2. The Resilience of History

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The 19 countries included in this book are diverse but share a similar set of historical experiences. They are all products of the great empires that dominated European politics less than 100 years ago. They are all relative latecomers to state and nation building, and, for that matter, to democracy. They have a common heritage of communist rule and Soviet domination; and after the collapse of communism in 1989–90, they all embarked on a process of democratisation. More recently, they have gravitated towards the West. Most of them are now fully integrated into the European Union and those that are not are actively seeking closer cooperation with the EU.

The impact of the past is neither simple nor straightforward. The four empires were all multi-ethnic and multi-cultural states. But they cultivated different legal and administrative traditions. As a rule, the Austro–Hungarian and German empires left a legacy of the rule of law, while the Tsarist and Ottoman empires promoted deeply seated traditions of patrimonialism and clientelism. But the empires were not homogeneous and sometimes allowed for a great deal of regional variation. The clearcut difference between the Habsburg and Hungarian crownlands within the Austro–Hungarian Empire is a good case in point. The former were governed from Vienna with only limited pressure on the ethnic minorities to adapt to the predominantly German speaking political elite; the latter were run from Budapest and subjected a wave of Magyarisation. In a similar vein, it must be noted that communism did not always come in the same shape and form. The communist regimes all had totalitarian ambitions, but did not always live up to them. There were variations over time and by region. As a rule, Central Europe proved more difficult for the communist rulers to handle than the countries of Eastern and South Eastern Europe. It is no coincidence that the uprising against communist rule originated in Poland and Hungary in the very heartland of the former Austro–Hungarian Empire. With the benefit of hindsight, however, the lasting impression of

communism in Eastern Europe is its role as a modernising force. It spelled industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation throughout the entire region. The East Europeans who took to the streets in 1989–90 were generally better off and better educated than ever before (Berglund et al. 2001).

This chapter sets out to provide an overview of social divisions and political cleavages in Eastern Europe over time. We are particularly interested in long-lasting and persistent conflicts, but we will also pay attention to transient divides that fade out and go away as times change.

The Imperial Heritage

The German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman empires came out of the First World War (1914–18) fatally weakened, and as the victorious Western allies – the United States in particular – propagated the idea of national self-determination, the 'captive nations' of these empires were able to break free of their empires into independence, statehood and a first experiment in democracy. Nation building became a top priority but also a bone of contention throughout the region (Deutsch 1953; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990).

The political culture in the newly independent states was strongly marked by the legacy of the past. The region, taken as a whole, had been an interface between East and West since at least the 10th century, when it became part of Christian European civilisation. But with the onset of proto-industrialisation in the 15th and 16th centuries, the distance to the European core again began to broaden. Since then, the bulk of the eastern part of Europe has remained relegated to the periphery or at least the semi-periphery of the European economic system; only some parts (in particular, Bohemia) have occasionally been within the core (Wallerstein 1974, 99; Knutsen 2009, 69). The entire region has been part of the broad pattern of European civilisation and culture for at least a millennium, but 'slightly differently, less intensively, less fully' than the West, 'with the result that East European participation in the European experience was only partial' (Schöpflin 1993, 11). In political terms, the eastern part of Europe has been a transitional zone between the Western tradition of division of power and the Eastern tradition of concentration of power. This fault-line coincides with that between Western and Eastern Christianity; the Eastern tradition is at its strongest in territories once under Ottoman rule, and the Western tradition is strongest in areas marked by Lutheranism (*Figure 2.1*).

This dichotomy between the German and Habsburg empires and their Russian and Ottoman counterparts neatly coincides with the East/West fault-line between Central and Eastern Europe. The Western group shares traditions of Roman law, feudalism and relatively early national awakening;

the Eastern group has a Byzantine heritage and a lack of strong feudal traditions, enabling ancient local authority relationships such as kinship and clientelism to survive longer. This tendency is stronger in the South than in the North. The North/South dichotomy is reinforced by the strength and autonomy of political authority versus religious leadership. The North/South dimension separates the Protestant and substantially secularised states from the Counter-Reformation Catholic states, non-secularised Orthodox states, and the Muslim states (Berglund and Aarebrot 1997).

Figure 2.1: The main historical religious cleavage lines in Eastern Europe

If the peace settlements and establishment of new states were intended to ease communal tension, defuse national conflicts and, in general, set the

successor states on a path towards democracy and prosperity, this failed miserably. Even though national self-determination was straightforward enough as a concept, its practical application to the eastern part of Europe as of 1919 created an abundance of new intra-state and inter-state conflict dimensions. The nation states created were far from perfect, with borders designed to accommodate the victors and their protégés, and very little protection for the minorities, whose calls for cultural autonomy were considered seditious by the new ruling ethnic groups. Germans and Magyars in Czechoslovakia, Ukrainians, Germans and Jews in Poland, and Magyars, Jews and Ukrainians in Romania were among those who experienced harassment or even persecution (Tismăneanu 1993, 6).

In newly-independent Poland, Marshal Józef Piłsudski and the moderate left championed a multi-ethnic Polish state, but were not prepared to grant any significant amount of autonomy to the minorities, particularly not to some 5 million ethnic Ukrainians and 1.5–2 million Belorusians who lived in the Eastern borderlands, which nationalist Poles perceived as the bastion of Western Christianity. The failure to create a political state led to the eventual victory of Roman Dmowski's vision of a state founded on national kinship. President Beneš envisaged that Czechoslovakia would develop into an 'Eastern Switzerland', but others saw only a mini-replica of the Habsburg concoction – the difference being that Czechoslovakia, like the other successor states, lacked the Habsburg supra-national ideology which helped national minorities to feel included. And even for the ethnic groups that had not been content with that prospect; the imperial policy of ethnic favouritism had at least been more reversible than that of the successor states constructed around nation-building ethnic majorities.

The imperfect application of the nationality principle guaranteed that nationalism would remain the dominant issue in interwar Central and Eastern Europe. The widespread irredentism encouraged neighbouring kin states to intervene in defence of their kin across the border, and host states to attempt forceful integration of their minorities, or even to deny their very existence (Brubaker 1996, 5). Social policies were strongly influenced by attempts at ethnic assimilation, economic policies drifted towards economic nationalism and competitive striving for autarky, and attempts at land reform were primarily motivated by the glory of expropriating 'alien' landlords. Moreover, resilient irredentist tension pre-empted the development of regional political and economic cooperation, and enabled Germany and the USSR, the revisionist great powers, to exploit the situation to their own advantage.

Ethnic cleavages often coincided with religious ones. Multi-ethnic and multi-denominational Poland was, despite its secular constitution, to all intents and purposes a state of and for Roman Catholics, just as Romania and Bulgaria were states of and for Orthodox believers. In Yugoslavia, an Eastern Orthodox dynasty ruled over not only Catholic Croatia and Slovenia

but also over predominantly Muslim areas in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Southern Serbia. In Czechoslovakia, Slovak dissatisfaction was fuelled by the strong Catholic heritage, as opposed to the Protestant or secular outlook of the politically dominant Prague and Bohemian elites. Latvia was an amalgamation of three historical regions of which Livonia and Courland were mainly Protestant and Latgale mainly Catholic.

Party formation in immediate post-independence Central and Eastern Europe was co-determined by ethnicity, class, ideology and religion, but ethnicity was the defining cleavage, to which other cleavages – including left/right – were subordinated. Typical in interwar Central and Eastern Europe was the existence of parallel party systems for each ethnic group, a tendency which was reinforced by constitutional arrangements which had paved the way for extreme multi-partyism, particularly in the northern half of the region. As Derek Urwin has noted: '[w]e find in these imperfectly integrated European states with substantial minorities that either the ethnic cleavage coincided with other cleavages, especially religion, or that the linguistic groups generated complete party systems of their own. This is generally the case in Eastern Europe, examples being the Germans and Magyars in Czechoslovakia, and the Jews and Ukrainians in Poland. These sub-cultural party systems often included an agrarian party' (Urwin 1980, 195).

Indeed, agrarian parties were almost universally ethnically based (the Yugoslav Peasant Union was one exception), as were many of the liberal and conservative parties, and – for obvious reasons – the radical nationalist formations. But fragmentation according to ethnicity also applied to the left. Faced by the bewildering ethnic array of the Austro–Hungarian Empire, the social democrats had already abandoned statehood for ethnicity as organising by the 1890s. By the end of the First World War, the social democratic parties in the German, Habsburg and Russian empires had formally split into their national branches, and the disintegration continued within the newly independent states.

The level of ethnic compartmentalisation and political fragmentation was particularly high in the Northern tier of Eastern Europe. In Czechoslovakia, there were moderate socialist, agrarian, liberal, Christian democratic and conservative parties catering to almost every single ethnic group. By way of example, Poland had a total of 92 registered parties by 1925, about half of which were ethnically Polish; in Latvia, ethnic fragmentation resulted in separate party systems for Latvians, Russians, Germans, Poles and Jews, while regional fragmentation prompted the emergence of parochial Latgalian and Semgalian parties (cf. Crampton and Crampton 1996). In Yugoslavia, the party system was also structured along ethnic lines, with the National Radical Party being dominant in Serbia proper and the Democratic Party among Serbs elsewhere, and the Croat People's Peasant Party, the Slovene People's Party and the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation dominant

within their respective ethnic constituencies; over 40 parties participated in the November 1920 election for the constituent assembly.

The new states invariably opted for formally Western-style constitutions, albeit that Bulgaria and Romania were monarchies since the 19th century and Yugoslavia and Hungary emerged as kingdoms in 1918–19. The constitutional formats were conducive to extreme multi-partyism. The problem was that these new, modern political systems largely had no base of autonomous spheres and power-centres. The nation-builders inevitably had to turn to the state, and paradoxically the state thus came to perform or organise many of the functions of civil society. These attempts to create a civil society from above were not entirely unsuccessful, but they also resulted in a high degree of state control of social and political interaction. The process of enforced social modernisation formed the basis of the statism often mentioned as the main characteristic of interwar Central and Eastern Europe. And even when the state did succeed in building structures of civil society, it often proved unwilling to relinquish control (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2010).

The Balkans constituted a special case. Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania had been ruled by local proxies of the Ottoman Empire and when independence arrived by instalments beginning in 1817, they simply cut their remaining ties with Constantinople. Contrary to their tight hold at the state level, the Turks granted local government considerable autonomy. After conquering an area, the Ottomans preferred to rule through intermediaries. Under the *millet* system, the Turks eliminated any residual local secular government and replaced it with a religious authority of local origin, or at least of local confession, with civic responsibilities. In the Balkans, the Orthodox Church came to serve as the Ottomans' agent for regional and local government, and the Church became strongly identified with the Ottoman state. When nationalism began to emerge within the region, non-Orthodox groups saw the Orthodox Church as an obstacle to their ethnic and nationalist goals. Religion thus tended to reinforce ethnic differences, exacerbating social divisions and complicating political development (cf. Jelavich and Jelavich 1965; Jelavich 1983a; 1983b).

As the Ottomans had eradicated the local aristocracies, the Balkan elites were not landed but rather military and clerical, and relative latecomers to political power, heavily reliant on the state and on clientelist relationships (Grosjean 2011). Albania was even worse off than the other Balkan countries when it became autonomous in 1913, as it had only a rudimentary state administration; the country was in practice ruled by tribal structures dominated by the Muslim clans of the north and was reduced to an economic and political client of Italy.

As George Schöpflin has argued (1993, 24–25), the attempts by the weakly grounded semi-authoritarian or fully fledged dictatorships – in the Balkans as well as elsewhere in the eastern part of Europe – to build loyalty

to the state through the promotion of nationalism raised two problems: it left open or exacerbated the national issue, and nationalism as a political doctrine provided answers to very few questions of political organisation and the distribution of power.

> It created strong identities and a sense of belonging to the state for members of the dominant group, but said next to nothing about political structures, the resolution of conflicts of interests, the allocation of resources and values, participation and representation, i.e. the day-to-day problems of political, economic and social life. […] The comparative vagueness of the nationalist message, together with its emotional intensity, produced a somewhat contradictory result. East European nations in the interwar era reached a fairly high state of national consciousness of their political identities as members of a nation and as to those excluded as non-members. At one and the same time the implicit promise of equality and justice, encapsulated in the nationalist message, was left unfulfilled, with inevitable frustration and resentment at the social-political closures enforced against society by its rulers.

The institution of the government party operating in a pseudo-parliamentary system was common to all the post-independence polities of the successor states: the governing parties (or coalitions) were incarnations of the bureaucracies and the technocratic and military elites. Prime ministers tended to emerge from the administrative elite and then proceeded to 'elect' a parliament to serve them. This system was, however, hegemonic, not totalitarian, and parliamentary opposition both on the left and on the right – even radical opposition – was tolerated as long as it did not threaten the fundamental stability of the regime in power (Fischer-Galati 2002). Hungary was a case in point: the ruling Unity Party was an instrument of administration rather than an association of like-minded people, and as the electoral system – with suffrage restricted to less than 30 per cent and an open ballot in rural areas – virtually guaranteed it a permanent majority, most of the formal requirements of democratic rule could be observed. Likewise, Romania and Bulgaria had vocal parliaments, but their function was to legitimise the governments designated by the monarchs. In Poland and the Baltic countries, the representative systems also took on a façade character after an initial experiment in extreme multi-partyism.

The elites were socially and economically conservative, and the truly revolutionary force in the predominantly rural eastern part of Europe before, during and after the First World War was the peasantry – not the working class. There were only pockets of industrialisation in interwar Central and Eastern Europe – Bohemia, Silesia, Warsaw, Łódz, Riga, parts of Budapest, the Romanian oil district – and worker radicalism on issues other than wages and working conditions was ill-supported by the shallow roots of the working class (Stephens and Kümmel 2002).

In the final analysis, not much happened by way of social and political regeneration in Eastern Europe between the two world wars. Nationalism

and economic modernisation served as instruments of political mobilisation rather than as attempts at solving the problems of nation building and economic reform. Ethnic diversity remained very high, rural economic development did not fulfil its promises and expectations, and industrialisation remained largely confined to the industrial areas of the old empires. The democratic regimes of the early interwar period, faced with populist challenges of almost every conceivable ideological shade, responded by ever grander promises of a swift entry into the modern world. But as they did not have the capacity to come through on most of these promises, they harvested dissatisfaction and disillusionment. This created a climate that played readily into the hands of non-democratic forces, which went on to develop a modern form of clientelism rather than a true civil society.

The Resilience of Historical Cleavages

War and occupation was to leave a lasting imprint on the nation states of Central and Eastern Europe. The map of Europe was drawn and redrawn several times, first by Nazi Germany and subsequently by the victorious anti-Hitler coalition (Berglund and Aarebrot 1997). In parallel with territorial revisions on a vast scale, the new rulers opted for policies of population transfers, inspired by Nazi and Soviet examples of ethnic cleansing, but with an additional antecedent in the 1923 Lausanne settlement after the Graeco–Turkish War of 1919–21.[1] Between 1936 and 1956, an estimated 22 million people were transferred from, to or within Poland, equalling no less than 70 per cent of the population as of 1939 (Davies 1986, 82). Throughout Central Europe, these drastic policies went a long way towards creating ethnically almost homogenous states. However, the Balkan states remained strongly multi-ethnic, and in the Baltic republics multi-ethnicity was reinforced by emigration, deportations and Slavic immigration. The USSR itself, of course, remained a multi-ethnic empire, albeit that Moscow pursued its own nation- and state-building agenda through Russification and attempts to create a *homo sovieticus*, with a Balkan parallel in the proclamation of a 'Yugoslav' nationality.

The cleavage structure of the pre-war era had survived the Second World War intact, but with one important addition. War against and/or occupation by Nazi Germany had introduced a fascist/anti-fascist cleavage. By the end of the war few, if any, Central and East Europeans were openly professing fascist sympathies; the overwhelming majority of them now pledged allegiance to anti-fascism. The initial Soviet concept for the so-called popular democracies in liberated Central and Eastern Europe called for these countries to be governed by broad 'anti-fascist' coalitions with their roots in the national fronts that had been part and parcel of the underground

resistance against the German occupiers. The small, and in many cases insignificant, communist parties were cast for a major role within these anti-fascist coalitions. It was to the advantage of the communists and their allies, if part of the competition could be disqualified on real or trumped up charges of harbouring pro-fascist sympathies; and the Soviet authorities actually did not agree to local or national elections until the old ruling elites and their potential followers had been barred from taking part in the electoral process (Berglund and Ekman 2010).

The election results were in all likelihood a source of great concern to Moscow. Polling 38 per cent of the vote in the general elections in Czechoslovakia in May 1946, the local communists had done very well, particularly considering that this gave them, and their long-time social democratic coalition partner, a parliamentary majority (Broklová 1995). But this was all there was by way of reassuring electoral reports for Moscow.

In the Hungarian general elections of November 1945, almost two-thirds of the voters had come out in favour of the Smallholders Party (Hellén 1996); in Poland, the Polish Peasant Party of Stanisław Mikołajczyk had apparently done considerably better than officially reported in the rigged plebiscite of November 1946 and the even more tightly controlled elections in February 1947 (Grzybowski 1994); in Bulgaria, the communist-dominated Patriotic Front had carried the general elections of November 1945 due to the boycott of several non-communist parties, including the majority faction of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union of Nikola Petkov, which had unsuccessfully called upon the Allied Control Commission to supervise the election carefully so as to avoid fraudulent practices (Fowkes 1995); and in Romania, it took yet another openly fraudulent election to provide the communists and their allies with a majority in the 1946 parliament (Dellenbrant 1994).

These elections were followed by other elections which reduced the space for political pluralism until it had been eliminated altogether. The social democrats were forced to merge with the communists, and the non-socialist parties were either infiltrated by the communists or banned. Many of the popular democracies formally preserved the multi-party format, but the surviving non-communist parties were permanent allies of the ruling Marxist-Leninist parties, totally reconciled with operating within the framework of the fundamental principles of the world communist movement. These principles included unconditional acceptance of the leading role of the Marxist-Leninist party, the consistent application of the principle of democratic centralism with its distinctly authoritarian components, and the unwavering support of the notion of eternal friendship and alliance with the Soviet Union (Berglund and Dellenbrant 1994).

The Communist Legacy

Within a few short years, the popular democracies of Central and Eastern Europe had been transformed into mere carbon copies of the Soviet political system. The party space was dominated by one single force and the dominant Marxist-Leninist force was itself constrained by the Soviet mentor. The social and economic programme on which the new regimes embarked was one of radical modernisation, inspired by the Soviet crash programme for industrialisation of the 1920s and 1930s. The means of production were socialised; the agricultural sector was collectivised and a number of gigantic industrial projects – like the Nowa Huta steelworks in Poland – were initiated throughout the Soviet bloc. The long-term consequences were manifold. The traditional middle class and rural constituencies of the liberal, conservative and agrarian parties were wiped out and the traditional working class and urban constituencies of the left-wing parties were substantially strengthened; the countryside was impoverished and the role of traditional religious values was sharply reduced; illiteracy was wiped out or sharply reduced; the average level of education jumped upwards as dramatically as industrial output and the standard of living.

Several inferences may be drawn on the basis of the socioeconomic indicators in Table 2.1. It is readily seen that communist Central and Eastern Europe trails behind the industrial nations of the West. The East European countries rarely come out at the very top of the list of socioeconomic indicators and they seldom surpass West Germany, which entered the post-war era in a state of devastation and destruction, much like that of Central and Eastern Europe. Hence, when the East European countries actually rank at the top of the list, it is not necessarily an indicator that they are ahead of Western Europe, the United States and the United Kingdom. The large share of industrial workers in the Hungarian labour force in 1978 (58 per cent) and the huge industrial output in the GDR, Bulgaria and Romania as of 1978 (62, 55 and 58 per cent of the GDP, respectively) testify to rapid social transformation and economic development, particularly compared to pre-war conditions (Hellén 1996) and also compared to the first decades of the post-war era. The data also serve as a reminder that Central and Eastern Europe did not provide fertile ground for what is sometimes referred to as the post-industrial society, with its emphasis on service production and small-scale enterprises.

By the end of the 1980s, Central and Eastern Europe was closer to Western Europe than ever before in terms of modernity, but with a class structure marked by the equalizing impact of almost 50 years of 'real socialism' (Wessels and Klingemann 1994). As indicated by Table 2.1, tremendous socioeconomic changes took place under communism, mainly in favour of industry to the detriment of the agricultural sector. An almost

equally important change, which is not shown in the table, is the change in life-style in rural areas due to collectivisation. Briefly, collectivisation entailed the introduction of an industrial life-style for agricultural workers. In sum, many of the advantages of a modern and urban organisation of labour, such as fixed working hours, regulated holiday periods, pensions and fixed wages, were introduced without consideration for anything like cost-benefit analysis.

Table 2.1: Socioeconomic indicators for Central and Eastern Europe

	Poland	*CSSR*	*Hungary*	*GDR*	*Bulgaria*	*Romania*	*Albania*	*FRG*	*Highest*
Urban pop. % in 100,000+ cities									
1950	23	14	38	20	9	10	0	48	71 UK
1960	27	14	22	21	14	16	8	51	72 UK
1976	20	17	28	24	24	25	8	35	72 US
Labour force, % in industry									
1960	29	46	35	48	25	21	18	48	48 FRG
1977	38	49	58	51	38	31	24	48	58 Hun
GDP, % in industry									
1960	51	65	58	–	–	–	–	54	56 CSSR
1978	52	60	47	62	55	58	–	42	62 GDR
GDP, % in agriculture									
1960	23	13	20	–	–	–	–	6	n/m
1978	16	9	15	10	18	15	–	3	18 Bulg
Literacy rate, %									
1960	98	99	98	99	85	99	–	99	100
1970	98	n/a	99	99	91	98	-	99	100
Telephones per 1,000 pop.									
1966	41	105	56	75	–	–	–	108	481 US
1975	76	177	100	150	88	56	–	318	697 US
Newspaper circ. per 1,000 pop.									
1960	145	236	143	456	182	147	47	307	477 Swe
1975	248	300	233	463	232	129	46	312	572 Swe
TV receivers per 1,000 pop.									
1965	66	149	81	188	23	26	1	193	362 US
1975	180	249	223	302	173	121	2	307	571 US

Note: Dates may be approximate. The Romanian data on urbanisation were gathered in 1971 and not in 1976 and the East German data on newspaper circulation were collected in 1965 rather than 1960. The Bulgarian data on literacy were gathered in 1965 rather than 1960 and the Romanian and Albanian data on newspaper circulation are from 1974 and 1965 respectively.

Sources: Taylor and Hudson, (1972), Taylor and Jodice (1983a, 1983b).

Another feature of communist policies was a marked increase in investment in education on all levels, particularly in technical fields. This

produced large middle classes, but not middle classes structured in the same way as in Western Europe. Income distribution was weakly, or not at all, linked to education. Nor was political and social stratification only a matter of education. Who belonged to the ruling class, the so-called *nomenklatura*, was defined by the ruling party and in terms of access to this party. But to the extent that education can be used as an indicator of modernity, the relative size of the population with a middle-class education was higher than ever before in the late 1980s. This is clearly a legacy of communist rule. The new middle classes could have provided the basis for the establishment of a civil society, but this kind of pluralism was also anathema to the ruling communist parties. Eastern Europe had its fair share of supposedly independent civil society organisations, but they were monitored, controlled and infiltrated by the communist regimes to the point that they hardly qualified as non-governmental organisations (Linz and Stepan 1996). Only Poland came out of the 1980s with a civil society of significance, but this was not primarily the work of the new middle classes. It was rather the product of a movement with deep roots in the Catholic Chrurch – the traditional bearer of Polish nationalism.

The social transformation on which the communist regimes embarked called for a strong government presence; and there is indeed a case to be made for the notion that the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe had state building as a top level priority (Berglund and Aarebrot 1997). The concept of a liberal state with the emphasis on individual rights and freedoms and rule of law was obviously alien to the communist leaders, but they definitely needed strong and efficient state machinery capable of levying taxes, mobilising the masses and supervising the individuals. Nation building or identity politics was also of obvious importance for the leaders of communist Central and Eastern Europe, particularly for the leaders of countries affected by large-scale border changes and population transfers. But identity politics in many ways represented a Pandora's Box of horrors and had to be handled with great care. The territorial revisions and population transfers had, after all, been initiated by the Soviet Union; and, to the extent that the Soviet Union did not itself benefit from the changes, the beneficiary was a neighbouring socialist country also aligned with the Soviet Union.

The 40 years of communism in Central and Eastern Europe included successive waves of political and economic liberalisation, but – with Poland and Hungary as the two major exceptions – the fundamental features of the Marxist-Leninist system remained intact until the very end. The first (almost) free parliamentary elections in Poland in June 1989 and the gradual return to genuine political pluralism in Hungary in the late 1980s set a dangerous precedent for the hibernating Stalinist and neo-Stalinist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and served as a source of inspiration for dissidents throughout the region. Marxist-Leninist tradition would have

called for Soviet intervention sooner rather than later. Stalin would not have condoned free elections and the return to genuine political pluralism anywhere within the Soviet bloc, nor would Khrushchev, nor Brezhnev. But Gorbachev was willing to take a chance on reform communism and thus paved the way for the breakdown of Soviet-style communism throughout the entire region. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe found themselves thrust into their third experiment in democracy in the 20th century.

Towards Democracy and European Integration

The collapse of communism and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union opened up the region for political pluralism once again. Sympathizers of the interwar parties – at home or in exile – were quick to take advantage of this opportunity to carve out a political niche for their preferred parties. But the thus resuscitated parties were ill prepared for the fluid socioeconomic structure in post-communist Eastern Europe. The situation was particularly precarious for the agrarian parties, whose constituency had been wiped out by collectivisation. The workers in the large-scale agricultural industries that had replaced private farming were not necessarily thrilled by the prospect of giving up their jobs and life style. The old-style social democratic parties also failed dismally at the polls. The Czech Social Democratic Party is in fact the only social democratic party of significance in the region to have ideological and organisational ties to the interwar era and beyond.

Even so, there is no shortage of social democratic or socialist parties in contemporary Eastern Europe. This is the preferred party label of the former ruling communist parties. They were initially at the very centre of a new divide – communists versus anti-communists. It was partly a classical struggle for power. The old communist power elite wanted to keep as much as possible of its privileged position, while the new power elite set out to replace it. But there was also a moral dimension attached to it. The region had just come out of a period of half a century or more of totalitarian rule, accompanied by violation of human and civil rights, corruption of the system of justice and election fraud; and it was generally felt that the perpetrators of these and other crimes should be brought to justice. Some anti-communist formations went one step further and called for full scale lustration of public administration. But with the notable exception of Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), this call for lustration did not make a lasting impression on the political system and, in fact, the former communist parties were accepted as legitimate contenders for political power within the political system, once they had pledged themselves to parliamentary democracy. This policy of inclusion rather than

exclusion was endorsed not only by the new political elites but also by the voters. In a similar vein, it may be noted that the reformed communist parties turned out to be extremely flexible. Many of them became champions of the market ecomomy and some of them have campaigned on distinctly liberal platforms. Left/right may be a meaningful distinction in Eastern Europe but it clearly does not carry the same connotations as in Western Europe (Szelényi and Szelényi 1995).

Nationalism remained on the agenda. It was a particularly salient issue in the former Soviet republics that were now at liberty to pursue their state and nation building projects as they saw fit. But it was also a dominant issue in the Yugoslav and Czechoslovak successor states. With the dissolution of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s, a new definition of nationhood was instated. This new definition is very similar to the ideals of the nation-state found in countries that have retained a constant concept of nationhood across regimes throughout the 20th century. This is brought out in the official Czechoslovak, Czech and Slovak statistics on the ethnic composition of Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia over time (*Table 2.2*).

In the Czechoslovak censuses of 1921 and 1930, the core group was widely defined as people of 'Czechoslovak' nationality. Some 65 per cent of the population were considered as belonging to the national core of this artificial nation state. The minorities – that is, those who were not considered 'Czechechoslovak' – included Germans, Poles, Ruthenes, Magyars and Jews. The nationalities excluded from the core thus consisted of Slavic as well as non-Slavic speakers, and one excluded group, the Jews, was not linguistically defined at all. Gypsies were not even listed. The Czechoslovak core population included Czechs, Moravians and Slovaks. The 1991 censuses list Czechs and Slovaks as the largest groups of the Czech and Slovak republics respectively. The definition of the core group is apparently much narrower now, but with more than 80 per cent of the national grand totals, these narrowly defined majority groups nevertheless account for considerably more than the 65 per cent reported for the Czechoslovak nationality in the censuses of 1921 and 1930. Similar observations can be made upon comparing the official statistics of Yugoslavia in the interwar period with early censuses in the successor states. The old Serbo-Croat nationality has been discarded.

In this context, Estonia, Latvia, and maybe Macedonia, stand out as deviant cases. Until the early 1990s, they were countries with decreasing ethnic homogeneity, but with a linguistically defined, and thus limited, definition of nationhood that has remained stable across previous regimes. The large minority groups – in Estonia and Latvia: a Russian diaspora population; in Macedonia: a potentially irredentist Albanian minority – have made post-communist nation building difficult, but by no means impossible. Estonia and Latvia have reversed the negative demographic trends and

Macedonia seems to have worked out an interethnic power sharing arrangement (see Chapter 4–5 and 18).

Table 2.2 classifies the Central and East European countries into four groups, using as a measure of ethnic homogeneity the percentage of the population reported as belonging to the core, or majority, population. It should be noted that the main purpose of the table is classification of countries. Estimates in terms of percentages have only been included where relatively reliable international sources are available.

Table 2.2: Ratings of ethnic homogeneity in terms of the relative size of the regime-proclaimed majority nationality (%)

			Censuses [1]		
	Country	*Majority Population*	*1920*	*1930*	*1993*
Stable approximate nation states: stable definition of the majority nationality; large majorities	Lithuania	Lithuanians	81_{1923}		80_{1992}
	Hungary	Magyar		97_{1992}	
	Bulgaria[2]	Bulgarians	83	87_{1934}	85 – 90
Newer approximate nation-states: stable definition of the majority nationality, large majorities in the early 1990s but smaller majorities in the interwar era	Poland[3]	Poles	70	70	99
	Romania	Romanians		72	89
Recent approximate nation-states: devolved from dissolved 'Mini-Empires', large or medium-large majorities in the early 1990s	Czechoslovakia	'Czechoslovaks'	66_{1921}	67	
	The Czech Rep.	Czechs			81
	Slovakia	Slovaks			86
	Yugoslavia	'Serbo-Croats'	74_{1921}	77_{1931}	
	Serbia	Serbs			80_{1991}
	Slovenia	Slovenes			99_{1991}
	Croatia	Croats			78_{1991}
Former approximate nation states with a decreasing majority population until the early 1990s	Estonia	Estonians		86_{1934}	62_{1992}
	Latvia	Latvians		77_{1935}	53
	Macedonia	Macedonians			65_{1991}

Notes: (1) The censuses of the interwar period are generally unreliable in their estimates of the size of ethnic minorities. The figures are, nevertheless, interesting as expressions of perceived size of regime proclaimed core populations. (2) The 1993 Bulgarian census data suggests that ethnic minorities account for more than 10 per cent of the population. (3) The Polish interwar estimates are highly questionable. Polish nationality was at last partly determined by the ability of the respondent to understand the census-taker when addressed in Polish.

Sources: Based on Berglund and Aarebrot (1997, 161) and data from Crampton and Crampton (1996).

The European house that emerged in the aftermath of the breakdown of communist totalitarianism had more rooms in it than the old and familiar Cold War European building of states. In this sense, the unification of

Germany in October 1991 was unique. All the other recent border changes in Central and Eastern Europe have been by-products not of amalgamation but of secession and/or breakdown. Sometimes this process resulted in new, ethnically homogeneous entities – sometimes it did not. The Czech and Slovak republics are clearly more homogeneous than the federal Czechoslovak republic from which they seceded. Due to a continuous and systematic influx of ethnic Russians into the Baltic region, Estonia and Latvia came out of the Soviet Union with much more by way of ethnic diversity than before. On the whole, however, contemporary Central and Eastern Europe stands out as distinctly more homogeneous than its interwar counterpart.

In the early 1990s, the prevailing mood in Eastern Europe was generally upbeat and strongly in favour of reintegration with the West. Democracy and parliamentarism was reinstated and Moscow's former allies in the region lined up for membership negotiations with NATO and the EU. With the notable exception of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the former Soviet republics were only partially affected by this wave of democratisation. Most of them initiated a process of democratisation featuring political pluralism and competitive elections, but turned into hybrid regimes locked in transition between democracy and authoritarianism. Ukraina and Georgia are included in this book by virtue of their recent attempts to break out of this mould and forge close relations with the West. Further West the transition to democracy was a success story. The 12 East European EU member (10) or candidate (2) countries are certified democracies in the sense that they live up to EU democratic standards. Countries like Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia are already deeply embedded in EU structures and will have to pass the same democratic litmus test before being invited to join the Union as full members.

This is not to say that the new democracies of Eastern Europe owe their democratic status to the EU. The point we want to make is that the prospect of EU membership and the active involvement of the EU in the process of democratisation made a difference (Berglund et al. 2009). The Copenhagen criteria of 1993 specified the democracy requirements at some length. New member states should not only have free and fair elections with all which that entails; they should also rest on a foundation of the rule of law and respect for human rights. Respect for and protection of national minorities was mentioned as a fourth criterion. The drawn out negotiation process between the European Commission and the candidate member countries, the so called *acquis communautaire*, was designed to bring the legal framework of the new arrivals up to EU standards. The new democracies of Eastern Europe thus ended up at the receiving end of a massive cultural transfer of Western principles of good governance. But this is a special treatment available only for potential member countries and beyond reach for countries such as Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, currently enrolled in the

EU Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

The EU has not only created a divide between in- and out-group countries in Eastern Europe. It has also drawn Eastern Europe into the ongoing conflict about European integration in general and the EU in particular. The EU friendly voices still dominate the East European discourse, but Euroscepticism is becoming more and more widespread (Mudde 2005). It is a complex phenomenon with a touch of centre/periphery to it, but also with elements of nationalism and – in some cases – xenophobia. The anti-Turkish sentiments in Austria, Germany and France have struck a chord among East European nationalists keen on preserving the EU as Union of Christian countries.

Conclusion

The turbulent and dramatic political history of Eastern Europe has brought many changes. The collapse of the empires paved the way for a host of new states. Many of them are still there, though not necessarily within the same borders as in 1918. Two of them – Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia – were to break up into half a dozen new nation states in the early 1990s. Three of them – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 and reappeared as independent states in 1990. The region has been at the very centre of two world wars; it has been exposed to foreign occupation and domination and – in some cases – recurrent waves of ethnic cleansing. The totalitarian experience was not quite over until communism broke down in 1989–90; and the most recent episodes of ethnic cleansing in the Yugoslav wars of independence are not even that far removed.

Nationalism – also in its milder forms – clearly remains a driving force in the region. It was a centrifugal political force in political history of the multi-ethnic empires. It was the dominant force of interwar Europe; it survived communism with a vengeance and restructured post-communist Europe. State and nation building remains a top-level priority throughout the region from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The fault-line between Western and Eastern Christianity, separating the Western and Eastern empires, also makes its presence felt over time (see *Figure 2.1*). It is at any rate tempting to attribute the importance attached to clientelism and kinship structures in Orthodox countries to their Byzantine heritage. Countries on the Western side of this fault-line have a different, more modern, political culture less conducive to corruption.

Communism represents only a small part of the long history of Eastern Europe, but it was nevertheless to leave a lasting impression. It served as an agent of modernisation in a region thus far only partially industrialised. Czechoslovakia had been a leading industrial nation already before the Second World War, but East of Bohemia and Moravia there were only

pockets of industrialisation in interwar Central and Eastern Europe in and around cities like Warsaw, Łódz, Riga, and Budapest, and in the Romanian oil district. The communist rulers set out to catch up with the West and embarked on an extensive programme of industrialisation. It was based on a Soviet blue print and had a devastating impact on the traditional social structure. Private farming was wiped out and the vast majority of peasants enrolled in large-scale agricultural industries. This undermined the basis for the once well defined urban/rural cleavage in Eastern Europe. The class structure that emerged was fuzzy. There were workers and – as time went by – more and more people with a higher education and a 'middle class' standard of living (*see Table 2.1*); and it is hardly surprising that post-communist parties have found it difficult to carve out stable niches of electoral support in this fluid socioeconomic setting.

The parties in comtemporary Eastern Europe often describe themselves referring to the well known European party families – as socialist, conservative or liberal – and many of them are part of a corresponding faction of the European Parliament. This suggests that the same cleavages might be operative across the continent. The country-specific chapters will tell us to what extent this is true.

First, however, we will dwell at some length one of our key concepts – political cleavages. This term is often reserved for fundamental long-lasting divisions. This is why we describe ethnicity and religion as cleavages, and the tensions between communists and anti-communists in the early 1990s as a transient issue divide. The following chapter sets out to put the cleavage concept into a broad theoretical context.

NOTES

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1. The peace settlement, which replaced the 1920 Peace Treaty of Sévres, gave Turkey all of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace. To prevent any future disputes, it also called for a compulsory population exchange; some 1.3 million Greeks and some 380,000 Turks were forced to emigrate (Jelavich 1983a, 172).

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