



## **What has Eastern Europe taught us about the democratisation literature (and vice versa)?**

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**Abstract.** The relationship between Eastern Europe and democratisation studies so far has been highly asymmetric. In contrast to the vast contribution, both in data and theory, of Eastern Europe to the democratisation literature, the latter has been of only modest use to the understanding of the democratisation processes in post-communist Europe. Despite the growing number of empirically grounded assessments, most notably of degrees of democratic consolidation within East-Central Europe, there is still very little agreement on what exactly is democratic transition and consolidation or on what explains the seemingly widening gap between East-Central Europe on the one hand and the Balkans and post-Soviet republics on the other hand. We believe that at least part of the answer lies in two underdeveloped topics of the democratisation literature: state and nation-building (the ‘third’ transition) and the international dimension. Moreover, to uncover the answers democratisation studies would greatly profit from expanding its disciplinary and geographical constraints, i.e., by integrating research from, most notably, nationalism studies, international relations as well as democratisation studies of the ‘first wave’.

### **Introduction**

The fall of the Berlin Wall has had a major impact on world politics as well as on its study. It liberated Eastern Europe from the hands of the sectarian ‘Sovietologists’ and enabled it to integrate into the wider study of comparative politics (Ekiert 1999; Von Beyme 1999). Moreover, and as a consequence, the field of comparative politics became (once again) dominated by democratisation studies. This said, ten years later the integration of East-Central Europe into comparative politics seems to have been rather successful, while studies of the post-Soviet space seem to retreat to a ‘post-Sovietology’ (in part a reflection of the diverging paths of democratisation in the two sub-regions, which we discuss below).<sup>1</sup>

The initial assumptions about the political changes taking place in post-communist Eastern Europe differed. For many, ‘post-communism’ has been a variation on a familiar theme of recent transitions in Southern Europe and Latin America. While acknowledging the simultaneity and asynchrony of

the political, social and economic reforms that characterise Eastern Europe, some scholars thus argued for the retention of the conceptual and theoretical treatment of these cases of democratisation as analogous to the previous ones (Schmitter & Karl 1994; Karl & Schmitter 1995). The differences were considered to be either overstated or, in fact, not impeding cross-regional comparisons. Moreover, it was assumed that Eastern Europe could be seen through conceptual lenses derived from experiences in Southern Europe and Latin America and that the region represented a useful pool of data to enrich the existing literature.

Others adopted a more sceptical view and argued from the outset that new analytical categories were needed to account for the different dimensions of the Eastern European transitions. These authors pointed out the multidimensionality of the specific extrication from communism, involving political, social and economic crises (Offe 1991; Elster 1993; Bunce 1995a). The experience of communism and its subsequent impact on the dynamics of political change in the region was seen as vastly different from the experience of autocratic regimes in the Southern hemisphere. Consequently, the relevance of existing democratisation paradigms was questioned, and with it the wider applicability of models developed for understanding non-communist societies. It seemed logical, in that view, to rather concentrate on comparisons within the group of post-communist countries and to search for new answers to new problems.

There is no doubt that this sort of debate, most clearly exemplified by the debate in *Slavic Review* (Schmitter & Karl 1994; Bunce 1995b; Karl & Schmitter 1995), pointed to serious methodological questions involved in comparative politics. But there is neither any doubt that, regardless of this debate, Eastern Europe has proven fertile ground for students of political change, and that the increased interest in the study of democratisation has moved this field ahead in many ways. In other words, whatever one's intellectual taste or disciplinary tradition, the framing of most research, as well as the explanations of (varying) outcomes of transformations that start to crystallise a decade after the demise of communism, have not easily avoided the familiar analytical instrumentarium.

In this article, we aim to introduce a thematic discussion of the democratisation literature on Eastern Europe, stressing its accomplishments and problems and drawing conclusions for a future research agenda. The first section will try to shed light on the use of the elusive concepts of democratic transition and consolidation in the literature on Eastern Europe. In the second section we will focus on the different theoretical approaches that aim to explain the various outcomes of democratisation in the region. The third and concluding section will contain a proposal for a future agenda of

democratisation studies, calling in particular for more research on the roles of the processes of nation and state-building and of the international dimension within the broader process of democratisation in Eastern Europe.

### A conceptual mess

The use of existing concepts in the literature on democratisation in Eastern Europe has been most evident in the adoption of two key terms which originated in the studies of Latin America and Southern Europe: transition and consolidation. The results of this 'borrowing' have been mixed. Despite the current flood of articles, books and edited volumes, particularly on democratic consolidation, Eastern European 'transitology' and 'consolidology' are today still in their embryonic phase, particularly in terms of theory-building. Most studies are actually non-theoretical, describing in often vivid detail the political and social developments in (post-) transition countries. Both concepts also suffer because their original meaning and assumptions are either ignored, stretched, or used interchangeably. Consequently, an enormous confusion exists within the academic community over what democratic transition and consolidation exactly mean and the wide variety of definitions currently in use (Munck 1994; Plasser, Ulram & Waldrauch 1998: 44–45; Schedler 1998).

Originally, transitions were defined as the interval between the dissolution of the old regime and the installation of a new regime (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986). Transitions were thought to be highly uncertain processes, dependent on individuals and various political groups, and on strategic choices made by these actors as they struggle over the nature of rules of the game constituent of a new regime. It was defined as a process delimited on both ends by different (types of) regimes: if *successful*, this came to mean an authoritarian regime on the one end, and a democratic regime on the other (O'Donnell 1992; Plasser, Ulram & Waldrauch 1998).

In general, democracy is understood in a minimal and procedural way by transition scholars, following the famous definitions by Schumpeter (1954) and Dahl (1971). More specifically, transition to democracy is considered to be over when an agreement on democratic rules is reached successfully (Di Palma 1990); which can, but not necessarily always must, include the adoption of a new constitution and conduct of the first free elections. The study of transition was not supposed to indicate exactly what kind of democracy is to emerge, or how deeply rooted or stable it will be. It should rather provide insights into the dynamics of change in the initial stages of political change and gauge the outcomes of this process in broad generic terms, such as democracy, *democradura*, *dictablanca* etc. (Munck 1994; Schmitter 1994).

In contrast, the essence of consolidation was originally thought to be in defining and fixing the core rules of democratic competition (Di Palma 1990); i.e., transforming the set of democratic rules and institutions agreed upon in the transition phase into regular, acceptable and predictable patterns (Schmitter 1994). Therefore, the phase of consolidation is characterised primarily by the increased importance of routinised (institutional) structures that start to influence the behaviour of political actors, rather than, as in the more volatile process of transition, by voluntarily behaving actors defining and struggling over the rules in a series of events seemingly unbound by structures. Consolidation is based on the partial redefining of agreements, arrangements and institutions which emerged from the process of transition, and/or on the affirmation, strengthening and routinisation of these provisions. It also involves the removal of all provisions which are inimical to democracy but were necessary to make transition possible; for example, reserving a certain number of parliamentary seats for members of the previous ruling Communist Party, as happened in the first post-1989 parliaments in various East-Central European countries.

Not surprisingly, most of the literature on Eastern Europe of the early 1990s was preoccupied with transition processes. Quite apart from coming to terms with the meaning and significance of the astonishingly rapid and by the social sciences (including Sovietology) unpredicted collapse of the communist rule (Von Beyme 1996), this literature was mainly concerned with the initial moments of democratisation. In particular, it addressed questions of why and how communist regimes collapsed and analyzed the dynamics of bargaining between the outgoing communist elite and the emerging democratic elite (Bermeo 1992; Welsh 1994). It further focused on possible outcomes of such bargaining, often through conceptual lenses of the much fashionable rational choice models (Przeworski 1991; Colomer 1994), as well as on testing some of the initial hypotheses linking the modes of transition with its outcome (Welsh 1994; Munck & Skalník Leff 1996). What emerged most clearly from these studies is that post-communist trajectories must be handled with care, because transitions resulted in a range of outcomes, which includes different democracies as well as various variants of authoritarianism (Karatnycky 1997; Von Beyme 1999).

Given this range of outcomes, it is quite surprising to see that most of the attention in the literature on Eastern Europe has now shifted towards the problems of democratic consolidation. It is perhaps the case that, with the proclaimed 'end of history' and with liberal democracy becoming the alleged dominant arrangement of modern politics, many observers of Eastern European countries expected transitions to be merely time-specific sequences of the same process, called democratisation. Transitions were, to

say, taken for granted. Moreover, this unjustified shift towards consolidation studies may also partly stem from the fact that the analysis of both transition and consolidation hinges on two related problems: the definition of democracy and the definition of the process itself. Given that the notion of democracy has been interpreted in many different ways, including different interpretations of its non-democratic alternatives, it is easier to understand that post-communism in Eastern Europe has been studied interchangeably from the vantage point of both transition and consolidation.

As a result, transition and consolidation were mingled into one notion and problematique, often approached interchangeably, thus confusing the use of both terms. In our understanding, 'transitology' proper, with its focus on initial attempts to implant democracy is still a perspective that merits close attention in Eastern Europe, most notably in the post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav states. Moreover, the range of outcomes which emerged very shortly after the breakdown of communism suggests that within democratisation studies we need to maintain a clear distinction between the transition from a communist regimes (or an authoritarian regime in general) to a democracy (i.e., 'transition') and the subsequent transition from an initial democratic arrangement towards a truly consolidated democracy (i.e., 'consolidation'). By definition, consolidation can only start after transition has been successfully completed. This is not to deny, however, that in practice these processes might be overlapping. Certain aspects that are important for the consolidation of democracy are sometimes already arranged during the transition phase; for example, the co-operation of the former elite through so-called 'pacted transitions' (Rustow 1970).

Even when countries have reached the watershed of successful transition – e.g., the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland or Slovenia – the question whether any of these countries has also achieved full democratic consolidation remains a complex issue. Many authors working on Latin America and Southern Europe used to speak of consolidated democracy in an ideal-typical and minimal sense, when all politically significant groups adhere to democratic rules of the game (Linz 1990; Valenzuela, 1992; Gunther, Diamondouros & Puhle 1995).<sup>2</sup> Consolidated democracy, in minimal terms, is thus understood primarily in terms of the behavioural compliance of political actors with the minimal procedural requirements of democracy.

Linz and Stepan recently introduced a more substantive definition of democratic consolidation. Democracy is considered to be consolidated when, first, "no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to achieve their objectives by creating a non-democratic regime or turning to violence or foreign intervention to secede from the state"; when, second, "a strong majority of public

opinion holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life in a society ..."; and, third, "when governmental and non-governmental forces alike, throughout the territory of the state, become subjected to, and habituated to, the resolution of conflict within the specific laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process" (Linz & Stepan 1996: 6). The feature that distinguishes this definition of consolidation from the one(s) mentioned above is that not only must the main political actors *comply* with democratic rules of the game, but these rules must also be seen as *legitimate* by the actors themselves and by a large section of the public (Plasser, Ulram & Waldrauch 1998).

This conceptualisation reflects recent concerns about relying solely on minimal electoralist and institutionalist definitions in assessing consolidation of democracy. With democratic regimes becoming more widespread and enduring in our times, at least in minimal procedural terms, the scholarly attention has now turned again to investigating more closely the different fits between their formal rules and actual political practice. The recent writings of O'Donnell (1996), and Linz and Stepan (1996), represent attempts to construct analytical tools and categories to differentiate between cases of regimes which fall within the bounds of a minimal definition of democracy, but clearly differ in the level of practical compliance with the democratic rules.

As Schedler (1998: 103) has argued, the wide variety of different notions of both consolidation and democracy has led to a "current Babylonian chorus of voices singing songs of democratic consolidation". Different definitions often mean different assessments (Commiso 1997; Elster, Offe & Preuss 1998). Generally speaking, scholars working with a minimalist definition, often operationalised through Huntington's famous two-turnover test (for alternatives, see Von Beyme (1996: 30)), have no problems arguing that most post-communist countries in at least East-Central Europe are consolidated democracies (though confusion remains on Slovakia). However, those working with a more demanding definition are generally far less positive. Some scholars believe no post-communist country is yet a consolidated democracy, pointing to the undeveloped civil society in countries like the Czech Republic (Green & Skalnik Leff 1997) or Poland (Taras 1997). More lenient colleagues do consider countries like the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland to be (almost) consolidated (Rupnik 1995; Lewis 1997). Plasser, Ulram and Waldrauch conclude, on the basis of extensive survey research in the four Visegrad countries, that "(t)he process of anchoring democracy attitudinally seems to have progressed remarkably far in the four countries studied" (1998: 192). According to them, these East-Central European countries are almost

on the same level as other post-transition countries in (Southern and Central) Europe and Latin America (see also Miller, White & Heywood 1998).

It seems to us that, in order to clear many of the current confusions, the first necessary step should be to establish a more stringent line between democratic and non-democratic regimes in post-communist Europe (Diamond 1996; Collier & Lewitsky 1997). Consequently, democracy and its alternatives should be confined to the study of transitions, whereas democratic consolidation studies should be concerned exclusively with already established democracies. For example, it is doubtful to analyse a country like Uzbekistan or Serbia as having failed to consolidate its democracy when democracy was never established in an even elementary form in the first place. These and similar post-communist countries have not left yet the process of transition, where the main distinction lies between democracy versus autocracy. Here, the still inconclusive and uncertain struggle about the fundamental direction of regime change should be at the centre of the analysis. Which theoretical view to adopt in studying these processes is a difficult question, though we agree that transition processes are best understood in terms of a range of contingencies (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986) within a setting of regime 'uncertainty' (Schedler 1999), thus calling for a more actor-oriented perspective (Burton, Gunther & Higley 1992).

Similarly, it makes no sense to analyse a country like Slovakia as a failed transition, when elementary democratic procedures have clearly been established, however fragile they may have appeared (Kopecký & Mudde 2000). Slovakia is already in the process of democratic consolidation, where the main distinction is that of institutionalised and stable democracies versus non-institutionalised and unstable democracies. Studies of democratic consolidation, then, should be concerned only with different (sub-)types of *democracies* rather than with different types of political *regimes*. For example, it is in the consolidation phase that the question about the form of institutional arrangements and their relative merits comes to the fore; i.e., the well-established debate on presidential and parliamentary systems (Lijphart 1992; Linz 1994; Merkel 1996b; Przeworski et al. 1996). Similarly, it is also here that democracy can be divided according to different types and degrees of institutionalisation (O'Donnell 1996; Rüb 1996).

The second suggestion is that the notion of consolidation should not be defined with excessive expectations and, least of all, with reference to a different definition of democracy than that used with regard to transition. This is of particular importance in the context of the post-communist totalitarian legacy which is much less favourable for democratisation than the legacy left by non-democratic regimes in Southern Europe and Latin America. Much conceptual work has recently been done in this respect, which is open to

application in Eastern Europe. Schedler (1998), for example, disentangles in a most lucid way several notions of democratic consolidation and distinguishes five basic meanings within the larger process of democratisation: preventing democratic breakdown, preventing erosion, completing democracy, deepening democracy, and organising democracy. Seemingly not believing in the future dominance of one approach, he calls upon 'considologists' to at least be aware of the different uses of the term. At the same time, he states explicitly that democratic consolidation should refer only to *regime continuity* (i.e., avoiding democratic breakdown and avoiding democratic erosion), thereby excluding all notions relating it to the *deepening* or *organising* of democracy (Schedler 1998: 103).<sup>3</sup>

We concur, and stress again that the notion of democratic consolidation should be linked to the same (minimal) definition of democracy as that which allowed the country to be classified as having completed the transition phase successfully.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, we believe that the main task in the process of democratic consolidation is the co-optation of (potential) counter-elites into the new democratic regime (obviously without undermining its democratic nature). This, first of all, regards the old elites, i.e., the former communists, if they are not already co-opted through a pacted transition. However, of equal importance is the co-optation of (potential) new counter-elites. Here, the most notable danger comes from the extreme right, which in many countries was part of the 'national-democratic' movement against the Soviet-dominated communist regime, but whose goals might divert after the transition. It is vital to convince them to play according to the democratic rules, as has been successfully done with, for example, Rukh in Ukraine or the ESRP in Estonia.<sup>5</sup>

This said, it is important to realise that consolidation does not guarantee that a democracy will be immune to political crises, ethnic tensions and other sorts of potentially destabilising events. Indeed, Valenzuela (1992) argues that the notion of consolidation should not be grounded in the presence or absence of these destabilising elements, and that crises of state should be distinguished from crises of democracy. Many established democracies have come to face enormous difficulties: the United Kingdom has for long been involved in violent inter-communal tensions in Northern Ireland; the Belgian government fights an increasingly uphill battle to keep the federation together. Because of the use of (too) demanding definitions, many similar problems in post-communist Europe are collapsed under the problems of democratic consolidation or, even worse, are interpreted as signs of non-consolidation. They should rather be interpreted as pressures for further change and as signs of the major successes that have been achieved in creating open societies, where politics can be freely discussed and governments can be subjected to

mobilising pressures from below. In other words, these problems should be part of the (broader) study of the functioning or quality of democracy rather than the (more narrow) study of the consolidation of democracy.

### **The failure of theory**

Despite the growing number of empirically grounded assessments – most notably of degrees of democratic consolidation within East-Central Europe, and of the widening gulf between East-Central Europe on the one hand and the Balkans and post-Soviet republics on the other hand – there is still very little agreement on what exactly explains this emerging diversity, and even less on how this can be explained in terms of the mainstream democratisation literature. Most notably, transition studies have been criticised for being “self-evidently normative and linear: that the values, structures and political procedures of advanced Western democracies are the most developed and should be transplanted” (Hughes 2000: 21).

This kind of evolutionary thinking is exemplified by the modernisation theories within democratisation studies (Kennedy 1999), according to which economic development is considered the most important explanatory variable for both the triggering of the fall of the authoritarian regime and the prospects of establishing and consolidating a democracy. Despite the attacks that modernisation theory suffered in the 1970s and 1980s (Rustow 1970; Smith 1991), several authors have explained the collapse of communism in terms of wide-ranging technological changes, both domestic and global, which made it increasingly difficult for communist leaders to mobilise and dominate the society (Pye 1990; Bova 1991) – a view which sounds highly suspicious given the sharp economic decline that preceded the breakdown of the communist regimes as well as the relatively high degree of Eastern Europe’s insulation from the global economy. Other authors, like Huntington (1991), stated more carefully that a high level of economic development is generally vital for democratic development, perhaps echoing recent modifications of modernisation theory (Lipset 1994; Przeworski & Limongi 1997; Vanhanen 1997), which reduced its claims from strict causality to referring to a positive or negative environment. Others have been even less deterministic, combining the modernisation and political agent theses, stating that “economic prosperity (...) structures the selectorate’s preferences for political participation and democratic rule” (Kugler & Feng 1999: 143; Munck 1994).<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, in light of the economic development in contemporary Eastern Europe, it emerges that the economic transition has been both over- and underestimated in the literature. Some scholars, most notably Offe (1991), have claimed that political transition is impossible without a (preceding) suc-

cessful economic transition, a thesis refuted both by logic (Linz & Stepan 1996: 435), and by the actual situation in most East-Central European countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic), where democracy appears to be most consolidated, while successive governments continue to struggle with the problems of increasing inequalities, unemployment and poverty. Ironically, Eastern Europe also produced cases where popular reaction to protracted economic crisis triggered attempts to advance political and economic reforms by newly elected radical governments (Bulgaria and Romania), rather than, as one could expect from the modernisation dictum or similarly deterministic 'cultural arguments',<sup>7</sup> a return to some form of authoritarian politics.

Moreover, the explanations related to economic factors fail to explain differences in democratic development between different Eastern European countries. The data from various international agencies monitoring economic development in the region support the view that post-communist countries can be divided into several groups of 'winners' and 'losers' according to the usual indicators, such as the GDP, the levels of growth, unemployment and poverty, or the rates of inflation and attracted foreign investment (for a useful overview see Blazycy 1998). However, there are too many exceptions from the expected positive pattern of economic and political development: Slovakia is economically well placed in the 'winners' group yet is often relegated to the 'losers' group of non-consolidated democracies; the Baltic states regularly feature among the consolidated democracies, yet also reside in the group of relative economic losers (excluding Estonia); Croatia's relative economic wealth sits uneasily with the still transitory stage of its political reforms. To be sure, many of these anomalies can probably be put down to the use of different criteria for evaluation, especially of political democracy (see above). Nevertheless, they also seem to underline that the conventional wisdom about a straightforward relationship between economic prosperity and political democracy has been shaken by both Latin American and Eastern European countries (Remmer 1995), and that Eastern European countries are very much in a 'zone of choice', where political democracy (or the lack of it) must be explained by factors other than economic development (Misztal 1992; Lewis 1997; Kennedy 1999).

Given the general importance attributed to the (unique) legacy of communism, several authors have made a link between the preceding type of authoritarian regime and the problems of transition and democratic consolidation. To be sure, this theoretical focus has not been shared uniformly among the scholars: for example, Przeworski (1991) considers the type of former regime practically irrelevant, while Huntington (1991) sees a significant difference between the various legacies. The main difference between the transitions in the South and East is that in the former the military disappeared

from the political arena once democracy was consolidated, while in the latter the (reformed) communists continue to play an important and often negative role in the new regime (Baylis 1998; Higley, Pakulski & Wesolowski 1998).<sup>8</sup>

The view of Huntington and others eventually prevailed over the 'carta blanca' proposed by Przeworski, as is exemplified by the virtual explosion of proposed 'path dependencies' in explaining the dynamics of post-communist change. For example, Linz and Stepan relate the former types of regime to both the transition and the consolidation phases in a most comprehensive manner (1996: ch. 4); Stark and Bruszt (1997) use different types of communist regimes to explain a variety of adopted economic reform programs; Kitschelt (1995) relates the type of previous regime to the subsequent structuring of party systems. What emerges most clearly from these studies is that post-communist dynamics cannot be explained with reference to some universally shared social, economic, cultural, and institutional structures created under the previous regimes (Jowitt 1992). The collection edited by Crawford and Lijphart (1997) convincingly shows that (negative) inheritances of the past can be overcome, and that a more nuanced explanation should be constructed in order to determine which legacies will and which will not play a role in shaping the direction of change.

This is, of course, no less true for those studies which at least disaggregate the previous regime legacies into a set of distinct propositions about the types of communist regimes. While clearly nuanced and promising, this line of explanatory work has nevertheless suffered from a lack of synthesis, and a general tendency to create as many categories of previous regime as there are countries studied. Thus, while most scholars now agree that the type of authoritarian regime does influence the mode of transition, which in its turn influences the prospects of democratic consolidation, the findings remain contradictory and the impact of the previous regime is not as straightforward as it was thought, especially in the long-term perspective on post-communist development. That view has been reinforced, it should be noted, by the general scepticism with which most scholars working on Eastern Europe treated the elite-based explanations – the theoretical tradition which has most clearly linked the mode of transition with the prospect of democratic consolidation. While the elite-based accounts were perhaps most successful in explaining the breakdown of communism – mainly by reference to the splits within the communist elites and the emergence of democratic counter-elites in the late 1980s (Di Palma 1991; Von Beyme 1996) – they have been considered too limited, too vague, or hindsight-driven to explain the post-transition dynamics by themselves (Welsh 1994; Bos 1996; Munck & Skalnik Leff 1996; Lewis 1997).

Therefore, if anything emerges from this cursory view on theoretical explanations of outcomes in Eastern Europe than it is, firstly, the need to integrate structural and agency based explanations into one single explanatory framework. Democratisation literature, including that on Eastern Europe, tends to hesitate between the relative explanatory weight assigned to structures (socio-economic, cultural or institutional) and agents (elites, parties, counter-elites, civil society etc.), resulting in huge problems of causal inference. As Elster, Offe and Preuss (1998) argued in their innovative attempt to construct a synthesis of structural and agent approaches, the explanatory frameworks must allow for forward (structures select agents and determine their choices), as well as backward linkages (choices and agents define institutional rules which, in turn alter or nullify structural determinants). Secondly, comparative democratisation theory should revise its strong assumptions about the state and nation as given units, as well as its assumptions about democratisation as being primarily a domestic political process.

### **A tentative future agenda**

The democratisation of post-communist Europe has clearly shown that despite the impressive scholarly work done so far, much more needs to be done (Munck 1994: 368–372; Plasser, Ulram & Waldrauch 1998: 49; Hughes 2000). Moreover, it made clear that the universalist pretensions of many democratisation theories were false, as they were written with a certain transition in mind, e.g., developing from authoritarianism, fitting the specific cases of Latin America and Southern Europe. We believe that future research should address at least two underdeveloped topics of the democratisation literature: state and nation-building (the ‘third’ transition) and the international dimension.

#### *State and nation-building*

One way or the other, the processes of state and nation-building were accepted from the outset as a crucial part of democratisation in Eastern Europe (Bunce 1995a). However, the record with regard to this ‘third transition’, generally referred to as state and nation-building or ‘stateness’ (Linz & Stepan 1996), is probably poorest of all. Though these processes now increasingly feature as part of the explanations for the diversity of outcomes within Eastern Europe (Vachudová & Snyder 1997), many scholars have little background to deal with it. As most democratisation scholars come either from the institutionalist school of comparative political science, or from the transitology of

Latin America and Southern Europe, problems of state and even more of nationhood are virtually alien to them.

Therefore, the biggest task for democratisation scholars today is to come to a better understanding of the important role that the related but different processes of state and nation-building play within the democratisation process in post-communist countries. The existing literature on the 'third wave' of democratisation is of little help here. Rather, one should turn to the literature on the 'first wave' of democratisation, i.e., dealing with the development of democratic states in Western Europe, for possible answers and inspiration. For it is particularly with respect to this democratisation wave that some of the major works on the highly complex processes of state-building and state-formation have been written (Rokkan 1970; Tilly 1975, 1990; Bendix 1996).

At the same time, the relationship between nation-building and democratisation has been part of the inter-disciplinary field of nationalism studies, which offers a wealth of research and ideas waiting to be used (Weber 1979; Gellner 1983; Hroch 1985; Hobsbawm 1990). However, the acceptance of nationalism as a crucial part of democratisation in the region should not limit itself to the simplistic thesis of "the return of the repressed" (Blank 1994), i.e., the claim that the end of communist oppression means that the lid was taken off the age-old nationalisms of Eastern Europe. In fact, given the cultural and linguistic diversity within the post-communist (former) states, and the severity of the crisis they went through, the level of nationalism has remained remarkably low (Von Beyme 1996). Studies that simply enumerate the number of existing cultural units (i.e., linguistic or religious minorities) within the Eastern European states, and then subsume these states under the category of potentially problematic cases of transition and consolidation tend to obscure the diversity, both conceptual and political, which this phenomenon bears.

These simplifications are largely due to the failure to recognise that state-building is not the same as nation-building. The two processes are often closely linked, but this is a matter of practice rather than theory (Linz 1993). State-building is principally about the creation and maintenance of the political unit, the state. In its most essential element, it deals with the struggle over the monopoly of physical violence within a certain territory, the definitional essence of the state. In later stages of state-building, it mainly includes the creation of a positive identification with the state of the citizens (Koch 1993). And it is in this respect that the overlap with nation-building often becomes relevant. The latter process denotes "the self-conscious production and dissemination of national consciousness and sentiment or a felt sense of national identity" (Vaneková 1998: 6; Foster 1995). It therefore refers to the definition of the cultural unit, the nation, not of the political unit, the state.

Despite the dominance of the terminology of the nation-state, most countries today are neither (pure) nation-states nor do they aspire to become such. This said, also non-nationalist states are involved in processes of nation-building.

Not surprisingly, scholars of democratisation in the post-Soviet states have taken the lead in this field (Brubaker 1996; Kolsto 1996; Rubin & Snyder 1998; Smith et al. 1998; Sasse 1999). They elaborated how the weakening of the Soviet/Russian centre, as a consequence of the power struggle in Moscow, rather than just the (pre)existence of some strong nationalist movements and identities, helped to trigger a process in which state-building and nation-building are now largely inseparable and extremely difficult to accomplish in the new, post-Soviet successor states (including in Russia itself, see Hughes (2000)). Given the transitory character of political developments, and the often uncertain final results of them, many scholars also understandably rejected the term 'democratisation' (or transition and consolidation), rather opting to describe political processes in the many post-Soviet countries exclusively in the terminology of state and nation-building.

Ironically, many colleagues, particularly those concerned with East-Central Europe, have mistakenly considered these processes irrelevant for their region (Croan 1999; notable exceptions are Szabó 1994 and Skalník Leff 1998). The most obvious case to disprove this assertion is Slovakia. The problem is not so much that scholars ignored the importance of its large Hungarian minority, but rather that Slovakia's crisis under Mečiar tended to be wrongly interpreted as a natural translation of a strong 'ethnic cleavage', rather than as a crisis of a new state, still very much in the treacherous process of state-building (Batt 1996; Kopecký & Mudde 2000). But also in supposedly 'ethnically homogeneous' countries like the Czech Republic, Hungary or Slovenia discussions about the relationship between state and nation surface regularly and feed directly into the patterns of competition between political elites (and parties).

Therefore, what is needed are both theoretical and empirical building blocks to develop a coherent and broad understanding of the complex relationships between the processes of state-building and nation-building and the processes of democratisation in Eastern Europe. In addition to the increasing number of case studies, which are unfortunately still mainly restricted to the post-Soviet states, small-N comparative studies would be most useful. So far, few comparative studies explored the different institutional strategies that national elites can employ in their policies vis-à-vis minorities (Linz & Stepan, 1996: 428–433), or the differences in strategies that post-communist governments adopted in this respect in their relationship with the EU (Vachudová & Snyder 1997). Future comparative studies should include a select (small) sample of post-communist countries that face significant

problems of nation-building and statehood, yet that differ in their level of democratisation.

### *International dimension*

The international dimension of democratic transition and consolidation in Eastern Europe has received very little scholarly attention.<sup>9</sup> This is the more remarkable given the almost universal agreement on the importance of this dimension in explaining the collapse of most communist regimes. As many scholars have noted, it was first and foremost the changes that were introduced by Gorbachev in the former USSR (i.e., perestroika and glasnost) that led to the collapse of the communist regimes in East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia etc. (Linz & Stepan 1996; Lewis 1997; Whitehead 1997). But therewith the international dimension did not loose its relevance. Actually, as Pridham (1997, 1999a) argues, the international context plays a far more important role in the transitions in Eastern Europe than it did in those in Southern Europe and Latin America, in part because of the simultaneous political and economic transition.

Obviously, 'the international dimension' is a very broad and diverse variable, difficult to conceptualise in relation to the boundaries of national politics. This is one of the reasons why democratisation scholars still tend to limit their explanations to the level of domestic politics, while scholars approaching democratisation from the perspective of international relations tend to ignore (the diversity of) political life at the state or sub-state level (Remmer 1995). Therefore, first of all, one has to distinguish between the 'international context' and 'international actors'. According to various authors, the international context has been extremely favourable to democratisation since the 1970s (Linz & Stepan 1996; Green 1999). Most Western states increasingly put the global pursuit of democratisation on the foreign policy agenda, punishing anti-democratic (measures of) governments and rewarding democratic ones. For some, this amounts to an important shift in the ways democracy is promoted: from formerly prevailing forms of 'coercion' to presently dominated 'conditionality' (Whitehead 1996). In addition, pro-democracy NGO's have sprung up throughout the world, calling for democratisation within autocracies or for the help of democratisation movements within democracies (Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 1999). Moreover, the global communication system has helped the oppressed getting their message out, as well as the 'free' getting their message to the 'unfree' (e.g. Urban 1997).

However, as the international context is a constant, it cannot explain the obvious differences in transition and consolidation that can be observed between post-communist countries such as Poland and Hungary on the democratic hand, and Serbia and Uzbekistan on the autocratic hand. In this respect,

the behaviour of international actors, traditionally the domain of the sub-discipline of international relations, is of more use. In different countries, different actors will constitute the relevant international dimension and with different effects (Merkel 1996a; Parrott 1997). Similarly, the same international actor will yield a different impact on different states, depending on both how policies of such actors are filtered through domestic structures (and local perceptions), and how a recipient state links up with the wider international system (Pridham 1997). Obviously, such complex processes can only be studied in (theoretically grounded) case studies or small-N comparisons.<sup>10</sup>

Probably most clear and decisive has been the continuing influence of the European Union on the democratisation efforts of East-Central European countries. As all of these countries (still) consider EU-membership their highest foreign policy goal, the EU is in a strong position to influence the internal politics of these countries.<sup>11</sup> So far, it has done this vigorously and across the board, pressing ECE states into implementing a global liberal vision of an open market policy, transparent bureaucratic and political systems, and a democratic human rights regime. There is no doubt that many of these measures have been implemented because of the desire to become a EU-member rather than out of genuine support for the goals themselves (Greskovits 1998; Petrová 1999). Nevertheless, these measures have been implemented, influencing the process of democratic consolidation in various ways; partly positive, i.e., the countries adopt to the new reality and internalise the new goals, partly negative, i.e., as some measures will lead to resistance within the local population and might create a new counter-elite (Croan 1999; Henderson 1999; Tănase 1999).

## Conclusion

The diversity of political, economic and social outcomes which have emerged as results of the recent changes in Eastern Europe has provided fertile ground for testing the explanatory frameworks of other cases of democratisation of the third wave, i.e., Latin America and Southern Europe. However, the relationship between Eastern Europe and democratisation studies has so far been highly asymmetric. In contrast to the vast contribution, both in data and theory, of Eastern Europe to the democratisation literature, the latter has been of only modest use to the understanding of the democratisation processes in post-communist Europe. Despite the welcome use of the existing terminology and hence the higher degree of integration of (mainly Central) Eastern European studies into the mainstream of comparative politics, questions largely prevail on what democratic transition and consolidation mean in the Eastern European context, as well as on how the seemingly widening

gulf between East-Central Europe on the one hand, and the post-Soviet and Balkan states on the other, can be explained.

Given the relatively short period during which democratisation has been under way in Eastern Europe, it might be too early to expect sound generalisations, least of all one feasible singular account, of these complex processes. However, we do believe that research on Eastern Europe has now produced enough material to deserve a synthesis and a push in new directions. We suggested that these should revolve around three key areas. First, there is a need to improve on classifications of the emerging diversity of regimes in post-communist Europe, accompanied by a moderation of the often excessive expectations as to what democratic consolidation involves. Second, explanations should attempt to integrate structural and agency based explanations into one single explanatory framework.<sup>12</sup> Finally, such analyses, essentially multivariable, should strongly probe into the explanatory power of two hitherto neglected topics: state and nation-building and the international dimension. In this sense, democratisation studies would greatly profit from expanding its disciplinary and geographical constraints by integrating research from nationalism studies, international relations, and the studies of the 'first wave' of democratisation.

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## Notes

1. Acknowledging that, in the words of Naimark (1999: 327), "(t)he geographical imagery of 'Eastern Europe' has changed so dramatically over the past ten years that it gets harder and harder to know what one means by the term", some words are needed to clarify how we use the various geographical denotations in this article. Most importantly, we use the geographical terms mainly as a shortcut, grouping countries with a more or less similar geographical position and, more importantly, political development. Starting with the simplest term, we use 'post-Soviet' for all states that have emerged from the former Soviet-Union. The term 'Eastern Europe' is used to describe all European post-communist states, as well as, though geographically incorrect, Central Asian post-communist states (including the non-post-Soviet Mongolia). Finally, 'East-Central Europe' denotes the four Visegrad-countries (although in political terms the Baltics and Slovenia fit the description), while the term 'Balkans' is used to describe the successor states to Yugoslavia as well as Bulgaria, Romania and Albania.
2. Who exactly are the most significant or relevant groups and political actors is nevertheless a moot point. Democratisation literature often considers political parties and large

interest groups as the main players, with the subsequent complaints that various civil society movements and associations are ignored even if their relative importance in a new democracy is significant.

3. In a more recent paper, Schedler (1999) has shifted his position: "Democratic consolidation is not about regime stability. It is about *expectations* of regime stability" (our italics). However, rather than solving the main problem of determining the endpoint of consolidation, we believe this new focus only creates new problems (e.g., whose expectations are important? how to measure 'expectations'?).
4. We suggest a minimalist definition which falls between Schumpeter's electoral democracy (i.e., existence of elections) and Dahl's definition of polyarchy. For a useful conceptualisation see Gunther, Diamandouros and Puhle (1995).
5. This is not to say that it is impossible to be a consolidated democracy while having reasonably successful anti-system parties. As, for example, the case of Italy shows, the most important aspect is that these parties are co-opted into the system, i.e., share (some of) the spoils and (therefore) accept the rules of the game.
6. Perhaps the best summary on both the validity and usefulness of the modernisation thesis is provided by Geddes (1999: 119): "In short, after 20 years of observation and analysis during the third wave of academic interest in democratization, we can be reasonably certain that a positive relationship between development and democracy exists, though we do not know why".
7. Note that Bulgaria and Romania are put also often in the category of 'cultural laggards', i.e., countries with a historical background in Ottoman traditions, Turkish influences and eastern Orthodoxy. This is sometimes seen as distinct (and negatively related to the prospects for democracy) from the Austria-Hungarian, western Christian traditions of the countries in East-Central Europe (Lewis 1997).
8. While in most post-Soviet states the former communist *nomenklatura* remained very influential in (party) politics, in most East-Central European states it mainly 're-emerged as the rising new bourgeoisie' (Haraszti 1999). As Tănase (1999: 363) argues, the old political elite/new economic elite "is in a contradictory mood seeking (1) to limit reforms in order to control political and economic processes (allotment, wealth); and (2) to push forward reforms in order to benefit from opportunities" (for an interesting discussion on the Russian case, see Hughes (2000)).
9. So far it has been explored almost exclusively because of the efforts of two scholars, Geoffrey Pridham (1997, 1999a, b) and Laurence Whitehead (1996, 1997). Some of the few studies of other scholars are Quigley (1997), Phillips (1999) and Wedel (1999). For a useful theoretical overview see Schmitz and Sell (1999).
10. Two of the few small-N comparisons that study the impact of the international dimension in an empirical way, and include a nation-building approach, are Hunter (1994) and Skalník Leff (1996). For a very thoughtful discussion of the various ways in which the international dimension influenced the transition in Russia, see Hughes (2000).
11. A similar argument can be made for NATO and the Council of Europe. However, we focus here mainly on the EU, as though membership of both other organisations is or was also high on the agendas of East-Central European governments, and requires basic democratic institutions and behaviour from the applicant countries, both NATO and the Council of Europe are considered by ECE states as being either of secondary importance or mainly a 'porch' of the EU.
12. For some first attempts see, for example, Merkel (1996a), Sandschneider (1996) or Elster, Offe & Preuss (1998).

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