transition was driven simply by the ripples from the regional wave.

Nevertheless, underlying the collapse of Communism in East and Central Europe lie popular and elite aspirations suppressed over generations – for economic reform, social freedoms and, most important of all, national self-determination. If democratization was driven in the first place by Gorbachev's reforms, then it was immediately nourished by deeply felt national demands to make nominal sovereignty real. The mode of transition, however, was principally determined by the extent to which even an embryonic opposition had existed prior to 1989 and the different national experiences of Communism. In Czechoslovakia and East Germany, some degree of material prosperity under Communism was able to mask mass discontent, preventing the development of strong opposition. Furthermore, in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet invasion in 1968 to crush 'socialism with a human face', froze the totalitarian system in place and the system largely was maintained through fear and mass disengagement with the public sphere. In the German Democratic Republic, in addition to relative prosperity, the trauma of division from West Germany, front-line status in the East–West conflict, a rigid surveillance state and a policy of allowing a few dissenters periodically to leave, together kept levels of opposition low. These options were not possible in Poland. Here, periodic economic crises had driven the leadership to seek closer collaboration with the West from the 1970s. And Poland, like Hungary, has incurred substantial foreign debts during the 1970s and 1980s, a result of their strategy of introducing market mechanisms into the production system. So, in Poland and Hungary, inroads had already been made into Communist domination before Gorbachev came to power. In short, the distinctly national post-Communist patterns were shaped by differing patterns of national history and culture, different levels of economic prosperity and degree of crisis, and patterns of state–society engagement opposition.

As the first of the East and Central European transitions, the Polish experience merits particular attention. Unlike some other post-Communist transitions, the Polish experience was not simply the result of the collapse of the Soviet empire. Democratization in Poland was, instead, the culmination of a process of sustained social opposition across the country through the 1980s. Its uniqueness, as it seemed at the time, brought the anti-Communist opposition unprecedented international support and media interest. Hence the Polish transition also benefited from the attention it received abroad. For the Western press, the leader of Solidarity, Lech Walesa, a Catholic, a nationalist and a trade unionist, came to embody in one person the differing strains of Polish opposition to Communism. International interest offered him a

degree of protection. By the end of the 1980s, it was simply no longer possible for the Polish regime, dependent on external financing and weak internally, to break Solidarity up or to imprison Walesa.

Solidarity was born in 1980, under Walesa's charismatic leadership, and had a membership of 10 million. From the first, Solidarity was more than a trade union. It made political claims: for national self-determination, for freedom and for civil liberties. It received the blessing and support of Western politicians and of the Catholic Church and the Polish pope, John Paul II. Initially, the government attempted to suppress the organization through the introduction of martial law. This failed, however, and Solidarity survived. Unable to eradicate it, General Jaruzelski's government was eventually forced into negotiations in February 1989. The vitality of Solidarity had made the task of political and economic governance impossible. But even more surprising than the fact that negotiations took place at all was the outcome: the government agreed to the creation of a parliamentary democracy and to elections for June of that year. Quite incredibly for a social movement with no experience of electioneering, Solidarity won the elections. Just as significant was the fact that the Communist Party recognized that it had lost them (Garton Ash 1999). A few months later, a government was formed, led by Solidarity activists, supported by the Communist Party, which chose working with the new government as the best option for stability. Tadeusz Mazowiecki became Prime Minister. Walesa, meanwhile, was elected to the presidency a year later, in 1990. To all intents and purposes, then, the transition moved smoothly along the path laid down in the Round Table talks.

But there were important signs as early as 1990, that, despite the pact between Solidarity and the Communists, building democracy would not be an easy task. Some of the difficulties stemmed from the nature of the transition. Solidarity was a movement born in civil society, with a very loose structure, and it was ill-adapted to government. Furthermore, it rested overwhelmingly on the personal authority of Walesa, who, as far as it was possible to tell, was really more of a nationalist that a democrat. By 1990, competition between groups within Solidarity meant that it had effectively ceased to be a national movement. Thus, within a year, not only had Communism collapsed but Solidarity, which had shaped Polish politics through the 1980s, has disintegrated as a unified organization. At the same time, it became evident that civil society in Poland was not as strong or as dense as it had first appeared. Levels of electoral absentionism, for example, even in the key election of 1989, were also quite high. This was a worrying sign of public apathy. It was the first

indication that perhaps the peak of civil society activism had passed; it seemed that Polish society had been prepared to mobilize against Communism but it was less sure that the new system was the solution. By the 1990s, civil society had been further weakened by the combined consequences of demobilization, the residual cultural and political effects of Communism and the social consequences of economic transformation (Bernhard 1996).

In fact, the economy had been moving towards a severe crisis at the time of the Round Table talks. Indeed, at the time even the Communists reportedly favoured the rapid introduction of market mechanisms in an effort to dynamize the economy (Gentleman and Zubek 1992) According to Zubek (1997) there was broad support for economic liberalization in Poland from the mid-1980s, mainly because it was interpreted as the key to unlocking Western support and to moving Poland out of the Soviet sphere. As a result, the first grand debate in post-1989 politics revolved around how to manage the economy and, in particular, who could manage the transition to a market economy more efficiently, the nationalists or the technocrats. Political debate, whether about how to deepen democratic culture or how to implement much-needed social reforms, was pushed into second place to these more urgent questions. To some extent, this was a reflection of the fact that the transition had been opened through elite negotiation. Space was not created during the transition for popular debate. At the same time, the outgoing regime was able to impose conditions for its withdrawal. These included amnesties for Communist misdeeds in the past; the unimpeded transformation of the Communist Party into a 'social democratic' party; the uncontested right of ex-Communists to participate in national politics; and protection for the state-created Communist labour union, which had been designed to sap strength away from Solidarity in the wake of the 1982 strikes. Together, these conditions guaranteed a presence in Polish politics for individuals associated with pre-1989 politics and a substantial Communist legacy for post-Communist politics.

As in Poland, the introduction of Western-style institutions in Hungary – democracy and the market – was part of a package to save the economy and secure Western aid. Affected by events in Poland and the Soviet Union, as well as by evidence of its loss of internal legitimacy, the Hungarian Communist Party dissolved itself in October 1989. The following month the Czechoslovak Communists, who had resisted liberalization, were brought down in a week by the hastily organized oppositional Civic Forum. In both countries, Round Table negotiations based on the Polish experience were arranged as a device to ensure some form

of stable government. Party systems quickly emerged. Most parties were elite groupings of power contenders, with little real contact with the electorate. At the same time, the civil society option, which had seemed so vibrant during the early months of the transitions in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia began to fragment and weaken (Kopecky 2001). For the German Democratic Republic, the emergence of open opposition in the summer and autumn of 1989 was the signal for its unlamented demise. By November, half a million people felt confident enough to demonstrate against the regime in Leipzig. In the same month, the Party leadership resigned and the by now established formula was put to work: Round Table negotiations were held with the opposition. The end of East German Communism also meant the possibility of German reunification. As a result, East Germans re-entered the West, not as citizens of a post-Communist state, but as members of a new Germany.

The Balkans

The Balkan countries (Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania and the independent states of the ex-Yugoslavia) have followed different, and somewhat less successful, post-Communist paths. In all these countries, Communism had adapted more to local traditions than in East and Central Europe. At the same time, distance from Moscow and from the front-line of East–West conflict helped seal off these countries to some extent. Nevertheless the reverberations of events in East and Central Europe were also felt here: the Communist regime was removed in Bulgaria in November 1989 by reformists from within the governing party; in Rumania, the personalist Communist leader, Nicholai Ceauscescu, was forced to flee and was executed in December 1989; and Albania embarked upon a transition a year later. Unlike in East and Central Europe, these transitions were not the result of pacts between oppositions and governing elites; nor were they the result of unstoppable social pressure. So, although the new constitutions proclaimed a new era of liberal democracy, the terms of transition were unclear. In most countries, nationalism, or more properly conflicts between groups over who would successfully lay claim to representing the nation, initially defined the terms of democracy. Ethnic tensions shaped the new systems much less in Bulgaria or Slovenia, but elsewhere, politics became, to one degree or another, a fight for spoils between different groups.

The centrality of nationalism in contemporary Balkan politics is of course partly the result of its forcible suppression under Communism. It has become a tool for elites, through which they can create new bases

of post-Communist legitimacy and ensure continued access to the state. Appeals to ethnic nationalism are possible, furthermore, because the terms of transition involved no inducements for elites to compromise (Gallagher 1995). But is also the result of the absence of failed state-building and in particular of the fact that the Communist states could never accept the development of civil society in the region. As a result, ethnic struggles slip easily into open conflict. In Yugoslavia, there were three wars following the collapse of Communism, between Serbia and Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Serbia and Kosovo, as well as thirteen years of dictatorship in Serbia by Communist-turned-nationalist Slobodan Milosevic who used the wars to stay in power. The bloody nature of these wars overshadowed ethnic and nationalist conflict elsewhere. But Gallagher (1996; 1998) shows how similar tensions dominate politics elsewhere in the region.

The national problem in the Balkans is, furthermore, intensified by the social and economic legacies of Communism. Stalinism had meant the introduction of heavy industry into what were mainly peasant economies. This created enormous social and economic change and has left a destabilizing legacy for transition politics:

> Stalinist heavy industry…left a class of ex-peasant factory workers in derelict industries lacking markets, who were ripe for populist mobilization just as landless peasants had been in the 1930s. (Gallagher 1995: 355)

These social problems tend to map, albeit unevenly, onto ethnic conflicts in the region, making liberalism and tolerance difficult to achieve and the creation of a national civil society almost impossible.

Theorizing Democratization in the Post-Communist World

The key questions for democratization in the post-Communist world are:

● Why did the transitions occur?
● What kinds of democracies are taking shape? and
● How can we explain the different post-Communist trajectories?

The starting point for answering these questions has, logically enough, been the frameworks inherited from studies of earlier transitions. Schmitter and Karl (1994) maintain that theories of democratization can

be adapted to fit East and Central Europe. Higley, Kulberg and Pakulski (1996) advocate adopting the elite agency approach, developed for Southern Europe and Latin America, to explain the initiation of transition in East and Central Europe. They argue that in particular 'a desire among elites for greater security' was behind the turn towards democracy in post-Communist societies (Higley, Kulberg and Pakulski 1996: 134). It was not, then, simply a consequence of the Gorbachev effect. Different outcomes are attributed to different terms of transition. So, the persistence of 'semiauthoritarianism' in some new systems is due to 'the lack of turnover in top-level political positions' (Higley, Kulberg and Pakulski 1996: 138) and more successful outcomes, such as post-1989 Czechoslovakia, are the result of elite power-sharing (Higley, Kulberg and Pakulski 1996: 141–2).

But a number of studies have questioned the extent to which the transition framework constitutes an adequate lens through which to view post-Communism. It has been suggested that borrowed frameworks misrepresent the nature of the crisis which gripped the region in the late 1980s and which led to the collapse of Communism. Bunce (1995a; 1995b) argues that the nature of Communism means that comparisons with Southern Europe and Latin America are misleading. The role of society and the masses, she argues, was generally far more significant in Communist transitions than in Latin America. At the same time, the importance of geopolitics is certainly more immediately striking in post-Communism. The way out of this impasse is to adopt a middle position (see Sakwa 1996). This means that the differences between the post-Communist transitions and the earlier examples of Southern Europe and Latin America are important and are essentially ones of *context* (Gill 2000). In other words, understanding outcomes – or what kinds of new systems are being created – necessarily means paying attention to the economic, cultural, ideological and geopolitical legacies from Communism as well as to the behaviour of elites during the immediate transitional period.

Where democratization has been most successful, that is in East and Central Europe, theories of change borrow most heavily from the agency-centred perspectives. So there is a significant volume of research on pact-making and the terms of transition in East and Central Europe. Munck and Skalnik Leff (1997: 345), for example, argue that the degree to which the transition is the result of pacts 'affects the form of post transitional regime and politics through its influence on the pattern of elite competition, on the institutional rules crafted during the transition and on key actors acceptance or rejection of the new rules of the game'.

There is also a literature on institution building, parties and electoral systems (Lewis 1997; Kopecky and Mudde 2000). This literature sees the experiences of East and Central Europe as part of a data pool on democratization in general.

However, where the democratization project has run into problems, or where it hardly forms part of the political agenda, an array of competing perspectives has emerged, all of which assert the specificity of political, sociological and economic change in the region. Perhaps the most notable has been the political culture argument, an approach muted in studies on Southern Europe, Latin America and Africa. The legacies of Communist, Asian or an undeveloped mass culture have been used to explain the weak civil societies and low levels of independent political activity that can be found. A focus on culture also pays attention to the persistent or resurgent ethnic identities that split society and the state, and cause state and social crises or even ethnic violence and war in some parts of the region. Indeed, such are the problems posed by nationalism in the region that there have been calls to (re)introduce a focus on state-building into the literature on transition in post-Communist countries (Kopecky and Mudde 2000).

In terms of explaining outcomes, the culturalist approach should be complemented by a political economy focus, that explains the 'dual transition' problem – the impact of the establishment of markets alongside new political institutions. How has the need to restructure the economy created constraints or opportunities for democratization (see, for example, Stark 1992; Balcerowicz 1994; Bryant 1994; and Keman 1996)? Has the creation of markets made civil societies stronger? Are post-Communist states able to adapt to the very different functions they now have to carry out? In general, this research points to the vital importance of state capacity and social cohesion for successful democratization and those countries which are experiencing some success with democratization enjoy aspects of both.

The State

Democratization in ex-Communist countries implies a transformation of the role and competencies of the state. It is not simply a case of creating a more efficient state; democratization implies changing the rationale of state activity. This involves challenging cultures of secrecy and non-accountability and building a consensual relationship between state

and society-based actors. But in the first place, of course, the post-Communist state must be able to claim uncontested sovereignty. A *sine qua non* of democratization, and one that cannot be taken for granted under post-Communism, is the legitimacy of the nation state.

The 'Stateness' Problem

Perhaps more than any other area of 'third wave' transitions, the question of nationalism and the stateness problem pose a question mark over democratization in post-Communist states. While some countries have coped strikingly well with this issue, more have been unable to do so. We analyzed above the extent to which nationalism has derailed democratization in the Balkans. But nationalism does not only affect democratization negatively when it leads to open war. The problem with any ethnic definition of the nation is that by creating insiders and outsiders within the same territorial unit, some groups are defined as beyond or outside citizenship, or at best as only having limited citizenship rights. In these cases, nationalism becomes a vehicle for policies of exclusion that are, at the same time, socially legitimized. This kind of nationalism is, in fact, far more endemic in post-Communism than is open warfare. Examples of this include ethnic Russians who suffer systemic discrimination in the Baltic states; and the growing numbers of Romany from the Czech and Slovak Republics who face social and political exclusion of such magnitude that they migrate in huge numbers.

The failure to challenge racist concepts of nationhood and to build societies based on tolerance and ethnic pluralism bodes ill for improving levels of participation, welfare and development in the long term. Moreover, the difficulties with the transition to market-based economies that many post-Communist countries have experienced have created communities who regard nationalism as the only way to express opposition to what are increasingly seen as policies of impoverishing Westernization. A defence of local traditions, the appeals to 'traditional' ways of life and the exclusion of 'the other' is the result. Western aid, even in defence of democracy, can actually provoke an even greater nationalist backlash in these circumstances. Of course, some of these problems are undoubtedly only short-term and it is possible to exaggerate the threat that ethnic nationalism presents. But it is also important to recognize that democracy requires communities to live together peacefully, even if it cannot force individuals to accept each other fully. This means that, in multi-ethnic states, policies and institutions must manage difference effectively. So far, however, post-Communist states

have shown a real reluctance to create institutions that guarantee multi-cultural social and political rights.

State Capacity

The state tradition in Eastern Europe is very different from that of the West. These differences pre-date Communism (Anderson 1974) and are discussed in Box 9.1.

The Communist regimes used already existing state traditions to try and promote modernization, rationality and progress. The strong state was the means to carry through the Marxist project. It made the command economy possible. But Communist states also went to inordinate lengths to police the private sphere and to carry out policies of social control. They tried to shape beliefs through education and penetrated civil society by organizing leisure and cultural activities. Even family life was not immune from the reaches of the state. Surveillance was routinely carried out to ensure compliance, along with repression, information-gathering and the inculcation of fear. Indeed, Communist states depended on surveillance for their very survival. This has inevitably left an important and uncomfortable legacy in state traditions.

Box 9.1   The State Tradition in the East

Historically, the state in Eastern Europe was much stronger than in Western Europe. The state was important politically and economically, especially since alternative power contenders from within society were much weaker, mainly because economic development was slower, but also because of geographic fragmentation and poor communications. The idea that law enforcement should be independent of the executive, for example, was slow to develop. The boundaries of state activities were never clear and the state intervened in areas that by the end of the nineteenth century in the West were regarded as the private sphere. For Schopflin (1993: 11–12) 'the discretionary power of the state' in the East had its origins in 'the principle of the royal prerogative, [the idea] that the ruler has the right to take action in any area of politics unless he is expressly prevented from doing so by law. This principle enabled the state to retain and promote *its* autonomy in the crucial fields of taxation and military organization. Society was too weak to exercise control over these areas, whereby it could not sustain its autonomy *vis-à-vis* the state.' Communism drew on the established tradition of the strong state, not only in Russia and the territories of the former Soviet Union, but also in East and Central Europe.

Civil society is regarded with suspicion. The state apparatus remains primed for coercion, although in practice many post-Communist states no longer have the resources to repress effectively. Communist legacies such as these in Russia are discussed in Box 9.2.

Box 9.2   State Traditions in Russia

One of the characteristics of a democracy is an open and accountable state. The Russian state remains difficult to access and reluctant to offer information to its citizens. There is also evidence that state officials distrust the public and do not always tell the truth. The culture of the Russian state, then, is not radically different from that of the Soviet state. Government and officials have not caught up with changes made possible by the onset of democratization, such as the fact that the public can now access information from abroad. At the same time, the state, though it does not operate democratically, is no longer monolithic, so information leaks out quickly and incoherently. The events surrounding the sinking of the Russian nuclear submarine, the *Kursk*, in the Barents Sea in August 2000 reveal some of the pathologies of the Russian state.

The immediate government reaction to the accident was to lie. It claimed that many of the submarine's crew of 118 men had survived and that the Russian Navy would be able to rescue them. Offers of assistance from Britain and Norway were rejected. In fact, the Russian Navy did not have the equipment to mount a rescue. Finally, after a week, British and Norwegian teams were allowed in. This revealed what the government had always known – that the accident had been far worse than had been claimed and that most, if not all, of the men did not survive it. Meanwhile, the government treated the families of the sailors who died with contempt and disdain. No efforts were made to inform them before broadcasting news of the accident in the media, so the families learned that their fathers, sons and husbands had been in a serious accident from the television or the radio. Relatives were not offered assistance of any kind to enable them to travel to the naval base from where the rescue activities were supposed to be being organized and to where the submarine would, supposedly, be brought. They were given false hope that the men were alive, although they could see that little or no effort was being made to save them. Meanwhile, despite the crisis, President Putin remained on holiday, until it was officially announced that all the men were dead. There is, in all of this, little to mark out the responses of the Russian state from that of the Soviet state during the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986. Although traces of contamination were found as far away as the UK, the Soviet government denied that the accident was serious, restricted the flow of information to local inhabitants and effectively abandoned those affected to their fate.

Communist states were strong, but they were not efficient. Strength did not translate into capacity. The crisis of Communism, indeed, was rooted in the very inefficiency of the state. Economies were bedevilled by bottlenecks, shortages, under-production, antiquated machinery and weak distributional channels; and secretive, irrational and bureaucratic decision-making made by political elites who were out of touch with popular needs and demands. The lack of a capable bureaucracy now a real hindrance to the implementation of both political and economic reform. Equally, traditions of secrecy and of corruption create obstacles to the democratization and to mass support for the new systems. The World Bank (2000) has expressed concern that the problem of the state is at the heart of poor economic and political performance: 'in many countries, the public perceives corruption to be woven into the basic institutional framework, undermining governance and weakening the credibility of the state'. In particular, the Bank suggests that the post-Communist state is captured by special interests and that policies are shaped by restricted non-democratic networks.

Civil Society and Democratization in the Post-Soviet World

The impetus for democratization under Communism was national or regional (Przeworski 1991). In some countries, society clearly rejected Communism, sometimes via the formation of opposition organization and, in other cases, through the more passive route of simply by-passing the state. In East and Central Europe, in particular, the revolutions of 1989 were made in the name of 'the people'. In these cases, the transitions were taken to represent the triumph of the 'civil society project' (Smolar 1996). In contrast, in the ex-Soviet Union, the role of 'the people' in bringing down Communism was rather more ambiguous.

Labour unions, religious organizations and human rights movements emerged as signs of the development of civil society in East and Central Europe before 1989. But the cohesion and influence of these organizations declined after the immediate onset of transition. There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, the strength of civil society in 1989 was actually exaggerated. For Marata (2000) civil society was able to bring down authoritarian regimes but not strong or cohesive enough to offer an alternative political direction. By 1990 when the state reorganized following the Communist collapse there was already less space for social dissent than had been expected. Secondly, the process of economic reform fractured the civil society movements, making it difficult

for them to engage effectively with the state. Drawing on research in Hungary, Miszlivetz (1997) attributes the loss of interest in participation after the first democratic breakthrough to the alienation that accompanied market reform. Thirdly, civil society withered with the eruption of revanchist nationalism. Nationalism not only offered an alternative site of mobilization, it represents the denial of the civil society project and the triumph of ascriptive identity (Seligman 1992). In Yugoslavia, civil society was simply crushed in the early 1990s by the forces of nationalism (see Box 9. 3).

Box 9.3   Civil Society and Nationalism in Yugoslavia

The collapse of the Eastern bloc led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. A new, smaller, Yugoslavia emerged, based on Serbian hegemony. Because war broke out almost immediately, democratization in Yugoslavia lagged behind the rest of the region. Aggressive Serbian nationalism led to the wars that tore Bosnia and Kosovo apart in the 1990s. Milosevic was sustained in power in Serbia by nationalism, which effectively curtailed opposition. When NATO decided to intervene in 1999 to protect the Muslims in Kosovo, Milosevic's hold on power was strengthened. An intense wave of nationalism swept the country. Serbians constructed the NATO attacks as an attempt to destroy the country. Serbia suffered considerable material damage (it was estimated that 62 per cent of Serbia's transport system was destroyed, 70 per cent of its electrical power stations damaged and 80 per cent of oil refineries were affected by the bombing)*, but support for the government increased. Nationalism seemed to have eclipsed civil society and Milosevic remained in power.

Once the war was over, however, the political climate was very different. Forced to call presidential elections in September 2000 for reasons of domestic and international legitimacy, Milosevic hoped that nationalism, and electoral manipulation if necessary, would enable him to win. However, during the campaign, opposition from society erupted so strongly that it became clear he could only win by fraud. The opposition, with the support of the few independent observers who had been present at the elections, claimed outright victory in the first round. Milosevic tried to use force to quell the massive street demonstrations that erupted. A campaign of civil disobedience began. Children were kept off from school, a transport strike was organized in Belgrade and thousands of people took to the streets. Miners went on strike in the huge mining complex of Kolubara in an attempt to paralyze the economy as well. Journalists working for the state-controlled television and newspapers joined the opposition. As the opposition increased, so Milosevic's grip on the state weakened and the police refused to stop the strikers and the protesters. Milosevic was finally forced out of office.

More fundamentally, however, civil society was bound to weaken with the emergence of political society, as political parties coalesced around local and national elite figures and organized for the purpose of contesting elections and gaining power. Civil society was in effect drained by political society. According to Ost (1993), the intelligentsia in Eastern Europe had moved into the social movements as part of their project of revitalizing civil society in opposition to state. They were thus over-represented in the leadership of the 1980s social movements (Kopecky and Barnfield 1999). But when it became possible to join political parties or even the government, they chose to do so, leaving the social movements leaderless. At the same time, they had pushed the social movements towards adopting high moral and political agendas, rather than bread-and-butter questions of material improvement, making it difficult for the social movements to adapt to the new circumstances. Once democratization had begun, it was not clear, even to the members of the movements themselves, what further role they had to play. Disintegration was almost inevitable. For Lomax (1997) this failure to stay in civil society, rather than contributing to its demise, amounts almost to a betrayal of democratic ideals by the intelligentsia.

The weakness of civil society in post-Communism is therefore a considerable democratic fault line. Not only is it difficult to imagine participation and citizenship without vibrant social organizations, it is also difficult to imagine how pressures can be brought to bear to reform and change the state. At the same time, in view of the disintegration of the states and the collapse of state services in the former Soviet Union, civil society organizations are desperately needed to keep communities together and to provide the resources that allow people to survive physically and psychologically. Political parties, which have emerged strongly throughout the region, structure legislatures and elections but have relatively few social linkages. They cannot be substitutes for civil society.

Democratization and Globalization

The collapse of Communism in 1989 was a globalized event. In this sense, it was not the intentional result of conscious pro-democracy strategies planned over the long term. Rather it emerged out of the results of unforeseen actions and the unintended consequences of reform attempts, in a global context in which democratization was seen as the only possible alternative alternative to Communism. As protesters were

pulling down the Wall in Berlin, they knew they were being watched in the world's media and this was one of the reasons they had the confidence to challenge the East German state. Without the international media, 1989 would simply not have happened. More properly, however, it was the proximity of the West, the penetration of Western social identities into the East and the pull of the capitalist economy which led to the Communist disintegration and which provided alternative social and economic models inside Communism. Put simply, it was no longer possible, in Europe at any rate, to sustain closed national systems, especially when they have long lost popular legitimacy.

How far post-Communism is shaped by its role within the global order is a question of a different order. After all, we argued above that state traditions in particular were important in understanding different post-Communist trajectories. Nevertheless, the globalization of the world economy is also a major determining factor, as Lewis (1997: 4) argues:

> the international context was of prime significance [for explaining democratization] and it was often through the combined effects of modernization and global economic and technological developments that the pattern of democratization has been determined.

In particular, joining Europe was a major driving force behind East and Central European transitions. But Europe was not really seen as an outside force in East and Central Europe. Democratization was about rejoining the West from which the region had been severed. From this perspective, democratization and Westernization, far from being global imposition, actually constituted a process of normalization. According to Milan Kundera (see Kearns 1996: 59), for the Poles, the Czechs and the Hungarians,

> their nations have belonged to a part of Europe rooted in Roman Christianity. For them the word 'Europe' does not represent a phenomenon of geography but a spiritual notion synonymous with the West. The moment Hungary is no longer European – that is, no longer Western – it is driven from its destiny, beyond its own history: it loses the essence of its identity.

For Kearns (1996: 62) this is precisely why European (or Western) advice was legitimate in post-Communist East and Central Europe, possessing 'an almost magical quality'. Glasman (1994) explains how the 'magic of the West' shaped events in Poland following Solidarity's electoral victories in 1989 and 1990. Before taking office, Solidarity's pref-

erence was for an industrial relations system which combined state regulation with a social market system. Once in power, however, concerns about the deteriorating economy, the need to create new channels of capital investment and a desire to join Europe combined to lead the government towards austerity measures, stabilization policies and a commitment to rapid marketization. For the Prime Minister, Mazowiecki, it was important that the transition to capitalism be validated by the experiences of Western Europe. Nevertheless, whatever magic the idea of Europe may have possessed, its role in the region was backed up by the resource dependency of the East. Europe possessed credits, investments, security, all of which were desperately needed.

Geopolitics and Democratic Promotion

It was partly as a result of globalization that democratization became a part of the political agenda under Communism. Furthermore, Western influences shaped domestic actors' identities and policy preferences, as the Polish example above reveals. In fact, after 1989, conscious policies undertaken by the West became a significant factor in post-Communist politics generally. For reasons of security, development and geopolitics, Western (and particularly Western European) actors have developed quite different agendas for East and Central Europe, the territories of the former Soviet Union and the Balkan states. Different Western actors have also focused on very different kinds of policies. Some are concerned with establishing a market economy, and others primarily support the creation of a democratic order.

The policies adopted by Western European governments and the European Union towards post-Communist countries can essentially be described as a mix of aid and advice. The option of rewarding favoured countries with closer trade links or even integration constitutes the backdrop that gives Western Europe a particular leverage. The PHARE programme was created in 1989 as the aid arm of EU's cooperation with the East (Pridham 1999). PHARE established firm political conditions for aid, relating especially to human rights and to the maintenance of formal democracy. The Trade and Cooperation agreements created shortly after gave way to the more complex Europe Agreements in the mid-1990s, and set up areas of political dialogue as well as economic and cultural cooperation (Hyde-Price 1994). Nevertheless, these programmes have come in for considerable criticism for tying aid (Kearns 1996), for their small budgets and hyped programmes (Nagle and Mahr

1999) and for mismanagement. According to some sources, up to two-thirds of the PHARE budget has gone in paying for consultancies rather than to the countries it is earmarked for (Ost 1997). In conclusion, while aid from the European Union aid has certainly been visible, its impact is questioned.

In contrast to the European Union, US aid has primarily been destined for the countries of the ex-Soviet Union and for Russia in particular. Much of this flows through the international financial institutions. Essentially it is economic aid, aimed at speeding up the transition to a market economy, but it comes with political conditionality attached. For Sharman and Kanet (2000), these policies actually hinder democratization. In particular, they encourage technocratic and undemocratic policy-making. Thus it is not only the social results of marketization in Russia – increased hardship and inequality – that are questioned but

> more…the manner in which decisions have been taken and implemented; in effect to avoid those institutions of democratic government that might slow, review or reject measures in line with societal interests and thereby stymie technocratic prescriptions. (Sharman and Kanet 2000: 236)

The limited success of these programmes is testimony to the 'technical' difficulties of supporting democracy from outside. But it also graphically illustrates the problems inherent in trying to impose liberal democracy as the only end-game in the messy and confused politics of post-Communism.

Given the difficulties that beset aid policies, then, why were they put in place and why do they continue? They are driven by a combination of a security logic – a hangover from the Cold War – and a view that the post-Communist countries represented almost virgin terrain for the development of capitalism. According to Nagle and Mahr (1999: 271): '"Western" influence in post-communist Europe is part of a larger emerging pattern of a liberated and adventurous global capitalism.' In other words, support for democratization is derived from the assumption that the new political order will create trade and investment opportunities which will benefit Western companies and governments. Ultimately, democratization programmes pull post-Communist countries into the mainstream of the global political economy. The result is an uneven subordination of the Eastern economies to Western Europe: the best-placed economies will achieve some integration with the European Union while the rest will become a hinterland. This pattern of integration into the West through economic discipline and subordination will make it

difficult for the Eastern economies to close the gap with the West, leading to the institutionalization of dependency on the West. For Kearns (1996: 81), this dependency is maintained not only by the West itself but, crucially, by the new political elites of post-Communist countries who perceive short-term and personal benefits from the prestige and legitimation they are endowed with as a result of Western contacts.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the complexities attaching to transition in post-Communist countries and discussed the extent to which a strong tendency towards democratization can be discerned. The varieties of post-Communist politics are greater even than in Latin America. Moreover, it is less possible to speak of a single regional pattern than in either Latin America or Southern Europe. Three basic patterns of post-Communism can be seen: stable, if limited, democracies in parts of East and Central Europe, sustained by bumpy economic development; unstable and contested democratization in Russia and the other territories of the former Soviet Union, where de-territorialization of the state and worsening poverty, this latter especially in Russia, undermine the chances for deepening democratization in the short term; and 'nationalism in command', that is the subordination of democratization in the Balkans by elites who are able to manipulate nationalist and ethnic tensions. The differences in regional experiences, then, are tremendous.

What accounts for these very different trajectories? We have drawn attention in particular to the legacies of the Communist state and the 'Eastern' state traditions and to the general weakness of civil society as factors constraining the democratization project. While civil society was able to contribute to the demise of communism in innumerable acts of resistance, great and small, it is presently weak, vis-à-vis both political society and the state. Statecraft, which might have been expected to be able to triumph over these unfavourable structural constraints, is, on the whole, proving to be less decisive in determining outcomes than was initially hoped. The very strong support the international community is lending to the democratization experiments in the region is an attempt to counter these obstacles. Indeed, generally, the processes of globalization are forces for change across the region. However, the extent to which they are supportive of democratization, especially in the sense of creating inclusive societies, based on some recognition of rights and citizenship, is rather more open to question. External assistance is tied, for

the most part, to the development of trade and market linkages and citizenship programmes receive relatively low priority in funding terms. So, in the short term at least, the picture contradicts the excessive hopes expressed in 1989 for a rapid democratization of the entire region. Nevertheless, in some ways, the region has progressed towards democracy more than might have been hoped for. The electoral processes are for the most part stable, and international pressure, if nothing else, prevents a return to old-style dictatorships.