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# Political Transition Processes in Central and Eastern Europe

*Helga A. Welsh*

What has been termed the “third wave”<sup>1</sup> of democratization culminated in the unexpected,<sup>2</sup> domino-effect fall of Communist political regimes in the central and eastern European countries and the Soviet Union in 1989 and 1991.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of these extraordinary events much scholarly attention initially focused on the various causes of regime change in the former Soviet bloc. Other studies placed major emphasis on the prerequisites of democratization: socioeconomic development and the roles of civil society and political culture.<sup>4</sup> More recently, the consequences of regime change<sup>5</sup> and the comparability of regime transitions in eastern Europe to other regions of the world have been given greater attention.<sup>6</sup>

As Przeworski points out, studies on regime transitions can be loosely grouped into two categories, macro-oriented studies which focus on the objective conditions of regime transformation and studies that concentrate on political strategies and choices.<sup>7</sup> This article falls into the second category.

One of the underlying assumptions of much of the literature on transitions has been that the mode with which new regimes are created has important implications for the stability of the newly emerging polyarchies. Modes of transition are usually distinguished according to the process through which incumbents are replaced by opposition forces. Roughly, one can differentiate between transitions from above (transformation/transaction/reform), transitions from below (replacement/breakdown/rupture), and transitions where regime and opposition play a roughly equal role in system transformation (transplacement/extrication).<sup>8</sup> Dahl has argued that a “disproportionately large number of the stable-high-consensus polyarchies seem to have come about . . . by peaceful evolution.”<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, Karl and Schmitter suggest that the “mode of transition from autocratic rule is a principal determinant of whether democracy will emerge.”<sup>10</sup> They argue that the most successful transitions are implemented by pact or imposition in which the incumbent rulers remain at least partly in control of political development and contrast them to transition by reform or revolution. They caution, however, that the experiences in central and eastern Europe might suggest different findings with regard to the utility of modes of transitions and emphasize that the different classifications are ideal types.

Using the example of central and eastern Europe, this article approaches the study of transitions by deemphasizing the role of modes of transition and instead emphasizing the changing modes of conflict resolution in the transition process from authoritarian regimes to polyarchies. I argue that, independent of the mode of transition, the concept of bargaining is crucial in understanding transition processes. The argument is based on the assumption that the “bargainers need to reach some settlement but, at the same time, wish to settle on terms favorable to themselves.”<sup>11</sup> Joint decision making can take a variety of forms across national

settings, but, as Przeworski puts it, "democracy cannot be dictated; it emerges from bargaining."<sup>12</sup> The absence or failure of bargaining efforts may impede progress toward the emergence and consolidation of polyarchic political systems.

The emphasis on different negotiation patterns also contributes to a better understanding of the transition process. It allows us to distinguish between different stages in the transition process without having to rely solely on particular events such as founding elections. I propose that different stages in the transition process are defined by different modes of conflict resolution. In this approach, the successful transition process toward democratic political rule involves three stages. First, liberalization of the authoritarian regime is accompanied by declines in the use of command and imposition as the prevailing modes of conflict resolution. Second, as the transition proceeds to extrication from the old regime and institutionalization of a new political system, bargaining and compromise emerge as the key features in decision making. Finally, consolidation of the transition is distinguished by the increasing dominance of competition and cooperation as the prevailing means of conflict resolution.

First, I summarize some of the major characteristics of transition periods. The second section proposes a framework for analyzing regime transformations by looking at changing modes of conflict resolution. The third section analyzes similarities and differences in transitions by outlining negotiation patterns in the countries of central and eastern Europe. I conclude by suggesting that the transition process has entered a new stage once bargaining is replaced by competition as the prevailing mode of conflict resolution.

## **Transitions**

**Problems of Definition** The interval between an authoritarian political regime and a democratic one is commonly referred to as the transition period. The beginning is marked by the dissolution of the authoritarian regime, which often is identified with first signs of mass mobilization, the end by the establishment of a new form of government that gains legitimacy through democratic elections.<sup>13</sup> It is reasonable to assert that transitions have beginnings and that they must have ends, but their fluidity makes clear demarcation difficult.

However, the dissolution of an authoritarian regime often starts well before signs of dissatisfaction manifest themselves publicly, and the election of a new government is not the end of the transition period. Emphasis on the date of the first democratic election after a period of authoritarian rule oversimplifies the transformation of political systems and reduces it to the act of voting and to the transfer of power at the central level. Regime change, however, involves changes at many other levels of the political system—for example, at regional and local levels—and in decision-making procedures.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, the demarcation of stages within the transition process is not new, but operationalization of the different categories is difficult. Rustow, for example, distinguished three phases in the transition process. His preparatory phase features the polarization of the main political actors, followed by a decision phase in which some crucial elements of democratic procedure are institutionalized. The final phase of a transition is the period during which politicians and the electorate are "habituated" to the new political rules.<sup>15</sup>

The most common distinction is made between liberalization and democratization. Whereas liberalization is a controlled opening of the political space, democratization—that is, extrication from the authoritarian regime and constitution of a democratic one—is a process that subjects different interests to competition, that institutionalizes uncertainty.<sup>16</sup>

Just as it is difficult to outline the exact time frame for periods of transition, it is difficult to describe different modes of transition. Indeed, the confusion about how one should label the different transition modes in eastern Europe is great and contributes significantly to the general problem of concept misformation in political science. The confusion relates in particular to the use of the term revolution in describing the developments in central and eastern Europe. The goal of transforming the political order is central to most definitions of revolutions; however, there might be considerable discrepancies between the original intent and the final political outcome of mass action.

**Characteristics of the Transition** While there are individual, national variations with regard to the speed, methods, and players involved in transitions, they have a number of features in common.

First, transition periods are characterized by the need to address certain crucial issues under rather urgent time constraints. For example, institutional arrangements regarding the future distribution of power and the requirements for “founding elections” command immediate action.<sup>17</sup> Thus, transition periods are times of accelerated change. After long periods during which major political, social, and economic changes have been postponed or blocked, a growing impatience of the population arises which intensifies the apparent need for change.<sup>18</sup> In central and eastern Europe, this impatience became evident in the pressure to schedule “founding” elections at times when most opposition forces hardly had time to organize and overcome the Communist Party’s monopoly of access to and distribution of information. From the very beginning it is imperative to institutionalize change since dissatisfaction and nostalgia for certain aspects of the old regime may slow down the process of reform and enhance political polarization. Some of the major issues in the process of transition are addressed in Table 1.

Second, transition periods are characterized by great uncertainty with regard to both the process and the results. During a transition no one knows who will win or lose in both the distribution of political and economic power and personal well-being. In addition, even if there are agreements on the goals of economic and political transformation, the processes leading to the achievement of these goals vary considerably. Once initial euphoria has subsided, it becomes clear that the prospects for achieving and sustaining polyarchy are different among countries in the region. Disturbing signs of governmental instability, stalemates in decision making, the emergence of violent protests, and war involving different ethnic groups, as in the former Yugoslavia, reinforce the notion that the process and the outcome of transitions from different forms of authoritarianism are not linear and are often marred by insecurity and uncertainty. In other words, the collapse of authoritarian rule may result in a variety of outcomes.<sup>19</sup>

Third, previous authoritarian structures are altered during a transition period by the rapidly expanding range of political actors and the need for political communication among them. Typically, there is consensus on some goals but discord on methods and procedures.

**Table 1** Transition Processes in Central and Eastern Europe: Main Issues of Conflict Resolution

Political:

- reform of electoral system
- reform of structure of government (including issues of decentralization)
- selection of new political elite
- development of institutions of interest articulation and interest aggregation (e.g., political parties, interest groups)
- constitution writing
- prosecution and purge of communist party officials and members of security apparatus
- restitution of past injustices
- reform of media sector

Economic:

- macroeconomic stabilization (e.g., reform of monetary and fiscal policies)
- price reform (e.g., price liberalization, currency convertibility)
- structural reform (e.g., privatization, trade liberalization)
- institutional reform (e.g., reform of legal and banking systems)
- educational reform (e.g., management training)

In 1989, restrictions on political activities for nonsanctioned political groups and organizations ceased to exist and resulted in the resurrection of civil society. The institutionalization of political parties and movements was a dialectical process: on the one hand, a highly diversified political landscape emerged; on the other hand, broad anticommunist sentiment united the opposition.<sup>20</sup>

Fourth, transitions are elite-centered. Independent of whether regime change has been initiated from above by political elites or from below by the masses, the terms of transitions are settled by emerging elites, not by the public.<sup>21</sup> Mass mobilization is short-lived; demobilization and retreat to the private sphere follow.<sup>22</sup> In central and eastern Europe, with its long history of intellectual dissidents and politicians, the gap between the political elite and the masses reinforced disillusionment and distance between the rulers and the ruled. In addition, as Burton, Gunther, and Higley have pointed out, the extent of structural integration at the level of communication and influence and value consensus regarding the mode of political conduct are crucially important once the transition has ended and the process of consolidation begins.<sup>23</sup>

Last but not least, transitions involve bargaining. Whereas popular mobilization often creates the conditions for the extrication from authoritarian regimes, in "the second phase of the redemocratization process elite bargaining and accords become the key."<sup>24</sup> This sequence seems to hold true even in cases where negotiation has been previously neglected. For example, it is often assumed that revolutionary transitions lack the element of negotiation; one could argue the same for externally imposed transitions. These assumptions

apply only if one limits the concept of negotiation to “old” versus “new” political forces. However, negotiations may take a variety of forms depending on the political environment.

In summary, periods of transition are characterized by a number of specific features which aim at both change and consolidation. These features help us understand the complexities and challenges of transition but are also instructive in understanding the character of the process. This article addresses one particular issue of transition, conflict resolution.

### **Transitions and Conflict Resolution**

Generally, we distinguish among three major means of conflict resolution: command and imposition, bargaining and compromise, and competition and cooperation. Although these modes are clearly present in all political systems, their relative significance varies considerably. In authoritarian political systems conflict resolution is based largely upon methods of command and imposition that take the form of rule by decree, force, or exclusion and the mutual denial of legitimacy. Alternately, competition, accompanied by cooperation, lies at the heart of pluralist politics.<sup>25</sup>

Recent transition periods suggest that the end of extrication and the institutionalization of polyarchy are delimited by the dramatic decline of command and imposition and the increase in bargaining and compromise; the introduction of democracy is as much a matter of procedure as it is a matter of substance. Bargaining and compromise are not entirely absent in authoritarian regimes; even in the past they have been recognized as increasingly important features in authoritarian political systems. For example, corporatist strategies involving coalitions of special interest groups within the state where access to participation is state-controlled are a common feature of left- and right-wing authoritarian regimes.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in pluralist political systems competition is moderated by cooperation which promotes persistent bargaining and compromise. While bargaining in authoritarian regimes is state-initiated and state-controlled and aims at the protection and consolidation of power, bargaining in pluralist political systems is competitive, diverse, but grounded in a political climate that nurtures mutual trust and cooperation, which are seen as important preconditions of the voluntary distribution and regularized transfer of power. In contrast, bargaining in times of transition is aimed at the peaceful passage of power; it is born out of necessity, and the number of actors as well as the issues under discussion is limited.

**Bargaining in Central and Eastern Europe** Bargaining, negotiations aimed at reaching compromises at the greatest advantage to each participating party, can take a variety of forms (including ad hoc meetings) but more often takes place in an institutionalized setting. In central and eastern Europe, the stage of “bargaining and compromise” was characterized by three particular features: the so-called round table, broad-based (maximum-winning) coalition governments, and “conglomerate” parties.

One specific feature of the transitions in central and eastern Europe was the emergence of round tables in which representatives of the old Communist political system discussed the terms of transition with representatives of the opposition. In some countries, members of political and social organizations who were closely aligned with the ruling Communist Party participated in the negotiations. In East Germany and Poland the mediating role of the

churches was evident in their continuous role in the round table negotiations; in Hungary a number of independent observers, including church personalities, also attended some of the round table negotiations.

The main goal of the round tables was similar in all countries: to set the terms for the creation of a reformed or new political system. Decisions regarding dates and terms of democratic elections, changes in the constitution (for example, deletion of the provisions that guaranteed the leading role of the Communist Party),<sup>27</sup> and the dismantling of the forces of domestic suppression (state security, workers' militia) had to be made. Finally, round tables led to or were responsible for the choice of transitional governments. Because it was commonly understood that central and eastern Europe had to undergo dual transitions that encompassed political and economic institutions, both items were discussed. However, in the end the results of the round table discussions were confined largely to the political realm.<sup>28</sup> In the context of the literature on negotiation, this type of bargaining is generally described as integrative: there are two major parties and several issues to be negotiated, the negotiation process runs through stages, the parties' interests are not clearly defined at the beginning of the negotiations, and conflict is never absent.<sup>29</sup>

Round table negotiations combined public with secret negotiations, and one of their trademarks was the exclusion of public discourse. In all cases, there was a high level of mutual dependence on the bargaining relationship; round table negotiations were entered into out of political and economic necessity. In Poland, urgent and drastic economic reforms could no longer be postponed; in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria large segments of the public had become highly politicized and demanded major political and economic reforms. The opposition saw the round table arrangements as a way to control the incumbent government, to raise the visibility of opposition forces since, with the exception of Solidarity in Poland, the opposition had always been fragmented, rather elitist, and thus isolated from the public at large, and to initiate the process of democratization. The mandate of the round table representatives was self-imposed and exclusive, and its legitimacy was indeterminate since it was not based on elections.

With the exception of Hungary and Bulgaria, one overriding feature of round table negotiations involved power-sharing, attempts to reconcile the past division between "us" and "them," and their aim was to make compromises acceptable to both sides. These negotiations opened up channels of political participation for the hitherto excluded opposition groups and allowed outgoing administrations to "save face." Power-sharing emerged because the Communists were no longer able to govern without the active participation and support of oppositional forces. For a variety of reasons, the opposition in Hungary and in Bulgaria (until December 1990) rejected formal power-sharing arrangements: the sense of defeat of the Communists was less acute in these two countries, and the inability of the Communists to continue their rule independent of other political forces had to be further exposed.

Although the methods and goals of power-sharing were similar across national settings, the time frames during which round tables were active, the particular political environments, and the resulting bargaining strengths of the parties varied to a fair degree. Bargaining schemes differed with regard to tactics and the perceived power of the negotiating partner. Generally, loss of authority by the incumbent political parties continued during the negotiations, and the perception of bargaining power shifted from the incumbents to the

opposition forces. The ongoing reassessment of bargaining strength had important implications for the roles of opposition groups which evolved throughout the period of negotiations.<sup>30</sup>

During this time, substantial differences in institutional settings—the length of negotiations, the range of participants, and the number of meetings—were also evident. In Hungary, fifty main delegates and more than 500 experts came together in two main committees, twelve subcommittees, and two supplementary committees and negotiated in roughly 1,000 documented meetings or talks over a period of three months.<sup>31</sup> In East Germany, the “Central Round Table” met sixteen times from the beginning of December 1989 to the middle of March 1990. In addition, there were sixteen working committees, as well as a steering committee and numerous smaller ad hoc committees; altogether 276 members and advisers took part in the activities of the “Central Round Table.”<sup>32</sup> In Romania, however, the so-called round table negotiations encompassed only two sessions (see Table 2).

In central and eastern Europe, roughly four forms of negotiation emerged. They emphasize different aspects of the process but are not mutually exclusive. Negotiations started because of the shared perception between regime and opposition that the severity of the political and economic crises demanded joint approaches to problem solving. While the political forces in Poland agreed to a gradual opening based on power-sharing, the Hungarian opposition opted instead for an immediate transition to democracy without formal power-sharing arrangements. In this form of transition, competitive strategies almost immediately followed the opening of the political space.

The most common form of negotiation evolved from the concept of control and resulted in power-sharing. In this arrangement, which was adopted in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany, negotiations started with the initial intent of controlling the Communist Party, evolved into power-sharing, and resulted in a substantial decline, if not defeat, of the power of the Communist Party. In contrast to the first setting, mass mobilization played a crucial role in the willingness of the ruling elites to enter negotiations with opposition forces.

Finally, negotiations took place in Romania with the intent of replacing the old system but without substantial power-sharing among the new political elite. The limited role of bargaining and compromise is yet another indicator that the transition to polyarchy was severely hampered in the Romanian case.

**Table 2** Central Round Table Negotiations and National Elections in Central and Eastern Europe

Country	Duration of Round-Table Negotiations	Date of National Elections
Poland	6 Feb. 1989-5 Apr. 1989	4/8 June 1989
Hungary	13 June 1989-18 Sept. 1989	25 Mar./8 Apr. 1990
CSSR	26 Nov. 1989-31 Jan. 1990	8/9 June 1990
GDR	7 Dec. 1989-12 Mar. 1990	18 Mar. 1990
Bulgaria	22 Jan. 1990-14 May 1990	10/17 June 1990
Romania	27 Jan. 1990-1 Feb. 1990	20 May 1990



**Negotiation as Reform** In many ways Poland set the stage since it was the first country in central and eastern Europe that engaged in round table negotiations. In addition, the experience of negotiation was not new to the political actors in Poland. Members of the Polish United Workers' Party as well as of Solidarity had the experiences of 1981 to draw from. The fact that the negotiations in 1980–81 failed and led to the introduction of martial law weighed heavily on the negotiating partners; the experience of 1981 was not to be repeated in 1989.

The resulting compromise initially clearly favored the Communist party and its coalition partners: they were guaranteed a majority in the Sejm, the lower house of the parliament. In addition, it was understood that the opposition would not impede the election of General Jaruzelski as president and that matters of defense and internal order would remain in the hands of the Communists.<sup>33</sup>

However, the demoralizing blow to the Communists in the June and July 1989 elections to the upper house of parliament seriously undermined the results of the round table negotiations. Solidarity was forced to take over governmental responsibility, a contingency for which it was unprepared. At one point Lech Wałęsa confirmed that his intentions had been quite different: "I wanted to stop at the conquests of the round table, make a pause and occupy ourselves with the economy and the society. But, by a stroke of bad luck, we won the elections."<sup>34</sup>

After the electoral defeat of the Polish United Workers' Party, people questioned the need to adhere to an arrangement that was made under different domestic and international circumstances. The round table agreement preserved important elements of political power for former Communists and, in the eyes of many, ultimately became an obstacle toward faster consolidation of democratic rule.<sup>35</sup> The power-sharing arrangement did advance and facilitate the introduction of one of the more progressive "shock therapies" in the transition from a centralized to a market-oriented economy. However, even this aspect of policymaking has been drawn into question not only by subsequent governments but also by scholars.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the round table agreement made possible the peaceful transition to a pluralist political system at a time when power-sharing in Communist political systems was a novelty. In addition, the diffusion effects of these developments on other countries in the region can hardly be overstated.

**Negotiation and Competition** In Hungary, the major opposition forces advocated the concept of "one-step transition to democracy," that is, they rejected the power-sharing formula employed in Poland.<sup>37</sup> Although the opposition forces were fragmented, they were able to agree on a common strategy and were helped by a faltering Communist party that had split into two rival wings. In March 1989, nine major opposition groups formed the so-called Opposition Round Table, convincing at least the more reform-minded members of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) that the strategy of "divide and conquer" toward the opposition had failed. The goal of the Opposition Round Table was to create the conditions for a peaceful transition to democracy, but the Communist party leadership insisted on giving economic issues equal standing in the negotiations. "Their original idea was to make economic discussion a condition for political concessions. . . . By late July, following a by-election which returned the first opposition MP to Parliament, it also became

clear that both the policy of concessions and the plan of making democracy a gift from above were of limited potential."<sup>38</sup> In contrast to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany, the opposition forces refused to enter any transitory governmental power arrangements.<sup>39</sup>

Although bargaining and compromise did not extend to institutionalized power-sharing arrangements, they were the prevailing decision-making mode for the duration of the National Round Table. The National Round Table set the terms of the transition (which included the specifics of the upcoming elections and consensus regarding major legislative proposals)<sup>40</sup> and united the opposition, even if only for a few months, during which settlements of far-reaching political significance were achieved.

**Negotiation: From Control to Power-Sharing** In Bulgaria, the German Democratic Republic, and Czechoslovakia, the Communist political leadership started the process of liberalization only after the pressure of popular mobilization left no alternative. The Communists reacted, rather than acted, in response to the turmoil in their countries, and the initiative for the institutionalization of round tables came from the political opposition. Although to differing degrees, opposition forces in all three countries were still in their infancy and needed the support of round table negotiations to gain status and public visibility. Opposition groups saw their roles initially in terms of vetoing Communist policy initiatives, later expanding into shaping policy decisions. In East Germany and Czechoslovakia, opposition groups gradually eroded the bases for Communist party participation and entered coalition governments of "national unity" and "national responsibility" in which Communists and noncommunists shared power until elections in spring 1990. The political initiative moved from the old to the new political forces: indeed, in the case of Czechoslovakia a reversal in power positions occurred even before the scheduling of democratic elections.

Bulgaria's Communist Party met emerging opposition from a united front, but the independent opposition was relatively weak, lacked organization, and needed to gain independence and visibility. As in Hungary, the inequality between the two negotiating partners led to an arrangement based on necessity which precluded genuine power-sharing. More than in other countries, the threat or use of strikes and walk-outs and the refusal to enter into a new round of talks unless certain issues were resolved became standard negotiation tactics and continued to undermine the strength of the Bulgarian Communist Party from the initial phase of transition until the June 1990 elections. For example, only the threat of a general strike at the national level led to the inauguration of round table talks in January 1990, and only on March 12, 1990 was a formal agreement regarding the role of the round table concluded.

The resulting transitional government in Bulgaria was exclusively a caretaker government without the participation of the opposition forces.<sup>41</sup> Even after the June 1990 elections, which resulted in a small margin of victory for the Communists, there were many futile efforts to form a coalition between the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Union of Democratic Forces. Finally the stalemate was broken when the opposition forces within the Union of Democratic Forces agreed to enter into a power-sharing government. On December 29, 1990, a government was created in which the then-renamed Bulgarian Socialist Party held eight positions, the Union of Democratic Forces three, and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union two, while four went to unaffiliated experts.

**Negotiation by Dictate** Negotiation in Romania did not follow any of these patterns, and the dialogue between newly emerging political forces was never officially termed a round table (although the term was widely used in the media). There were no negotiations between old and new political forces, at least not in the usual juxtaposition of Communist Party versus opposition. The old Romanian Communist Party died with Ceausescu, and although members of the opposition were included in the Council of the National Salvation Front (NSF) and later in the Provisional Council of National Unity, the clear majority of NSF members precluded any meaningful bargaining. As Weiss and Heinrich point out, the leaders of the National Salvation Front saw themselves as executive organs of the revolution who enjoyed considerable political backing. The other newly emerging political forces were fragmented and were never able to gain an equal footing in the negotiations.<sup>42</sup>

In the May 1990 elections the National Salvation Front emerged as the clear winner and was able to form a government without participation of the highly diverse opposition forces. A first offer to the opposition to participate in the government came in April 1991. However, the resulting coalition government was aptly termed a pseudo-coalition; the major opposition forces refused to join the government by Petre Roman because it did not entail any guarantees of power-sharing.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Development of the Political Party System**

Another feature in power-sharing arrangements involved creation of so-called umbrella organizations, conglomerate parties, or movement parties. These terms were used to describe political organizations which combined a variety of different political groups and political parties in a loose movement without a structured program or institutionalized structure. The pent-up desire for political participation resulted in an unprecedented proliferation of political parties and movements. Mushrooming numbers of political groups and parties were counterbalanced by the antiideological and anticommunist stance of the opposition movement. On the one hand, members of the emerging opposition rejected any kind of overt ideology and often even the very concept of party-building; on the other hand, they created new organizations which—just as the despised Communist parties—tried to appeal to all sectors of the population, that is, “all political interests were submerged in the name of the higher interest” of opposing the Communist party.<sup>44</sup>

Whether to unite or to run on separate tickets was conditioned, among other things, by the anticipated strength of the Communist party and the emerging opposition political forces. Where the Communist party was perceived as united and strong and the opposition as weak, oppositional unity was essential. Where the Communist party split into two or more rival political parties, as in Poland and Hungary, the need to ban together diminished.

As a result, a number of powerful political alliances emerged in central and eastern Europe in 1990. The Union of Democratic Forces combined major but, in terms of political spectrum and membership strength, rather diverse elements of the opposition in Bulgaria; the Civic Forum and Public against Violence did the same in Czechoslovakia.<sup>45</sup> Although the origins of Solidarity differ from those of the opposition forces in other central and eastern European countries, the sense of unity of the oppositional forces initially prevailed in Poland as well. In East Germany, efforts to unite major opposition groups failed largely

because of the early entry of West German parties into the electoral campaign. In particular, the refusal of the Social Democratic Party to join an opposition alliance forestalled a similar arrangement in East Germany. Still, a number of electoral alliances, in particular the victorious Alliance for Germany, aimed at combining different political groups under one umbrella.

One major exception to this form of power-sharing is Hungary. As early as 1988, the opposition enjoyed relatively more freedom of organization but was limited to the urban middle class. As Batt points out, "their creation was largely the product of elite initiatives, rather than the mass pressure that was so important in the original formation of Solidarity, the Civic Forum, and the Public against Violence."<sup>46</sup> However, the opposition remained divided and confident of its victory over an increasingly weak Communist party that had split into two major factions.

Initially, the anticommunist umbrella was enough to continue electoral alliances into governmental alliances, even after the elections in 1990. Power-sharing governments still prevailed. In Czechoslovakia and East Germany the broad-based power-sharing governments of the first transition period led to maximum-winning coalitions. In view of the enormous tasks ahead, broad consensus was needed, and competition was limited almost exclusively to former Communists. In Bulgaria, power-sharing arrangements were initially rejected by the oppositional Union of Democratic Forces, and a coalition government was not formed until the end of November 1990. In Poland the power-sharing arrangement between former members of the Polish United Workers' Party and Solidarity gradually disintegrated up to the elections of October 1991. In the months following the 1991 elections, the government struggled repeatedly to form viable coalition cabinets; a coalition of seven parties was able to maintain a stable majority in the Sejm, the Polish parliament, from July 1992 to May 1993. New elections were set for September 1993.

In Hungary, the incumbent caretaker government was replaced by a coalition of three parties, with the Hungarian Democratic Forum as its core. A coalition between the two largest parties, the Democratic Forum and the Alliance of Free Democrats, was declined by the former. However, the element of compromise came to the fore once more: on April 29, 1990, the two major political parties concluded a pact in which major elements of the distribution of power were negotiated.<sup>47</sup> In particular, this pact involved the choice of a member of the Alliance of Free Democrats as president; the Free Democrats, in turn, agreed to a revision of some laws which, according to the round table agreements, had previously required a two-thirds majority.<sup>48</sup>

However, problems inherent in the lack of an established party system have subsequently taken their toll. Lack of party tradition, party identification, party programs, and institutionalized structure became major obstacles to efficient decision making. These problems are particularly important since the structures of government in central and eastern Europe are based on the model of western European parliamentary systems which rely heavily on party identification and party discipline. Effective policymaking is possible only with the support of a majority in parliament.

By 1991 transitions entered a new stage in most countries. Political groups and organizations felt the pressure to develop their own political profiles and their independent organizational and membership bases. Slogans had to be replaced by substantive political programs and transformed into policy actions. Conflicting interests started to surface, and

competition for personal and political power came to the fore. In these circumstances, parties proliferated, and competition among them increased, contributing to early elections in most central and eastern European countries. In Poland in the fall of 1991, more than 100 political parties existed, of which twenty-two were able to register national lists; twenty-nine parties achieved representation in the parliament. The high degree of party fragmentation has fostered intransigence and delimitation, which in turn has undermined elite consensus, a key variable in democratic consolidation.<sup>49</sup>

Only the Hungarian government seems to have been able to finish its original term of four years, despite the fact that here also the party landscape is far from established.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, lack of cooperation in the coalition government dominated by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF) has led to the walk-out of ten of the members of the Independent Smallholders' Party, including its chairman. Competition as the prevailing mode of conflict resolution already characterized the Hungarian political scene by the time of the 1990 elections and has continued since then.

In Czechoslovakia, the Civic Forum split into two independent parties, and some members joined other parties and movements. The division of the Public against Violence into two parties led to the collapse of the republican government in Slovakia. By virtue of party split-ups, the six political groups originally represented in the Czechoslovakian parliament grew to fifteen by mid 1991 and almost twenty by the end of the year. The parliament became fragmented and deeply divided along party lines.

However, the proliferation of parties did not necessarily coincide with party identification. At the beginning of 1992, only eight of the twenty ministers in the Polish "government of experts" belonged to the coalition parties. Another indication of the weakness of party organization—and the perceived need to stay above partisan politics—was the official nonpartisan character of the presidents of Romania, the former Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

Although the Union of Democratic Forces in Bulgaria has also suffered a series of individual and group defections, some of which resulted in the formation of new political movements and parties, so far the presence of the strong Bulgarian Socialist Party helped keep their ranks together.<sup>51</sup> Although its composition is far from stable, the Union is well on its way to becoming a permanent feature of the Bulgarian political landscape.

In Romania opposition forces also remained divided, thus contributing to a resounding victory of the National Salvation Front. In 1990 none of the opposition parties was able to gather more than 7.2 percent of the national vote. A first effort to unite the opposition forces resulted in the formation of the National Convention for the Establishment of Democracy (NCED) on December 15, 1990. In spring 1991 personal ambitions seem to have been the major motivation in the decision of one of its key players, the National Liberal Party, to leave it. However, in subsequent elections during 1992 the Convention was able to garner major parts of the electorate. The opposition was helped by developments within the National Salvation Front; personal rifts and diverging opinions regarding the speed of the transition led to its split into two movements by late March 1992. As one observer noted, in 1992 political life in Romania was characterized by "increasing confusion and fragmentation. Hardly a day passes without a split in, or an expulsion from, one of Romania's 140-odd registered parties."<sup>52</sup>

In many cases, disagreements over the methods and process of transformation turned into

personal power struggles. Lines of division can be drawn between former dissidents and emerging career politicians of “old” and “new” origin and according to positions in the vertical and horizontal distribution of power. For example, the battle over constitutional rights between the head of government and the head of state has been intensified by constitutional uncertainties but also by personal animosities and political differences. The power struggles between Lech Wałęsa and several prime ministers in Poland, between Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman in Romania, and between Árpád Göncz and József Antall in Hungary are cases in point. In Czechoslovakia much of the struggle for influence initially involved former federal president Václav Havel (now President of the Czech Republic) and Václav Klaus, first minister of finance and later Czech prime minister.

The emergence of competitive strategies was a logical step from extrication to consolidation. Further progress toward democratic consolidation may be substantially influenced by how the skills of bargaining and compromise were employed during the second phase of the transition, either as singular strategies or as a more deeply ingrained behavioral pattern in which conflict resolution is the outcome of competition accompanied by cooperation.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

All modes of transition entailed the element of negotiation. Different negotiating patterns were a crucial part of the first stage in the transition process; only when the revival of the old system ceased to be a viable option did negotiation give way to competitive modes. This change was illustrated in the shift from conglomerate parties to competitive parties and from overarching (maximum-winning) to minimal-winning coalition governments. Most important, with the exception of Romania, where the negotiation phase was short-lived and dominated by one group, negotiation facilitated the peaceful and organized transition from authoritarian to democratically constituted political systems.

I have suggested that bargaining and compromise lie at the heart of the transition process. I argued that the transition to democracy is also a transition in the modes of conflict resolution and that the examples drawn from central and eastern Europe are indicative of transition processes in other settings as well. The first stage in the transition to democracy is characterized by the switch from command and imposition to intense bargaining and compromise. Once the transition enters the stage of consolidation, bargaining and compromise decline in favor of more competitive modes of conflict resolution. In countries where elite bargaining and compromise are largely absent or limited in their outreach, the successful completion of the transition may be slowed down or jeopardized.

While bargaining and compromise contributed to the peaceful and orderly transfer of power and the institutionalization of pluralist political structures in central and eastern Europe, further progress toward the consolidation of these emerging democracies has been hampered by unresolved issues of power distribution and, to some extent, by conflictual elite attitudes. Many of the current problems in the region—governmental instability, ethnic conflicts, political apathy—can be traced at least partly to the premature eclipse of bargaining and compromise in conflict resolution. Further progress toward democratic consolidation, however, is dependent on both competition and cooperation.

## NOTES

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1. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Samuel P. Huntington, "Democratization and Security in Eastern Europe," in Peter Volten, ed., *Uncertain Futures: Eastern Europe and Democracy* (New York: Institute for East-West Security Studies Occasional Paper 16, 1990), pp. 35–49.

2. Timur Kuran, "Now Out or Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," in Nancy Bermeo, ed., *Liberalization and Democratization: Change in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, 1992), reprinted from *World Politics*, 44, (October 1991).

3. For the purposes of this article, central and eastern Europe encompasses Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia prior to its division into two separate states, the former German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

4. See, for example, Zbigniew Rau, ed., *The Reemergence of Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Valerie Bunce, "The Struggle for Liberal Democracy in Eastern Europe," *World Policy Journal*, 7 (Summer 1990), 395–430; Jan Zielonka, "East Central Europe: Democracy in Retreat?," *The Washington Quarterly*, 14 (Summer 1991), 107–120.

5. László Bruszt, "Transformative Politics: Social Costs and Social Peace in East Central Europe," *East European Politics and Societies*, 6 (Winter 1992), 55–72. Much emphasis has been placed on the transformation of the centralized planned economies. See, for example, Michael Keren and Gur Ofer, eds., *Trials of Transition: Economic Reform in the Former Communist Bloc* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); Christopher Clague and Gordon C. Rausser, eds., *The Emergence of Market Economies in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1992).

6. Russell Bova, "Political Dynamics of the Post-Communist Transition: A Comparative Perspective," in Bermeo, ed., pp. 113–138; Barbara A. Misztal, "Must Eastern Europe follow the Latin American Way?," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 33 (1992), 151–179; Bart van Steenberghe, "Transitions from Authoritarian/Totalitarian Systems: Recent Developments in Central and Eastern Europe in a Comparative Perspective," *Futures*, 24 (March 1992), 158–172; Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Karl, "The Types of Democracy Emerging in Southern and Eastern Europe and South and Central America," in Peter M. E. Volten, ed., *Bound to Change: Consolidating Democracy in East Central Europe* (New York: Institute for East West Studies, 1992), pp. 42–68; Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, "Modes of Transitions in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe," *International Social Science Journal*, 128 (May 1991), 269–284; Adam Przeworski, "Spiel mit Einsatz: Demokratisierungsprozesse in Lateinamerika, Osteuropa und anderswo," *Transit: Europäische Revue*, 1 (Fall 1990), 190–208.

7. Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 95–99.

8. For a summary of the different terms used in analyzing the nature of regime change, see Huntington, *The Third Wave*, p. 114.

9. Dahl, p. 41.

10. Karl and Schmitter, p. 280.

11. Samuel B. Bachrach and Edward J. Lawler, *Bargaining: Power, Tactics, and Outcomes* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1981), pp. IX, 4; H. Peyton Young, "Negotiation Analysis," in H. Peyton Young, ed., *Negotiation Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

12. Przeworski, *Democracy and Market*, p. 80.

13. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 6.

14. Mihály Bihari, "Change in Regime and Power in Hungary (1989–1990)," in Kurtán Sándor et al., eds., *Magyarország Politikai Évkönyve* (Budapest: Ökonómia Alapítvány-Economix Rt., 1991), p. 33.

15. Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy," *Comparative Politics*, 2 (April 1970), 337–363.

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17. "Time as a tactical resource" is discussed by Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

18. Nikolai Genov, "The Transition to Democracy in Eastern Europe: Trends and Paradoxes of Social Rationalization," *International Social Science Journal*, 128 (May 1991), 336.
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20. Cf. Herbert Kitschelt, "The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe," *Politics and Society*, 20 (March 1992), 7–50.
21. See Michael G. Burton and John Higley, "Elite Settlements," *American Sociological Review*, 52 (June 1987), 295–307.
22. Cf. Piotr Sztompka, "The Intangibles and Imponderables of the Transition to Democracy," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 24 (September 1991), 306–307.
23. Michael Burton et al., "Introduction: Elite Transformations and Democratic Regimes," in John Higley and Richard Gunther, eds., *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 10.
24. Nancy Bermeo, "Democracy and the Lessons of Dictatorship," *Comparative Politics*, 24 (April 1992), 276. The notion of negotiation is emphasized in a number of recent articles on regime transitions in regions other than central and eastern Europe. Cf. Joseph M. Colomer, "Transitions by Agreement: Modeling the Spanish Way?," *American Political Science Review*, 85 (December 1991), 1283–1302; Terry Lynn Karl, "El Salvador's Negotiated Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, 71 (Spring 1992), 147–164. In Africa, the emergence of national conventions has become a trademark of recent transition processes. See Richard Joseph, "Africa: The Rebirth of Political Freedom," in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 314–16.
25. Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy Is . . . and Is Not," in Diamond and Plattner, eds., pp. 41–43.
26. The role of corporatism in East European politics is stressed by David Ost, "Towards a Corporatist Solution in Eastern Europe: The Case of Poland," *East European Politics and Societies*, 3 (Winter 1989), 152–174, and Grzegorz Ekiert, "Democratization Processes in East Central Europe: A Theoretical Reconsideration," *British Journal of Political Science*, 21 (July 1991), 293–298. András Nagy, "'Social Choice' in Eastern Europe," *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 15 (1991), 266–283, emphasizes the elimination of competition and the role of bargaining and compromise in the economic planning process in Communist political systems.
27. For an important discussion of the role of round tables in constitution making, see Jon Elster, "Constitution-Making in Eastern Europe: Rebuilding the Boat in the Open Sea," *Public Administration*, 71 (Spring-Summer 1993), 169–217.
28. Robert Weiss and Manfred Heinrich, "Der Runde Tisch: Konkursverwalter des 'realen' Sozialismus: Analyse und Vergleich des Wirkens Runder Tische in Europa," *Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien*, 4 (1991), 10.
29. This definition of integrative bargaining is derived from I. William Zartman, "Common Elements in the Analysis of the Negotiation Process," *Negotiation Journal*, 4 (1988), 37–38; and Howard Raiffa, *The Art and Science of Negotiation* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 131.
30. A particularly good example of the changing role of the round table is provided by Uwe Thaysen, *Der Runde Tisch, oder: Wo blieb das Volk? Der Weg der DDR in die Demokratie* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990).
31. László Bruszt, "1989: The Negotiated Revolution in Hungary," *Social Research*, 57 (Summer 1990), 365–387.
32. Thaysen, pp. 99–103.
33. For a detailed account of the agreement, see Radio Free Europe (*Polish Situation Report*6), 7 April 1989, and *RAD Background Report*67 (Poland), 26 April 1989.
34. Cited in Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, p. 79.
35. The negative consequences of the round table agreements are emphasized by Wojtek Lamentowicz, "Dilemmas of the Transition Period," *Uncaptive Minds*, 2 (November–December 1989), 19–21. See also Bartłomiej Kaminski, "Systemic Underpinnings of the Transition in Poland: The Shadow of the Round-table Agreement," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 24 (June 1991), 173–190; Jan T. Gross, "Polen nach der Revolution: Die Marginalisierung



des Politischen," *Transit: Europäische Revue*, (Winter 1991–92), 69–78. For a different point of view, see Irena Grudzińska, "Post-Communist Resentment, or the Rewriting of Polish History," *East European Politics and Societies*, 6 (Spring 1992), 146.

36. See, in particular, Adam Przeworski, "Economic Reforms, Public Opinion, and Political Institutions: Poland in the Eastern European Perspective," in Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira et al., *Economic Reforms in New Democracies: A Social-Democratic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 132–198.

37. Bruszt, "1989: The Negotiated Revolution in Hungary," p. 371.

38. András Bozóki, "Democracy across the Negotiating Table," *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, 33 (Spring 1992), 65. See also András Bozóki, "Hungary's Road to Systemic Change: The Opposition Roundtable," *East European Politics and Societies*, 7 (Spring 1993), 276–308.

39. László Bruszt and David Stark, "Remaking the Political Field in Hungary: From the Politics of Confrontation to the Politics of Competition," in Ivo Banac, ed., *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 13–71.

40. See Peter Hardi, *Constitutionalism and Political Change in Hungary* (Budapest: Hungarian Institute of International Affairs Policy Paper Series No. 1, January 1990).

41. For a classification of transitional governments, see Yossi Shain and Juan J. Linz, "The Role of Interim Government," *Journal of Democracy*, 3 (January 1992), 73–89.

42. Weiss and Heinrich, pp. 29–30.

43. Michael Shafir, "Romania's Tortuous Road to Reform," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 3 January 1992, pp. 97–98.

44. Stephen White, *Communist and Postcommunist Political Systems: An Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 155.

45. For example, at the time of the June 1990 elections the membership of the Union of Democratic Forces totaled sixteen political parties and groups. See Kjell Engelbrekt, "Cracks in the Union of Democratic Forces," *Report on Eastern Europe*, May 17, 1991, pp. 1–5, and Rada Nikolaev, "The UDF's Members and Groups with Observer Status, Spring 1991," *Report on Eastern Europe*, May 17, 1991, pp. 5–8.

46. Judy Batt, *East Central Europe from Reform to Transformation* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991), p. 55.

47. Peter Gowan asserts that this pact was the indirect outcome of western reactions to the victory of the Democratic Forum. According to him, the relatively poor election results of the Free Democrats—the party that advocated a swift change to western-style market economics—resulted in the immediate withdrawal of financial backing for Hungary. In turn, this withdrawal was said to have led to offers by the winning Democratic Forum to negotiate. Cf. Peter Gowan, "Western Economic Diplomacy and the New Eastern Europe," *New Left Review*, 182 (July–August 1990), 77.

48. Attila Ágh, "The Year of Incomplete Changes," in Sándor et al., eds., pp. 19–20; see also Mihály Simai, "Hungarian Problems," *Government and Opposition*, 27 (Winter 1992), 56.

49. See Higley and Gunther, eds.

50. Kathrin Sitzler, "Parteiensystem und Gesellschaft in Ungarn: Stabiles Parteiensystem oder Krisensituation?," *Südosteuropa*, 41 (1992), 171–187.

51. Avram Agov, "The Blues, The Reds, and the Greens," *Uncaptive Minds*, 4 (Winter 1991–92), 105–114.

52. Dan Ionescu, "Another Front for Romania's Salvation," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 1, 33, 21 August 1992, 17–23.

53. Thomas A. Baylis emphasizes this point when he concludes that the new elites in eastern Europe "have not learned to employ the subtle mix of confrontational rhetoric and accommodative practice that typifies democratic politics in the West." Thomas A. Baylis, "Plus Ça Change? Transformation and Continuity among East European Elites," Revised paper at the Twenty-fourth National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Phoenix, November 19–22, 1992, p. 20.