

Post-Communist Democratization Revisited: An International Relations Approach

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ABSTRACT *Using a theoretical approach inspired by Alexander Wendt's International Relations constructivism, this article argues that the main engine of post-communist democratization and democratic consolidation is represented by external factors. A triple international structure including the Conference/Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union's Europe Agreements, and NATO's Partnership for Peace efficiently interacted with the Central and Eastern European (CEE) state–society complexes in a process of international socialization that used both incentive- and persuasion-based strategies. This led to the creation of two parallel and sometimes independent processes of socialization targeting CEE elites and society, respectively. The international socialization of the society was in fact the main cause of democratization in countries dominated by anti-democratic elites. Internal factors are not completely ignored. Rather, they are regarded as structural causes that facilitated, hampered, or blocked the international diffusion of democratic norms and values, thus dictating differences between CEE, the Western Balkans, and the Commonwealth of Independent States' trajectories. The 1990s 'soft' authoritarian regimes of Romania and Slovakia are used as case studies that illuminate the decisive importance of external factors.*

KEY WORDS: Post-communism, democratization, democratic consolidation, constructivism, international socialization, Central and Eastern Europe

1. Introduction

On 1 January 2007 the accession of Bulgaria and Romania completed the enlargement of the European Union to include ten Central and Eastern European (CEE) states. The same countries had also become NATO members. This is generally perceived as a direct consequence of the democratization process initiated by the fall of communism in the region. Ensuing change made CEE countries fully compatible with their Atlantic neighbours and allowed accession to the Western community. This is not the case with other post-communist states. Plagued by ethnic conflicts and authoritarian regimes, the republics of the Western Balkans and the

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Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) clearly did not follow the same trajectory. Consequently, it is logical to see democratization as a precondition to EU and NATO accession. However, the goal of this article is to show that, from its very beginning, democratization itself was *caused* by international factors that included the pre-accession process.

Previous democratization waves were mostly driven by internal factors. The only major exception is the fall of fascist regimes due to military defeat at the end of World War II. But more recent South European and Latin American transitions to democracy had little outside influence. The fall of communism, on the contrary, was decisively influenced by external elements. Still, as the next section shows, the importance of external causes has been largely underestimated. The literature on early post-communist democratization is dominated by the analysis of internal factors.

This article proposes a different view. An International Relations-based approach inspired by Alexander Wendt's constructivism is used to explain the evolution of post-communist countries. To be more specific, external factors are perceived as the main engine of democratization. 'External factors', in this context, include but are by no means limited to geopolitical elements. They fully incorporate the process of international socialization that ensured the diffusion of the Western system of democratic values and decisively contributed to the identity change of CEE states and societies. This does not mean that internal factors are completely ignored. Rather, they are regarded as structural causes that determined the geographic distribution of the democratization process. Internal factors facilitated, hampered, or blocked democratization, thus dictating the major differences between CEE, the Western Balkans, and CIS trajectories. But they are not the main cause of democratization itself.

Another important aspect concerns the mechanism of diffusion of democratic values. Most of the literature on post-communist democratization tends to prioritize the actions of elites. This article claims that the international socialization process leading to the assimilation of democratic values took place at two levels: elites and society. The latter was in fact the main engine of the democratization process in countries dominated by anti-democratic elites.

In order to support this view, two case studies have been chosen at the border between rapidly democratizing Central Europe and the undemocratic post-communist republics. Romania and Slovakia initially gave preference to neo-communist or ultra-nationalist regimes not unlike those of the Western Balkans/CIS. However, there was a major difference. The two states were part of international structures diffusing democratic norms and values: the Conference (later Organization) for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE/OSCE); the European Union's Europe Agreements; and NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP). Under their influence, the two states and societies experienced a progressive identity change that finally led to the overthrow of the authoritarian regimes and allowed Bucharest and Bratislava to adopt pro-Western, democratic trajectories. It is the complexity and length of this process that make the two countries perfect examples illustrating the international origin of post-communist democratization. In Central European states the speed of change makes a similar analysis difficult. In the Commonwealth of Independent States the difficulty comes from the modest results of the democratiza-

tion process. This is why Romania and Slovakia are used to support the theoretical model proposed by this article.

One more point has to be mentioned. The transitology literature makes a very clear differentiation between democratization and democratic consolidation (for discussions of this term see Pridham, 1990, pp. 8–16; Hanson, 2001, pp. 126–151; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006, 30–31). However, this perspective can be highly misleading. In many post-communist republics, a clear-cut division between the two categories is problematic due to the existence of hybrid regimes (for a definition of this term see Levitsky & Way, 2002). In fact, as Henry Hale noticed, in certain cases it is difficult to speak of ‘a “trajectory” toward or away from ideal-type endpoints like democracy or autocracy’ (Hale, 2005, p. 134). Therefore, the following analysis does not make a formal differentiation between democratization and democratic consolidation. Rather, it treats them as imbricate parts of a unitary, continuous process.

The article has the following structure: section 2 briefly examines the assessment of external factors by previous theories of post-communist democratization. Section 3 builds a new, International Relations-based alternative approach. Sections 4 and 5 present the case studies of Romania and Slovakia. Findings are compared in section 6 while section 7 emphasizes the decisive importance of international factors as causes of democratization. The conclusion summarizes the article’s main findings.

2. Transitology vs. Europeanization

The study of transition to democracy and democratic consolidation led to the creation of a sub-field of comparative politics known as transitology. Scholars like Lipset, Almond, Verba, Rustow, O’Donnell, Schmitter, Diamond, and others contributed to its development. Their case studies were the Southern European and Latin American transitions of the 1970s and 1980s. Predictably, the resulting theory was applied with little change to transitions in Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Subsequent contestation of this approach led to a ‘vigorous polemic’ (Wiarda, 2006, p. 79; see note 1 at p. 91 for a review of the literature on this subject) but did not succeed in fundamentally revolutionizing the field. One of the main consequences is the diminished role generally assigned to international factors:

It seems to us fruitless to search for some international factor or context which can reliably compel authoritarian rulers to experiment with liberalization, much less which can predictably cause their regimes to collapse. (O’Donnell *et al.*, 1986, p. 18; see a discussion of this statement in Pridham *et al.*, 1994, p. 13)

However, the fall of communism was so clearly marked by external influences that most scholars had to take them into consideration. The general opinion in the early 1990s on the importance of the international causes of democratization is well illustrated by the book edited in 1994 by Geoffrey Pridham and Tatu Vanhanen. External factors are classified by four main categories: the influence of the Soviet Union, that of the Western countries, the influence of multilateral organizations, and the ‘diffusion of ideas’ (Pridham & Vanhanen, 1994, p. 265). There are two separate

chapters on the role of the Soviet Union and on the 'external dimension.' But the overall international influence is seen as belonging to the 'conjunctural' set of factors (Ibid., p. 7). The European Community, CSCE, and the Council of Europe are international organizations that, in the future, might and should bring important support to the democratization process. But their contribution prior to 1994 is not perceived as decisive. The general view is that 'external agents can only provide a favourable international environment to democratic reform' (Ibid., p. 11).

A different approach is suggested by the first paragraph of a book edited also in 1994 by Geoffrey Pridham, Eric Herring and George Sanford: 'the international dimension has been central to democratization in Eastern Europe' (Pridham et al., 1994, p. 1). The volume is dedicated entirely to the 'international dimension of democratization in Eastern Europe'. Its highly theoretical effort to 'unscramble the international context' of post-communist democratization uses a complex pattern of background or situational variables, different external actors, and forms of external influence (Ibid., p. 11). It is clearly stated that 'any bald relegation of external factors to a secondary or subordinate category is too simplistic' (Ibid., p. 9) given the fact that 'international factors have had a more persistent and profound effect' in Eastern Europe than in the previous South European transitions (Ibid., p. 29). There are chapters analyzing the role of international security determinants as well as the contribution of the European Community. Nevertheless, Laurence Whitehead concludes his contribution stating

the recent democratizations in East-Central Europe have introduced some important variations on the themes present in earlier transitions in literature; important variations, but not an entirely new tune. (Whitehead, 1994, p. 54)

In fact, only the geopolitical factors are regarded as decisive and much of the analysis is focused on the role of the Soviet Union. Besides that, the international influence is not assessed as fundamental. The internal factors remain the main cause of post-communist democratization.

By 2001, however, transitology seemed prepared to accept a different point of view. The second volume of the series edited by Jan Zielonka and Alex Pravda makes a complex and detailed analysis of the influence of Western states, international organizations and NGOs on the 'democratic consolidation in Eastern Europe'. Twenty-one contributors explore the political, economic and security dimensions of this influence. Regionalization, ethnic strife, international migration, crime and corruption are also taken into consideration. In the concluding chapter, Jan Zielonka speaks explicitly about 'the enormous impact of external factors on democratic consolidation', as it 'appears that democracy in East Europe is to a significant extent foreign made' (Zielonka, 2001, p. 511). He believes that

it is no longer possible to claim that internal factors are more important than external ones ... If one was asked which factors are truly important, external or internal, the answer ought to be that both are important, although the very nature of interplay between these two factors varies at different times and places. (Ibid., p. 531)

This view is presented as a conclusion of the entire volume. Still, many of the contributors think differently. Writing precisely about ‘Western Actors and the Promotion of Democracy’, Karen Smith states

of course, [democratic consolidation] was not primarily the result of Western direct influence – domestic conditions favoured democratic consolidation. But [...] the Western model of democracy, pressure for reforms, and aid for democracy project had a positive, contributing effect. (Smith, 2001, p. 57)

Despite Zielonka’s position, the view of external factors as ‘contributing’ elements continues to dominate the transitology literature. This made Howard J. Wiarda write in 2006 a subchapter on the ‘Underestimation of International Influence’ (Wiarda, 2006, p. 87). Noting that recent analysis only partly corrected the ‘woeful’ underestimation of external factors by the early literature, he suggests two explanations. The first is the lack of knowledge about the policy involvement of outside actors. The second ‘reflects a preference on nationalistic or political grounds to give credit for democratization to internal, domestic forces, and to ignore and downplay the crucial importance of international influences’ (Ibid., p. 88). Of course, these explanations might not satisfy everyone. In any case, external factors are today present in post-communist transitology. But their role remains secondary, as internal causes are considered the main engine of regime change.

The opposing view was adopted by a different approach created in the late 1990s. Its goal, however, is not the study of post-communist democratization itself. Rather, it analyses ‘Europeanization’, which

consists of processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, identities, political structures and public policies. (Claudio Radaelli quoted by Grabbe, 2006, p. 46)

There are two different approaches to Europeanization originating from policy analysis and international relations, respectively (Ibid., p. 45). The latter, inspired by the ‘sociological turn’ in International Relations, studies the process of international socialization leading to the accession of CEE states to the European Union (see Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Schimmelfennig *et al.*, 2006). As this is a subject of major interest in European politics, it is not surprising that Europeanization replaced transitology as the dominant theme of post-communist studies outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (within the CIS, the ‘coloured revolutions’ helped preserve the interest in democratic building and consolidation). It was even used to explain change in the turbulent area of the Balkans (Demetropoulou, 2002).

It is beyond any doubt that Europeanization brought a major and innovative contribution to the study of post-communism in Central and Eastern Europe. It illuminates mechanisms that contributed greatly to the transformation of CEE states into consolidated (or, at least, consolidating) Western-type democracies able to join the European Union. Unlike transitology, it also convincingly explains the

importance of external factors. However, this comes at a price: internal factors are now marginal. A good example is provided by the well-known Europeanization scholar, Frank Schimmelfennig:

under a policy of reactive reinforcement, the CEE states' preparedness to adopt liberal norms varies mainly with their domestic conditions of power preservation. Where society is strongly oriented toward the West and the current government has based its claim to power on a liberal ideology, the domestic incentives for internalization are so strong that Western policy is almost redundant. Conversely, where Western orientations in society are weak and governments owe their power to nationalist-authoritarian programmes, Western reactive reinforcement will not make much of a difference. The effect of Western socialization policy will be most important if societal and governmental orientations diverge. (Schimmelfennig, 2000, p. 111)

This is correct, but clearly fails to illuminate the structural causes that made CEE societies pro- or anti-Western. Those causes can be ignored if the goal of the analysis is limited to the explanation of EU accession, a process that became credible only in or after the mid-1990s. On the contrary, this is a major flaw in the study of the overall democratization of former communist states and especially of its decisive episode of the early 1990s. It is at that moment that the Western Balkans and CIS republics missed the opportunity to consolidate their nascent democracies and turn westward. Unfortunately, Europeanization is not equipped to deal with this process. Therefore, a different approach has to be built in order to combine Europeanization's appropriate assessment of external factors with transitology's analysis of structural internal causes of democratic consolidation. This is the goal of the following section.

3. An International Relations-Based Approach

The sudden fall of communism created an ideological and identity vacuum that simultaneously affected a large number of states. At the societal level, the disappearance of communism left no dominant ideology. At the international level, this was paralleled by an identity vacuum aggravated by the irrelevance of all previous regional political and security structures. In Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union this led to a wave of ethnic wars. Three competing systems of values immediately tried to impose themselves. The first was the democratic one. As local pre-communist experience with democracy was scarce or nonexistent, this was basically a Western-imported ideology formalized by the 1990 Paris Charter of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Its provisions included respect for democracy and human rights, development of a market economy, and peaceful foreign policy. As will be shown later, the diffusion and assimilation of democratic values and norms were actively supported by Western states and organizations. The two competing systems had an endogenous genesis, based on local historical experience. They were the ultra-nationalist system of values, which led to ethnic wars and the creation of authoritarian regimes in former Yugoslavia, Slovakia, and certain ex-Soviet republics; and the neo-communist system of values, which became

the dominant ideology of non-democratic regimes in Romania, Bulgaria, and some CIS republics. In order to define the former, a difference has to be made between nationalism and ultra-nationalism. While the first might use a civic, French-revolution approach, the second is always based on ethnic, Herder-type rejection of the 'other'. It is also much more radical (one could usefully compare Charles de Gaulle and Jean-Marie Le Pen as representatives of the two categories). Neo-communism can be simply described as an effort to mirror totalitarian communism with more modest, authoritarian means. A working definition might be that provided by the former Romanian president, Emil Constantinescu, in an article published by *Le Monde* on 22 February 22 1997:

We are not talking about classical communism . . . but rather of a form that is both old . . . and new because of its goal, which is to preserve all that can be preserved, both in men and structures, of the old regime: as many as possible of the large enterprises, as many monopolies as possible, especially in the areas of energy and agriculture, as many of the political and economic leaders as possible, and as much as possible of an isolationist and anti-Western mythology, ready to halt all openings towards Europe and the rest of the world. (quoted by Gallagher 2001, p. 392)

Analyzing the beginning of post-communism in a rationalist perspective, Rose *et al.* (1998, pp. 3–24) speak about 'Competition between Regimes: A Question of Supply and Demand'. It is perhaps more useful to assess the competition between rival systems of values. The option for a certain type of regime is the logical consequence of the prevalence within a given society of the corresponding system of values. Another important aspect is the dynamic nature of this competition. In the early 1990s only Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary seemed to have consolidating democracies. Nevertheless, continuing international interaction allowed further diffusion and assimilation of Western democratic norms and values. This process was important in all CEE-10 states, whose evolution illustrates the strong relationship between internal and external change. Western influence contributed to the assimilation of democratic values. This favoured the democratization process while, at the international level, natural affinities were created with Western states sharing the same values. Progressive democratization encouraged pacific, pro-Western foreign policy, while the latter further contributed to democratic internal development.

This phenomenon is well captured by Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999). In this view, both state and society are relevant in international interactions; therefore, the actors of international relations are not states but 'state-society complexes'. Such complexes are permanently involved in socialization and learning processes, which modify both their identities and interests. In turn, the interaction of state-society complexes modifies their international environment, sometimes changing the very 'culture' of international anarchy. The two key concepts of this interaction are identity and socialization. The analysis of the former leads Wendt to define international actors as a 'script or schema, constituted to varying degrees by cultural forms, about who [they] are and what [they] should do in a certain context' (Wendt, 1999, p. 230; for the entire analysis of the concept see

pp. 224–233. A discussion of the ‘identity literature of IR’ can be found in Flockhart, 2006, pp. 94–97). The working definition I will use in this article sees the identity of a state–society complex as ‘relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self’ representing ‘a property of international actors that generates motivational and behavioural dispositions’ (Wendt, 1999, p. 224). The other key concept, international socialization, can be defined as ‘a process in which states are induced to adopt the constitutive rules of an international community’ (Schimmelfennig *et al.*, 2006, p. 2). Its outcome is

sustained compliance based on the internalization of ... new norms. In adopting community rules, socialization implies that an agent switches from following a logic of consequences to a logic of appropriateness; this adoption is sustained over time and is quite independent from a particular structure of material incentives or sanctions. (Checkel, 2005, p. 804)

In his introduction to the 2005 special issue of *International Organization* on ‘International Institutions and Socialization in Europe’, Jeffrey Checkel identifies two types of international socialization. In the framework of Type I internalization or socialization,

agents may behave appropriately by learning a role – acquiring the knowledge that enables them to act in accordance with expectations – irrespective of whether they like the role or agree with it... conscious instrumental calculation has been replaced by conscious role playing. (Ibid.)

This rather limited type of socialization is generally preferred by rationalist approaches. Constructivists favour the more advanced Type II internalization/socialization that goes beyond role playing. It implies that agents accept community or organizational norms as ‘the right thing to do’. They ‘adopt the interests, or even possibly the identity, of the community of which they are a part. Conscious instrumental calculation has now been replaced by “taken-for-grantedness”’ (Ibid.). Checkel also outlines three mechanisms involved in the process of socialization: strategic calculation, role playing and normative suasion. They are associated with ‘three modes of rationality that may contribute to socialization outcomes: instrumental, bounded, and communicative’ (Ibid., p. 805). Given the rather limited reach of the first two (incentive-based) mechanisms, normative suasion is normally needed in order to complete the switch from a logic of consequences to one of appropriateness and ensure Type II socialization. The mechanisms of international socialization are analyzed in more detail later in this section. Reviews of the literature, detailed analyses of the socialization process and its mechanisms as well as discussion of the role of international organizations can be found in Checkel (2005, pp. 804–815) and Schimmelfennig *et al.* (2006, pp. 2–11, 16–56).

Returning to Wendt’s vision of the effect of (successful) international socialization on the ‘culture’ of international anarchy, the CEE-10 states represent an ideal case study. They first experienced the absence of any security framework (which could have transformed ethnic tensions in Slovakia, Romania, Estonia and Latvia in Yugoslav-type conflicts), then relative stability and, finally, membership of the

Western security community. Wendt analyses 'the three cultures of anarchy', associated with Hobbes, Locke and Kant. Correspondingly, states are enemies, rivals and friends. Following this approach, there can be an evolution (not mandatory, but at least unidirectional, except for an exogenous shock) between the three 'cultures:' from Hobbes to Locke and then toward Kant (Wendt, 1999). It is clear that since 1989 CEE-10 states have followed exactly this trajectory. Ultra-nationalist or neo-communist regimes in Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria were overthrown. Ethnic tensions in Estonia and Latvia were reduced to irrelevant levels. Finally, EU and NATO enlargement confirmed the ten states' accession to the Kantian Western community.

This impressive transformation was possible due to the existence of three international structures linking CEE-10 and Western states. Chronologically, the first was the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (which became in 1994 the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe). Its 1990 Paris Charter formalized the democratic system of values. As all post-communist states were CSCE members and approved the charter, even those resilient to democratization accepted at least the superficial aspects of electoral democracy (Decaux, 1992; Heraclidis, 1993). This was the first step of the diffusion of democratic norms and values that finally imposed themselves in CEE-10. CSCE's contribution did not stop there. It developed specialized organs – the Office for Free Elections, later transformed in the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR); the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media; the Court of Conciliation and Arbitration – that effectively and efficiently helped develop democratic political systems (<http://www.osce.org>). The so-called 'seminar diplomacy', which included seminars and colloquia as well as different forms of multilateral diplomacy led to the creation of an epistemic community in the field of European security (Adler, 1998, pp. 138–139). This was extremely important in a region threatened by military conflicts. Even more important, CSCE's preventive diplomacy and especially the actions of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) helped reduce ethnic tensions, thus preserving regional peace and increasing concerned states' chances of democratization (Flynn & Farrell, 1999, p. 522; Huber, 1994, p. 25). Of course, the HCNM could not stop the Yugoslav wars. But he contributed greatly to the prevention of ethnic conflicts related to Russian and Hungarian minorities in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania. While less visible, this had an important effect on both the stability and the democratization of CEE.

The second institutional framework was initiated by the EU's Europe Agreements. These were association treaties clearly stating the perspective of accession. Given the remarkable economic advantages associated with membership, it is not surprising that impoverished ex-communist states did everything in their power to comply with accession criteria. Furthermore, the European Union's Eastern enlargement was regarded by the huge majority of the CEE population as a natural reunification of the European family that Soviet military occupation had divided for half a century. Pro-accession efforts were therefore highly legitimated while political forces perceived as hampering the enlargement rapidly lost public support (a good example is provided by the end of the Slovak ultra-nationalist regime of Vladimir Mečiar in 1998). Progressively, the European Union added further elements to the initial Europe Agreements. The Essen pre-accession strategy and the reinforced pre-accession

strategy defined by Agenda 2000 brought significant improvements (see Demetro-poulou, 2002). But the decisive step had been the 1993 adoption of the Copenhagen criteria, as they introduced political – and, more specifically, democratic – conditionality. This was an extremely effective instrument that forced candidate members to democratize their political institutions and practices in order to be accepted as EU members (see Tucny, 2000; Hughes & Sasse, 2003; Vachudova, 2005; Schimmelfennig et al., 2006; Grabbe, 2006). The European Union’s conditionality had a visible impact on the very identity of concerned state–society complexes, which progressively evolved toward the model provided by their EU counterparts. This is why democratization and EU accession of the CEE-10 states were mutually constitutive. Through conditionality, the enlargement process forced them to fully democratize. But their inclusion in this process – only ten post-communist states were granted Europe Agreements – was itself due to the fact that the ten countries had already begun to democratize. Unfortunately for them, the authoritarian, war-torn Western Balkans and CIS states remained outside this *cercle vertueux*.

The third structure belongs to the field of security and is related to NATO. The Partnership for Peace, created in 1994, did not provide security guarantees for CEE members. Initially it was even perceived as a modest alternative to NATO enlargement. Its main mission seemed to be peacekeeping (Drew, 1995, p. 27). Still, it created cooperation mechanisms and procedures and helped build an epistemic community reuniting NATO and CEE military. Furthermore, its functioning directly influenced a specific aspect of democratization. It helped modify post-communist states’ civilian–military relations, assuring the control of the armed forces by democratic institutions (Vankovska & Wiberg, 2003, p. 27; Sherr, 2004, p. 65). But PfP’s major contribution was linked to its perception by CEE societies and political elites as a first step toward the United States’ involvement in the region. This was a subjective impression. Nevertheless, the perspective of active American hegemony significantly encouraged pro-Western political forces. It was widely believed that Washington’s involvement would put an end to regional conflicts (as it did in Bosnia, imposing the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement). Through future NATO enlargement – which effectively took place in 1999 and 2004 – it would protect the region from possibly hostile external powers. Accession to NATO as well as to the European Union would bring CEE states fully inside the Western community, thus fulfilling their population’s desire of ‘returning to Europe’ (for the case of Romania see Gros & Tismaneanu, 1997, p. 28). Overall, the apparently modest Partnership for Peace was the final key element needed for a resolutely pro-Western – and implicitly pro-democratic – orientation of Central and Eastern Europe. CIS members of the PfP, on the contrary, failed to perceive it as more than an empty framework. Involvement in the PfP did not prevent them from maintaining an ambiguous or even hostile attitude toward NATO enlargement that isolated them from the CEE-10 pro-Western evolution.

This evolution was also facilitated by individual Western states, other specialized international organizations (such as the Council of Europe and the International Monetary Fund), and Western NGOs (for a country-by-country detailed description see Zielonka & Pravda, 2001). While the individual contributions of these entities cannot be compared with those of the CSCE, EU or NATO, their cumulative effect was significant.

As following sections will show, the overall influence of Western structures was threefold. Pressure was put on CEE decision-makers. There were actions meant to influence CEE public opinion. And, most importantly, there was the very diffusion of democratic norms and values throughout CEE societies. This led to the development of civil society that made impossible the survival of non-democratic structures and practices. Finally, all CEE-10 states were able to join the EU and NATO, which confirms their inclusion in the category of genuinely consolidating democracies.

At this point, more has to be said on the specific mechanisms involved in this process. In principle, there can be two strategies for socialization. The first is social influence, which elicits pro-norm behaviour through the distribution of social rewards and punishments. The second is persuasion, which encourages norm-consistent behaviour through a social process of interaction that involves changing attitudes without use of either material or mental coercion (Flockhart, 2006, p. 96). Out of Checkel's three socialization instruments – strategic calculation, role playing and normative suasion – the first two are incentive-based mechanisms that fall into the category of social influence. As such, they are accepted and analyzed by both Rationalists and Constructivists. EU conditionality, for example, belongs to this category. Nobody denies that it has been particularly effective 'when the EU offered a credible membership incentive and when incumbent governments did not consider the domestic costs of compliance threatening to their hold on power' (Epstein & Sedelmeier, 2008, p. 796). This is not the case for the strategy of persuasion and the associate mechanism of normative suasion. Rationalist approaches tend to reject or ignore them. Constructivists, on the other hand, insist on their importance for achieving Type II socialization. In her study of NATO's contribution to the transformation of the Czech Republic and Romania, Alexandra Ghenciu (2005, p. 973) notes that, 'in teaching new liberal-democratic norms, NATO exercised significant power: the power to shape its socializees' interpretations of the world and ideas about proper ways of acting in that world'. Indeed, NATO conducted a socialization process affecting 'not simply the behaviour of CEE socializees, but also their definitions of national identity and interests' (Ibid.). Ghenciu convincingly argues that this was mostly the effect of teaching and persuasion. She defines teaching as 'an attempt to project into Central and Eastern Europe the common lifeworld of the Euro-Atlantic community, consisting of shared liberal ideas and norms' (Ibid., p. 979). But it was on persuasion that NATO – as well as other Western actors – relied heavily. Argumentative persuasion is a social process of interaction in which a communicator attempts to induce a change in the belief, attitude or behaviour of another person through the transmission of a message in a context where the persuadee has some degree of free choice (Checkel, 2001, p. 562). Persuasion suggests that preferences and identities do change in the absence of material incentives and disincentives. Basically, 'argument and emotion help explain changes in actor motivation' (Johnston, 2005, p. 1030). In Ghenciu's view, the techniques of persuasion used by NATO (as well as CSCE and EU, I would add) in Central and Eastern Europe were consistency, authority and social proof:

Consistency involves linking prescribed reforms to norms that are accepted by socializees as unproblematic. Linked to this, also frequently used were

authority appeals, involving efforts at persuading actors to adopt specific reforms by pointing to the special expertise of NATO on a given question, or/ and invoking the moral reliability of an institution that embodied the liberal-democratic community. Finally, NATO officials sometimes resorted to *social proof*, seeking to convince Czechs or Romanians to promote a series of legal and institutional changes by pointing to examples of established and even emerging democracies who had set up similar institutions. This argument posits that if everyone followed a similar course of action, then it must be the right thing to do, because everyone else could not be wrong. (Gheciu, 2005, p. 992)

This is, of course, a view rejected openly by Rationalists. But the Slovak and Romanian case studies (see below) suggest that persuasion was indeed effective in modifying the convictions of CEE citizens even when the local political elites had adopted anti-democratic and anti-Western attitudes.

This latter aspect is important because the assessment of the relation between CEE societies and political elites frequently subordinates the former to the latter in a way that leaves little place for diverging trajectories. Analyzing the post-communist socialization from a rationalist perspective based on strategic calculation, Frank Schimmelfennig examines the international institutions offering incentives to governments as well as to nongovernmental actors (the latter trying to force their government to comply with international norms). The two situations are defined as intergovernmental reinforcement by reward and transnational reinforcement by reward, respectively. He concludes that ‘the main channel of international reinforcement in the CEECs is intergovernmental, because societies are too weak vis-à-vis the states, and electorates are too volatile, to serve as effective agents of socialization’ (Schimmelfennig, 2005, p. 828).

At first view, this seems a reasonable statement. But it is contradicted by the Slovak and Romanian examples. In these cases, the transnational reinforcement by reward worked while the intergovernmental one failed. Furthermore, there is a clear contradiction between Schimmelfennig’s intergovernmental view and a Wendt-type approach that sees the state–society complex as the main actor of International Relations. At this point it is useful to examine Trine Flockhart’s reconceptualization of the domestic level into a nexus between state/elite and nation/people. In the framework of a ‘Complex Socialization’ model,

‘state’ and ‘society’ can be conceptualized as two differently constructed social groups; one located at the state level and consisting of the elite, and one located at the nation level and consisting of ‘the people’...

By dividing the domestic level into these two different ‘we-concepts’ it is possible to work with a bifurcation of causal dynamics in relation to different norms, which effectively means that the domestic level operates with two distinct political cultures; a ‘state culture’ at the elite level and the widely accepted ‘political culture’ at the mass level. (Flockhart, 2006, pp. 98–99)

In Flockhart’s view, the international socialization represents the interaction of three different levels: international; domestic, state/elite; and domestic, nation/people (I

prefer to call these three levels: international; elites; and society). Norms emanate from a socializing agent located outside the norm-receiving domestic society. They are directed to a ‘fairly limited number of individuals and small groups’ in the country undergoing socialization. These ‘intermediate agents’ – intergovernmental or nongovernmental organizations, different forms of international interest groups, networks or social and religious movements – convey the message into the domestic setting (Flockhart, 2006, p. 104). The socialization process can be successful at the society level even if it fails at the elite level. The following two case studies suggest that this pattern correctly describes the evolution of Slovakia and Romania. I would add that ‘intermediate agents’ were indeed represented by certain components of local civil society but also – and frequently – by prominent Western representatives (the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities being, of course, the most visible one).

Finally, it is important to note that the HCNM-style persuasion cannot be presented as exclusively incentive-free. Its efficiency is at least in part due to the fact that it made clear to the general public the negative consequences of supporting undemocratic regimes. Both Mečiar and Iliescu resisted Western pressure to democratize but constantly assured their electorates of Slovakia’s and Romania’s imminent EU accession. For a time, they succeeded in hiding the fundamental incompatibility between accession (which implied prosperity) and their own rule and values. Western discourse targeting Slovak and Romanian society simply revealed this contradiction. Therefore, in this case persuasion efforts at the society level had an important dimension of conditionality and also acted as an incentive-based instrument. This leads to the conclusion that the three mechanisms of strategic calculation, role playing and normative suasion in fact functioned simultaneously. The West’s strategy was based on both incentives and persuasion and targeted both the elites and the society levels. In Poland, Hungary or the Czech Republic, elites responded positively and the rapid democratization that ensued made the society level less visible. But the cases of Slovakia and Romania show that the socialization of this latter level also took place and was strong enough to override the elite’s resistance to externally-induced democratization. Therefore, the democratization process was a complex interaction between Western international organizations and states and each of the two levels of the CEE Wendt-style state–society complexes.

The next two sections analyze the tortuous process of democratization in Romania and Slovakia. Unlike the Central European states, these were the CEE ‘bad pupils’ that initially gave preference to ‘soft’ authoritarian neo-communist or ultra-nationalist regimes. Nevertheless, they were members of the CSCE/OSCE and signatories of the Europe Agreements and the Partnership for Peace. The following sections illustrate the role of these international structures in the progressive identity change that finally determined the fall of authoritarian regimes and the adoption of a genuinely democratic, pro-Western course.

4. The Neo-Communist Regime of Ion Iliescu in Romania

In December 1989, Nicolae Ceausescu’s sultanistic rule was replaced by a ‘soft’ authoritarian regime led by Ion Iliescu, a former minister and ex-university colleague of Gorbachev’s. This was a neo-communist regime. However, it also persecuted the

Hungarian minority (Ivanciuc, 1996; Tismaneanu, 1997; Bugajski, 2002; Siani-Davies, 2005). Figure 1 shows the Freedom House quantitative evaluation of the desperate state of political rights and civil liberties in Iliescu's Romania. A one-to-seven scale is used, with one representing the highest degree of freedom and seven the lowest; 3.0 is the limit for 'partly free' states and 5.5 for 'not free' ones. Romania remained 'partly free' until the fall of Iliescu.

Perhaps more than Iliescu's neo-communist practices, actions clearly increasing ethnic tensions and potentially preparing a regional conflict (Ionescu, 1993, p. 45; Reisch, 1993, p. 22) generated serious Western concern. This is why the High Commissioner for National Minorities of OSCE, Max Van der Stoep, was one of the most visible actors involved in moderating Iliescu's undemocratic attitude. Between 1993 and 1996 he visited Romania eight times, playing a major role in reducing ethnic tensions in Transylvania (Michalchuk, 1998, p. 114, Ramelot & Remacle, 1995, p. 52). He made recommendations on new legislation for minorities and education while trying to convince the political party of the Hungarian minority not to start a civil disobedience campaign. Most importantly, he promoted a trilateral approach including negotiations with the government in Bucharest, the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, but also the government of Hungary. This finally led to the conclusion in August 1996 of the Romanian–Hungarian Friendship Treaty, which had a major impact on reducing regional tensions (Kemp, 2001, p. 237).

NATO's Partnership for Peace was another institutional framework that proved efficient in influencing the Romanian debate about the country's relations with the West. In January 1994 Bucharest was the first to sign a PfP framework agreement and actively involved itself in NATO-led actions (Ionescu, 1994, p. 43). This was precisely because Iliescu perceived PfP as an alternative to and not as a preparation

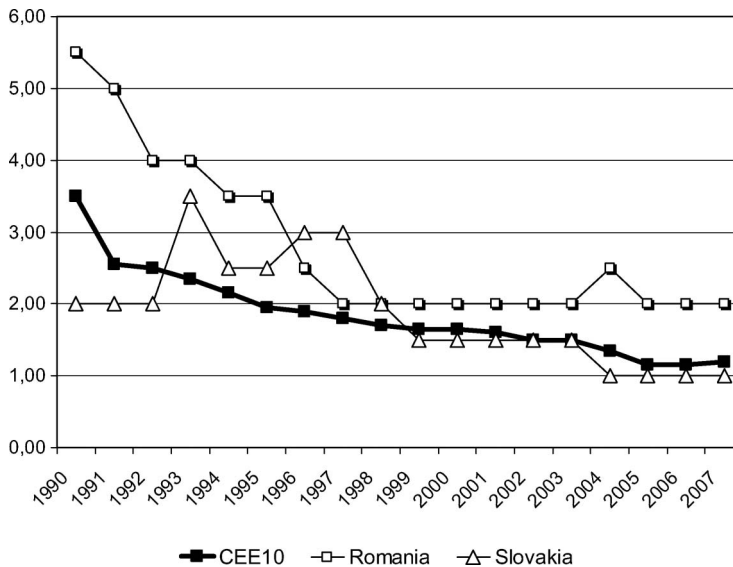


Figure 1. Freedom House Political Rights and Civil Liberties average scores for 10 CEE states, Romania, and Slovakia (1990–2007).
 Source: Freedom House (2007, 2008).

for NATO accession. However, within Romanian society the PfP fuelled a process that the neo-communists were unable to foresee or stop:

Romanian political [democratic] elite exploited the myth of the country's *naturally belonging* to the Western cultural sphere, NATO membership being perceived as a matter of reaffirmation of this ... According to the former President Constantinescu, 'Romania society does not regard the accession to the NATO as a form of protection against a threat, but rather as a way to regain an identity which had been unjustly denied to it for five decades'. The political elite claims that Romania's culture is European, sharing the same values: democracy, rule of law, human rights, free market economy etc. (Vankovska & Wiberg, 2003, pp. 131–132)

The Europe Agreement concluded in 1993 by Romania and the European Union had similar consequences. Its effect was increased by the economic advantages it provided and by the promise of future EU membership. This allowed the introduction of conditionality that contributed greatly to Romania's overall change. European conditionality determined political as well as market reforms. It equally concerned changes in public administration and the legal system that visibly contributed to the progressive Europeanization of the country. And it allowed Brussels to put pressure on Romania's government in special circumstances. The already mentioned conclusion of the friendship treaty with Hungary, mediated by Max Van der Stoep, is perhaps the best example.

In fact, there was a further reason that made Iliescu sign this treaty. By 1996, persecuting ethnic minorities had ceased to be an electorally profitable policy. Romanian society had changed and the very survival of the undemocratic regime became problematic.

The End of Iliescu's Regime

In 1990, Stalinist communism had been replaced by a mix of neo-communism and ultra-nationalism. These two ideologies, however, started to lose ground under the constant influence of the democratic system of values whose diffusion was facilitated by OSCE, the Europe Agreement, and NATO's PfP. In 1992, 49.8% of Romanians were not favourable to the Hungarian minority (Abele, 1996, p. 148). But Table 1 shows the constant improvement of attitudes toward minorities and related

Table 1. Perception of threats from ethnic groups and minorities and perception of threats from neighbouring countries (Selected countries, 1992–1998, %)

	1992	1996	1998
<i>Perception of threats from ethnic groups and minorities</i>			
Romania	60	32	32
Slovakia	53	48	43
<i>Perception of threats from neighbouring countries</i>			
Romania	67	35	27
Slovakia	46	36	30

Source: Haerpfer (2002, pp. 98, 100).

neighbouring countries. This clearly reflects an important reduction of ultra-nationalist convictions. As Table 2 shows, support for neo-communist parties and, implicitly, the extent of neo-communist convictions followed a similar trajectory.

In 1997, Romania's new President, Emil Constantinescu, noted that 'the popular mentality has changed a great deal in the past seven years. People are ready for real change and reform and are prepared to bear the costs' (Woodard, 1997, p. 42). The change was most visible at the level of civil society. Nonexistent in 1989 and unimpressive in 1992, it had rapidly expanded afterward. By 1996 there were no fewer than 8,000 NGOs. It is true that only about 200 – most of them Western-financed – were very active (Tismaneanu, 1997, p. 409). But analysts constantly emphasize the impressive dynamics of Romania's new civic sector (Marrié, 1996, p. 166). It includes 'places of dialogue', dominated by intellectuals trying to stimulate the development of civil society by the dialogue between its different components; 'places of memory', exposing the crimes of the communist regime and emphasizing elements of continuity between the totalitarian past and the neo-communist regime; and 'places of democratic vigilance', monitoring the respect for democratic principles and the development of democracy (Ibid.). Independent mass media and, more specifically, independent newspapers were equally important in criticizing the government's undemocratic practices and reducing electoral support for the ruling parties (Tismaneanu, 1996, p. 11). Syndicates also organized large-scale protest movements against the regime (see Ionescu, 1992).

Until 1996, pro-democracy political parties were weak and divided. In many cases, their leadership had been infiltrated by agents of Iliescu's secret services. Consequently, the Romanian political elites were unable to assume the democratizing role of their Czech or Polish counterparts. Instead, it was the civic sector that assumed the mission of diffusing democratic values. Nongovernmental organizations became the main intermediary between external factors of democratization and Romanian society (Flockhart's 'intermediate agents'). The ensuing process of socialization was of course slower than that experienced by Central European society. Still, in the long run it had the same effect as the general progress of democratic norms and values and the mobilization led by civil society resulted in the total defeat of Iliescu and his party in the 1996 general elections (see Table 2). The neo-communist regime came to an end. Democratic political forces resolutely oriented Romania toward a pro-democratic, pro-Western trajectory. More importantly, the neo-communists themselves realized the irreversibility of the change. It was clear that the support for an undemocratic regime was now insignificant. When the 2000 elections brought them back to power, they carefully avoided anti-democratic or anti-Western moves. In 2004 Iliescu even managed to

Table 2. Romania – vote for neo-communist parties in legislative elections (Chamber of Deputies), 1992–1996 (%)

	1990	1992	1996
NSF/NSDF	66.31	27.72	21.52
Socialist Party of Labour	–	3.03	–
Total	66.31	30.75	21.52

Source: Bugajski (2002, pp. 876–868).

secure Romania's accession to NATO, which he had opposed ten years earlier. At that moment, the identity change of Romania's state–society complex was obvious. But this change had started much earlier. In 1991, Iliescu signed a Romanian–Soviet friendship treaty preventing his country's accession to NATO. Domestic criticism was limited enough to be ignored. In 1996, the same president tried to conclude a much less ambitious friendship treaty with Russia. This time, domestic opposition was so vocal that the plan had to be abandoned. Relations with Hungary followed a similar trajectory, from the anti-Budapest 'axis' reuniting Iliescu and Mečiar to the conclusion of the Romanian–Hungarian friendship treaty. Society's values were progressively changing due to the external influence intermediated by the civic sector. In turn, this change forced the neo-communist regime to moderate its anti-Western foreign policy. Romania's identity as an International Relations actor started to change *before* the 1996 elections. The neo-communist elite was still in power and did its best to preserve the authoritarian regime. But it was facing both external pressure and the increasingly vocal opposition from its own civil society. The only choice was to give up openly anti-Western foreign policies. But this only increased Western influence in the country, thus accelerating the diffusion of the democratic values. Iliescu was caught in democratization's virtuous circle that, with a delay of six years, finally placed Bucharest in the category of genuinely consolidating democracies.

5. The Ultra-Nationalist Regime of Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia

After the 'velvet' vanishing of Czechoslovakia (1 January 1993), the Slovak nationalist movement responsible for the dismantlement of the federation did not disappear. Its main target became the Hungarian minority (10.8% of the population), accused of endangering national independence. In 1992, 58.4% of the Slovaks had a negative attitude toward this minority. In the parliamentary elections of the same year nationalist parties were voted for by 45.19% of the population (Abele, 1996, p. 148). Opinion polls conducted in 1991 and 1994 showed that respectively 55% and 62% of the Slovaks were 'dissatisfied with democracy' (Samson, 2001, p. 370). This allowed the nationalist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and its leader, Vladimír Mečiar, to progressively impose their control on the country. The landslide victory in the 30 September–1 October 1994 election gave Mečiar – in alliance with an ultra-nationalist and a neo-communist party – full control of the Parliament (Bugajski, 2002, p. 292). He took the opportunity to build an authoritarian regime unparalleled in post-communist Central Europe. Figure 1 clearly shows the disastrous effects of Mečiar's regime on democracy.

International Pressure and Its Consequences

While having little ideological affinity with the West, the government in Bratislava could not simply adopt an openly anti-Western stance. Slovakia needed international recognition while economic support from the EU and the International Monetary Fund was essential. The perspective of EU accession was also very popular: in 1997 it was supported by two-thirds of the Slovaks, while only 8% opposed it (Central and Eastern Eurobarometer no. 8, 1998, Annex, figure 32).

Consequently, Western decision-makers hoped that criticism of Mečiar's authoritarian practices would make him adopt a more moderate attitude.

In 1994/95 the European Union's condemnation of Bratislava's anti-democratic actions did not seem very credible as Brussels was in fact increasing PHARE and Action Plan aid to Slovakia (Kelley, 2001, pp. 247–248; Henderson, 1999, pp. 231–232). Therefore, a more resolute attitude was adopted:

When Slovakia passed harsh amendments of the penal code, the EU protested in a presidency declaration. The EU also criticized 'the continuing absence of a new law on minority languages'. . . . Commissioner Van den Broek and European Commission president Jacques Santer reminded Slovakia of the EU's demands on Slovak reform. Hans van den Broek said in meeting with the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister that 'it would be regrettable if doubts over Slovakia's ability to satisfy the political criteria for membership jeopardized its accession to the EU.' During the spring of 1997, several other EU officials added their voices to the criticism. When Slovakia held a problematic referendum on NATO membership and direct presidential elections, the EU issued a presidency declaration, and Van den Broek went to Slovakia and talked with the top officials. (Ibid., pp. 249–250)

These warnings culminated in the EU Commission's opinion on Slovakia's accession to the European Union, which identified Bratislava as the only candidate state not fulfilling political (and, more precisely, democratic) conditions for accession (*Avis de la Commission sur la demande d'adhésion de la Slovaquie à l'Union européenne*, 1997). Consequently, the European Council of Luxembourg excluded Slovakia from the first wave of the EU's Eastern enlargement.

A similar stance was adopted by the United States. As early as October 1993 the Helsinki Commission of the US Congress published a very critical Report on Human Rights and Democratization in Slovakia (Samson, 2001, p. 372). It was in the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace, of which Bratislava had become a member, that American and NATO officials frequently expressed their criticism:

During a September 17–18, 1995, visit, U.S. Secretary of Defense, William Perry discussed Slovakia's progress in implementing the PfP program and its preparations for integration into NATO. After reiterating general standards for NATO membership, Secretary Perry urged Slovakia to make more progress in democratization and toleration of a diversity of opinions. (Simon, 2004, p. 164)

On 30 April 1996 Secretary General Javier Solana visited Bratislava and stressed that NATO is a democratic organization that 'associates countries that respect democratic values, human rights, and differences between ethnic minorities'. (Ibid., p. 165)

On July 14, 1997, U.S. Ambassador Ralph Johnson explained to a select Slovak audience why the United States could not support Slovakia's NATO membership at that time. Simply put, the reason was 'concern about Slovakia's

democratic development' and 'the intolerant and unfair treatment of those with opposing points of view and the increasing centralization of power. (Toma & Kovac, 2001, p. 319)

As there was no positive reaction from Bratislava, the US State Secretary, Madeleine Albright, went as far as stating that 'Slovakia is a hole on the map of Europe' (Deegan-Krause, 2003, p. 66). Finally, the 1997 Madrid Summit excluded Bratislava from the first wave of NATO's Eastern enlargement.

Criticism was also formulated by the High Commissioner for National Minorities of the OSCE, Max Van der Stoel, and the Council of Europe. They were addressing Mečiar's hostile attitude toward the Hungarian minority. Van der Stoel first visited Slovakia in February 1993, one month after assuming the capacity of HCNM. During the following years, he made frequent visits to meet officials in Bratislava and representatives of the Hungarian minority, trying to help them open a dialogue. He made comments and recommendations on newly adopted language and minority legislation and tried to convince both Mečiar and Slovak citizens of the negative effects of discriminatory policies (Kemp, 2001, pp. 252–253; Pappagiani, 2003, p. 287). By 1997/98,

Van der Stoel's constant insistence on respect for human rights made him something of a nemesis for Mečiar. His criticisms of the Mečiar Government were influential in shaping the opinion of the OSCE community towards Slovakia. One could argue that Van der Stoel's constant criticism of the Mečiar regime effectively . . . re-enforced Slovakia's isolation from Western Europe. (Kemp, 2001, p. 253)

The Slovak government and the Prime Minister himself were not pleased with these waves of criticism and were aware of the fact that their public image might be affected. An analyst even mentioned 'Slovaks' heightened sense of isolation' (Jenkins, 2003, p. 137). Still, the regime's authoritarian character did not change at all. Even Iliescu-style superficial concessions were rejected. In fact, the only immediate consequence of Western pressure was the creation of a pro-Russian foreign policy similar to those of Ion Iliescu in Romania and Zhan Videnov in Bulgaria.

The End of Mečiar's Regime

The EU, NATO and the OSCE were completely unable to influence the anti-democratic practices of the government in Bratislava. But they were very effective in influencing Slovak society itself. The country's non-inclusion in the first wave of EU enlargement, for example, had an immediate and undeniable impact on popular support for Mečiar and precipitated his fall. Equally important, the constant efforts of the three organizations largely contributed to the diffusion of the Western system of values. Ultra-nationalism progressively lost ground. As Table 1 shows, between 1992 and 1998 the majority of the population ceased to perceive ethnic groups and minorities as a threat. Neighbouring countries to which these minorities were related were seen as a menace by only 30% in 1998 compared to 46% six years earlier. This

does not mean that ultra-nationalism completely disappeared. By 1998, however, it had lost the dominant status acquired in the early 1990s. The immediate consequence was the constant decrease of electoral support for Mečiar and his allies illustrated by Table 3. The leading political forces at the time of Slovak independence became, ten years later, unable to reach 20% of the votes.

Another, less visible but equally important process was the impressive development of Slovak civil society and its mobilization against Mečiar’s anti-European authoritarianism. In the 1990s, Slovak NGOs had the most talented and imaginative leaders in the region. This sector was very diversified and sophisticated. It was also very cohesive and one of the most dynamic in all CEE states. Table 4 shows that the 1996 density of Slovak NGOs was not yet similar to those of Hungary or the Czech Republic; but it was highly superior to those of Poland, Romania or Bulgaria. Furthermore, these NGOs were very diversified with respect to their field of activity and were successful in building a national cooperation network coordinated by a national committee (Drauss, 2002, p. 62).

Civil society opposition to the Mečiar regime was encouraged by the pro-democratic attitude of the Slovak Catholic Church. In May 1995, the Conference of Slovak Bishops stated that the government’s action ‘means to damage the foundations of the state and to create an atmosphere of uncertainty, mistrust and tension. Slovakia, as a young country, cannot allow such a political development’ (Fisher, 1996a, p. 40).

The Slovak Ecumenical Council of Churches equally emphasized the importance of ‘the respect of the principles of democracy, of freedom of ideas, of cultural development, and of tolerance’ (Ibid.). The architect of the anti-Mečiar policy, the bishop of Banska Bytrica, Rudolf Balaz, received threats, was accused of trafficking

Table 3. Results of Slovak nationalist parties in parliamentary elections, 1992–2002 (%)

	1992	1994	1998	2002	2006
Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Mečiar)	37.26	34.97	27.00	19.5	8.8
Slovak National Party	7.93	5.40	9.07	–	11.7
Nationalist Parties – Total	45.19	40.37	36.07	19.5	20.5

Source: Abele (1996, p. 148); Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2009).

Table 4. Development of NGOs in CEE (end 1996)

Country	NGOs per million inhabitants
Slovakia	1797
Romania	529
Hungary	3921
Czech Republic	2669
Poland	648
Bulgaria	345
Albania	88
Macedonia	71

Source: Gill (2002, p. 115).

religious art, and had his home and office searched by the police (Fisher, 1996a, pp. 40–41). But this did not stop church support for democratic forces, which significantly contributed to the delegitimization of Mečiar's regime.

Another major actor was independent mass media. Government's strict control of most media generated frequent protests. In March 1995, almost 120,000 Slovaks signed a petition in favour of national TV programmes banned by Mečiar. Two large demonstrations were organized in Bratislava in support of the same demand (Skolkay, 1996, p. 19). Anti-regime activism was championed by the *SME* newspaper and the *TV Markíza* television station, which had to face authorities' hostile and often abusive measures. For *SME*,

Mečiar's regime used various legal and semi-legal methods to undermine its position, and ruin this newspaper. For example, it arranged that *SME* could not print in a printing house that was privatized by people closely connected to MDS. The Editor-in-Chief, Karil Jezik, was arrested and interrogated several times over published articles and news reports criticizing the government. (Abraham, 2000, p. 202)

The case of *TV Markíza* was more spectacular, as it culminated in a direct confrontation between authorities and civil society:

The government tolerated *TV Markíza* until the election campaign in August 1998 when the Slovak Intelligence Agency (SIS) masterminded a plan to shoot down or neutralize the TV station. It failed mainly because for several days thousands of Slovak citizens came to its defence occupying its premises and demanded the resumption of free broadcasting ... Thus, although important in defeating Mečiar's regime, *TV Markíza* benefited from the already sprawling civil society that needed an independent source of information regarding the government and the opposition. (Abraham, 2000, p. 204; see also Fisher, 1996b)

Overall, the dramatic decrease of ultra-nationalist convictions as well as the active opposition of Slovak NGOs, Catholic Church, and independent media highly delegitimized Mečiar's regime. The 1998 elections brought to power democratic forces that put an end to authoritarian practices. The change was so profound that even nationalist parties had to take it into consideration. Before the 2002 elections, a leader of the ultra-nationalist Slovak National Party (which had been part of Mečiar's ruling coalition) widely known for his attacks against the Hungarian minority was asked to state his party's main electoral theme. Without hesitation, he answered 'Unemployment!' Nevertheless, this was not enough to save his party, which received less than 5% of the votes and had to quit the Parliament (Deegan-Krause, 2003, p. 76). Similar to the Romanian case, Slovak authoritarianism was overthrown by the profound change in Slovakia's society. The 1998 democratic, pro-Western turn created the conditions for further deepening this transformation, which became irreversible.

An interesting development, however, was triggered by the 2006 parliamentary election. The Slovak National Party recovered from its 2002 internal crisis and

achieved 11.7% of the vote. Mečiar's party, on the contrary, continued its descent to below 9%. Overall, the nationalist vote stabilized at its 2002 level of about 20% (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2009). The victor of the 2006 elections was Robert Fico's Smer-Social Democracy party. As its score of 29.14% imposed the formation of a government coalition, Fico took the surprising step of allying himself with the nationalists. Both the SNP and Mečiar's party entered the government, causing widespread internal and external criticism.

Smer-SD is often described as 'a populist outfit calling itself social democrat' (*The Economist*, 2006) while its leader is sometimes compared with the Kaczynski brothers in neighbouring Poland. Fico was fully aware of the negative consequences of this coalition choice, but decided to assume the costs. The Slovak National Party's attitude toward the Hungarian minority led to the rapid deterioration of relations with Budapest. Other undemocratic moves followed. The 2008 new media law was qualified as 'the most punitive and, potentially, arbitrary' in all Central and Eastern Europe (*The Economist*, 2008a). It is clear that Smer's choices would have been different *before* EU accession. As Olli Rehn, the enlargement commissioner had to admit, 'after a country has a seat round the table, it is much harder to apply pressure to it' (*The Economist*, 2008b). Reduced external constraint and Fico's populism and propensity for extremist alliances were in fact a good starting point for an authoritarian drift. Under different circumstances, the Slovak leader would most likely have become a second Mečiar. But, despite his questionable choices, Fico is not building an authoritarian regime. As a pragmatic politician, he understands that such a regime would simply not find enough supporters. It is this self-restraint that illustrates the fundamental change of post-communist Slovakia and the irreversibility of its democratic trajectory.

6. Explaining the Case Studies

It is striking that, despite differences in local circumstances and ideological orientation, the Romanian and Slovak non-democratic regimes had almost identical ends. Specific conditions allowed Iliescu and Mečiar to attract public support, which they used to build and consolidate authoritarian regimes. However, authoritarianism had to be 'soft'. Ultra-nationalism and neo-communism had the upper hand, but democratic values were nevertheless adopted by important minorities. These as well as Western pressure forced the two strongmen to moderate their actions (which was not the case in Belarus or Central Asia). Repression was limited and an appearance of democracy was maintained. In turn, this moderation allowed the two countries' full inclusion in the CEE-10 group that concluded Europe Agreements and took part in NATO's PfP. In a way, this was the beginning of the authoritarian regimes' end. The diffusion of democratic norms and values was accelerated. By 1995/96 neo-communism and ultra-nationalism had lost predominance within the two societies. The democratic system of values had been assimilated by the majority of the population. Despite their full control of the state apparatus and their efforts to counter the development of a vocal civil society, the two strongmen were now completely delegitimized. Their fall was only a question of time.

It was quite normal that new leaders in Bucharest and Bratislava dismantle the authoritarian regimes and adopt the democratic, pro-Western orientation

demanded by the majority of the electorate. This reinforced the effect of Western influence (and especially that of EU conditionality), thus accelerating the process that finally allowed EU and NATO accession. The change is also illustrated by the evolution of the former ruling parties. In Romania, neo-communists finally understood the need to reform. When they returned to power after the 2000 general elections, they did not try to reconstruct the authoritarian regime, despite the fact that most important positions of the state were again occupied by Iliescu and his associates. In Slovakia, Mečiar did not show the adaptability of Iliescu and his party could not eliminate him. Consequently, the party is supported today by less than 9% of the electorate. Even as a member of the post-2006 ruling coalition, it has a very limited influence. Overall, the 1996–98 episode put an end to the existence of all major anti-democratic political forces in the two countries.

One point has to be made with regard to the two-level character of the external influence. As already mentioned, most Europeanization theorists see externally induced change within post-communist societies as the result of a process that involves mainly the political elites. These are in direct contact with the international environment and represent the most obvious targets of persuasive Western efforts. As elites' reactions are very visible, it is easy to assess the effects of their international socialization and to conclude that these elites represent the essential transmission belt between Western, democratic norms and values and Eastern societies. However, the Romanian and Slovak cases show that ruling elites can adopt 'politics of ambiguity' or even become openly hostile to democratization incentives or pressure. Opposition leaders and political parties can be too weak and divided to successfully replace them in this task. And still, societies change and democratization occurs. This is due to the fact that external factors directly influence the post-communist societies. In the two case studies, most of the intermediation of democratic values transfer was assumed by two types of non-elite 'intermediate agents': on the one hand, Western political personalities such as the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities; on the other, a nascent civil society – NGOs (many of which were Western-funded), churches, trade unions, and independent mass media. These channels made simple citizens familiar with the values rejected by their elites but also aware of the consequences of their undemocratic behaviour. They were exposed to both the incentive- and persuasion-based mechanisms put in place by Western international organizations and, unlike Mečiar and Iliescu, became fully involved in the socialization process. A clear element substantiating the fact that external factors represent indeed the very engine of post-communist democratization is the identical and simultaneous character of changes illustrated by Tables 1–3. Despite their common communist past, these societies do not have identical political, socio-economic, cultural and religious characteristics. They are not linked by significant cultural, economic or information flows. Nevertheless, there is no difference in the progressive adoption of democratic norms and values by these two societies. This can hardly be the consequence of national, internal causes. Romania and Slovakia experienced identical democratization processes taking place at the same time in the presence of the same international factors. External influence is the only credible explanation.

7. Fast, Slow and No-Democratizers

While it is difficult to deny the importance of external factors presented in the two case studies, one might be tempted to formulate the hypothesis that only authoritarian or 'ethnocratic' post-communist regimes (such as those in Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Estonia and Latvia) democratize under external influence while the democratization of other CEE-10 has internal causes. But this would lead to the conclusion that the three very similar Baltic states experienced fundamentally different democratization mechanisms: externally triggered in Estonia and Latvia and internally-based in Lithuania. The same improbable difference would have existed between the Czech and Slovak parts of former Czechoslovakia.

Of course, there is a difference between 'fast' and 'slow' democratization processes in Central and Eastern Europe. The speed was determined by the level of the state–society complex that was first socialized by the West. In the early 1990s, the Poles, Hungarians and Czechs were targeted by the same Western actions as their post-communist neighbours. Their elites responded enthusiastically to the incentive- and persuasion-based mechanisms and were rapidly socialized, acquiring fully democratic convictions. They immediately assumed the mission of 'transmission belt' and became the 'intermediate agents' that diffused democratic norms and values to the rest of the society. The latter was also socialized directly by the West in a way similar to Slovakia and Romania. However, this process lacked visibility due to the efficient actions of the elites. The slowly-democratizing states, for their part, could not take advantage of the high-speed, elite-powered intermediation and had to rely on the less rapid international socialization of society. But in both cases the state–society complex was influenced by external factors and finally came to be successfully socialized, changing its identity both domestically and internationally.

The difference, then, comes from the attitude of the elites, which is determined by domestic factors well described by classical transitology. Lack of space prevents me from exploring this subject more fully. I will only say that internal factors shaped the post-communist democratization processes by determining the receptivity of CEE elites and societies to the process of international socialization. Due to specific domestic causes, the Central European elites had different predispositions from their counterparts in Slovakia or Romania. But differences were even bigger between the societies of the CEE-10 states and their southern and eastern neighbours. The former could take advantage of a nascent civic culture that rapidly developed under the influence of the Western incentives and persuasion, generating widespread civic engagement that in turn favoured full democratization. This is substantiated by the fact that both the fall of communism and subsequent democratic consolidation were marked by massive public support and participation. CIS and Balkan societies, on the contrary, preserved their historical passivity, being reluctant over civic engagement and tolerant toward authoritarian practices. Especially in the CIS, the end of communism was perceived far less enthusiastically than in Central Europe and did not bring the same fundamental changes. Against this different background, the same international mechanisms were able to efficiently diffuse democratic values in CEE-10 countries while only superficially affecting CIS and Western Balkan state–society complexes (see Fritz, 2005). Internal factors were therefore important, but only as preconditions for successful international socialization.

Of course, this view is not shared by most transitologists who remain unimpressed by theories of international socialization. This is why a counterfactual scenario might be useful. Let us suppose for a moment that World War II ended differently. In 1989, communism is dismantled, but the West is dominated by ultra-nationalist values. Western states have authoritarian political systems ruled by ultra-nationalist parties. Their public opinion abhors democracy. Both NATO and the European Union promote openly ultra-nationalist authoritarianism. In post-communist Warsaw, Budapest and Prague local democratic and ultra-nationalist political forces struggle to impose their own system of values. But the democrats are not supported by anyone outside their own borders. Furthermore, their ideology is condemned by all Western states. The ultra-nationalists, on the contrary, are able to claim that embracing their values will bring Western protection against weakened but still dangerous Moscow. Moreover, Western states and organizations vocally encourage Central European ultra-nationalism. The European Union uses political conditionality to promote ultra-nationalist values. NATO's Partnership for Peace is open only to ultra-nationalist states. The OSCE's High Commissioner *against* National Minorities tours Central Europe giving public speeches and TV interviews marked by ultra-nationalist propaganda. He makes simple citizens clearly understand the price of supporting democratic regimes. Both Western states and NGOs generously support Central European ultra-nationalist nongovernmental organizations that are very active in spreading ultra-nationalist ideas.

If the democratization of Central Europe were a domestic process, all these external factors should have no consequence. Due to purely internal causes, both elites and society in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic would resist geopolitical constraints, reject incentives, ignore persuasion, turn their back on visiting Western politicians, avoid Western-financed NGOs and become islands of democracy in an overwhelmingly ultra-nationalist (and implicitly hostile) Europe. Such a result, however, is not very plausible. More probably, the international environment would determine the Poles, Hungarians and Czechs to adopt the dominant, ultra-nationalist values. Of course, this is pure speculation. But, as all counterfactuals, it has a certain illustrative value. It suggests that domestic factors are important in predisposing a society to democratize. But even the countries with the most favourable internal conditions will fail to democratize in an international environment lacking the appropriate external determinants.

8. Conclusion

While recognizing the importance of the internal factors as preconditions for democratization, this article argues that the post-communist democratization and democratic consolidation were generated by external causes. The ideological and identity void left in Central and Eastern Europe by the fall of communism was filled by the democratic system of values due mainly to the action of the triple institutional structure formed by the CSCE/OSCE, EU's Europe Agreements, and NATO's PfP. This framework efficiently interacted with the CEE state-society complexes in a process of international socialization that used both incentive- and persuasion-based strategies. The mechanisms involved were strategic calculation and role playing for the former strategy and normative suasion for the latter. The most efficient – and

most visible – incentive-based instrument was of course the European Union’s democratic conditionality. Normative suasion took more subtle forms that included such techniques as consistency, authority and social proof. However, persuasion did not lack visibility. On the contrary, it was promoted by prominent Western representatives such as the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities. Their persuasive efforts were directed not only at the elites but also at simple citizens, making frequent use of public speeches and TV interviews. In fact, the two Western strategies targeted from the very beginning both the elites and the society of CEE states. Consequently, two parallel processes of international socialization were initiated. One was meant to modify the system of values of the CEE elites. When they responded positively, rapid democratization followed as the elites became the ‘intermediate agents’ efficiently diffusing democratic norms and values to the rest of the society. The slower, parallel process of international socialization of simple citizens was therefore much less visible. But the Slovak and Romanian case studies show that the elites hostile to democratization that resisted Western socialization were unable to stop the international socialization of their societies. This was a slower process whose ‘intermediate agents’ were components of local civil society as well as the Western representatives themselves. The latter successfully used persuasion and incentive-based instruments, making simple citizens understand the costs of supporting their undemocratic leaders. Overall, the entire state–society complex was involved in an international interaction similar to that described by Wendt’s sociology of international relations. Faced with the progressive change of the values shared by their societies, authoritarian regimes lost their legitimacy and were finally overthrown by ‘electoral revolutions’. Their successors further opened their countries to international influence. This *cercle vertueux* led to genuine democratization and Europeanization, which explain subsequent EU and NATO accession.

The Western Balkans (except Slovenia) and CIS republics, on the contrary, failed to genuinely democratize. This is due to a different set of internal causes that constrained the international diffusion of democratic norms and values. The initial lack of predisposition toward accepting democratic values determined the non-inclusion of the Western Balkans and CIS states in the Europe Agreements as well as the inefficiency of the CSCE/OSCE and NATO’s PfP. With no international socialization process able to diffuse efficiently the Western system of democratic values, these societies were conquered by ultra-nationalism and neo-communism. Non-democratic regimes sharing these ideologies were put in place, reinforcing authoritarian trends. The CEE *cercle vertueux* was replaced by a vicious circle that made democratic consolidation impossible. However, this is by no means a pessimistic ‘end of history’. If local conditions change and the appropriate international framework is put in place, the post-communist states in the Western Balkans and the Commonwealth of Independent States might one day follow the democratization trajectory of their Central and East European neighbours.

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