POST-COMMUNISM: A PROFILE

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The period of transition in the post-communist world can be regarded as over. While in the broad sense, all political systems undergo constant change (otherwise they stagnate), the period of rapid transformation, while the post-communist systems acquired their present shape, can be accepted as having reached an interim conclusion. Furthermore, after five years the activities of the post-communist political actors must also be added to the equation which has produced this interim configuration. There will, of course, be change in the future, but this is likely to be slower, although upheavals cannot be excluded. Certainly, while the potential for movement towards democracy as understood and practised in the West - the overt aspiration of the post-communist states - exists, the attainment of these standards and practices will take longer than was generally assumed in the heady days of 1989-90. In summary form, the post-communist systems can be described as "democratic in form and nationalist in content".

The reference is not coincidental, after all it was Leninism that left so deep a mark on these societies that the construction of democracy is proving to be such a hard road. This implies that both the communist legacy and the way in which post-communist politicians have responded to the challenge of introducing democracy should be seen as the key determining factors in the present state of play. These processes further imply that the term "post-communism" has authentic content and is not merely a temporal definition. This analysis is an attempt to chart the key features of this type of system. It will proceed from the broad assumption that while there are evidently significant variations between individual post-communist states, overall they share characteristics that allow one to make valid comparisons.

The essence of post-communism, it will be argued here, is that it now constitutes a **sui generis** system which is marked by some democratic practices, with stronger or weaker commitments to pluralism, so that both political and economic competition have become a reality. At the same time, anti-democratic ideas and practices are also current and have some roots in society as well as

legitimating discourses to back them up. These latter, when coupled with the structural obstacles to democracy imply that the road to the construction of genuine democracy will take a fair period of time (cf. Jowitt 1992).

The assessment of these obstacles should begin with an analysis of the state and of the relationship between society and the state. Historical and functional aspects of the state are intertwined in posing considerable difficulties in the attainment of the desired aim. First, the state machinery inherited from the communist period is overextended in the sense that it lacks the capacity to carry out its ostensible functions. It is handicapped by a series of bureaucracies that have a culture not of legal-rationality but of politicisation and rigid adherence to the rules.

When political and bureaucratic imperatives collide, the bureaucratic regulations generally give way and political or personal influence determines the outcome. Equally, the functioning of the state machinery is handicapped by both over-regulation and by gaps in legislation. Although several of the post-communist states have made considerable strides in updating their legal frameworks in the accordance with the needs of a market economy, lacunae still exist (see White, Batt and Lewis 1993). This state of affairs is exacerbated by another legacy of the past - the weak internalisation of the rule of law. Under communism, rules were adhered to because of coercion or the threat of coercion. The transition from this externalised compliance to an internalised recognition that rules are important and useful in their own right is slow and patchy. By and large there is a sense that the state is a capricious and uncontrollable body, the regulations of which are a resource to be used by those in power against the individual. Another factor which places a major question mark over the establishment of a market economy, contracts are unevenly honoured and property rights are enforced inconsistently.

Fragmentation and Moralisation

Post-communism is marked, furthermore, by a series of fissures in society and between society and the state. The most significant of these is the gap between the public and private spheres. Because of the alien and imposed nature of the communist system, society constructed a series of defences against it, one of which was to regard itself as morally superior. This is in no way unusual in a situation of powerlessness. This sense of a morally "good" society locked in combat with an "evil" state was projected on to the public sphere as a whole and, predictably, has been carried over into post-communism. The consequence is that there is an absence or weakness of impersonal norms and rule application. Whatever is done is interpreted as a moral category. Decisions are not taken at face value, but are scrutinised for their moral dimensions. And because this moral dimension has spilled over into politics, political decisions are especially prone to moralising judgements of this kind. This makes it extremely difficult to legitimate expertise and professionalism, as well as to underpin the autonomy of institutions as genuine. There is a general expectation that rather than follow the rules, one should use personal connections, a pattern which simply strengthens personalisation. That in turn encourages the creation of patron-client networks, which in the Central and East European context tend to be political and politicised - the establishment of new nomenklaturas for all practical purposes, albeit

these are not structured in the communist manner. Political parties are not merely the representatives of partial interests, but are the primary sources of self-protection in what is otherwise a harsh and hostile world, because the formal set of rules is perceived as meaningless. In this way, the cycle is reproduced.

There is an interesting counter-factual question to be asked here: was there ever a possibility of creating an unpoliticised civil service? One cannot, of course, give a definitive answer to this, but there is a line of argument which suggests that perhaps this was not entirely implausible, though in the circumstances it would always have been a difficult option. The proposition goes roughly along the following lines. At the moment when communism collapsed in some, though not all, of the communist states there existed a reasonably educated and technically competent intelligentsia that, while it had had its formation under communism, was not as such committed to the communist system. It was ready to serve any political order as long as it was allowed to do so without excessive politicisation and political interference. After all, the communist revolution did seek to bring about a form of modernity, a distorted one naturally, but one that recognised the significance of rules and rule application. To an extent that varied from country to country, this technical intelligentsia could have formed the basis of a politically independent public service. The new post-communist elites, however, could not or would not recognise this autonomy of the intelligentsia and regarded its members with suspicion, as having become irredeemably tainted by their association with the **ancien regime**. Hence it insisted on establishing its own, reliable cadres in the public sphere, because otherwise - the new rulers believed - their policies would be or were being sabotaged by the intelligentsia which was still loyal to the communists. Under these conditions, the members of the intelligentsia had no option but to seek the protection of whatever political power was prepared to take them on. The new leadership could not accept the interpretation that flaws in the execution of their policies derived not from the machinations of crypto-communists, but from their own inadequacies in managing and organising bureaucracies. The politicisation of the public sphere is an established fact under post-communism and cannot be undone, at any rate not in the short term.

A further factor complicating the role of the state and its politicisation is that excessive faith is placed in what can be achieved via the state. Even while the state is distrusted, the patterns of dependence on it developed under communism cannot be sloughed off overnight. The tradition of autonomous action, the core definition of a civil society, is still very weak. The consequence of these exaggerated expectations is that politics and the state are pushed in various directions to intervene in the affairs of other spheres - the economy above all, but also the law, culture and to some extent religion - where they can frequently do little or nothing. This state of affairs has been termed "political inflation" and ironically resembles the functioning of the Soviet-type system, although with the crucial proviso that there is no totalising ideology to legitimate it (see Gellner 1994).

Aspects of High Politics

The expansion of politics into other spheres has had far-reaching consequences for the nature of the political system itself. Paralleling the public sphere in general,

political parties, parliaments and governments appear to be permeated by a culture that suggests that political competition should as far as possible be diminished. There is a clear implicit assumption that once a government has come to power, it should be in a position to rule unaffected by criticism from the outside. While the principle of free elections may be generally accepted, the proposition that democracy is something more than a regular plebiscite is not. Parties in power, whether of the left or the right, appear to be deeply hostile to the ebb-and-flow of debate and contest over issues and are intensely hostile to criticism.

The distinction between constructive and destructive criticism is ignored and opponents continue to be regarded as enemies rather than as fellow members of the political process with something to contribute to decision-making. Here again the moralisation of politics and the homogenisation of interests that it helps to bring about are a salient feature of the post-communist paradigm. Nor does this emerging order encounter any marked hostility from the bulk of the population.

The weakness of civil society and a culture underpinning autonomous organisation as inherently valuable have led to a situation where sizeable social groups are content to let high politics operate above their heads, as it were, to leave governing to the government and to have minimal expectations of making an input. There are, of course, vocal minorities which object to whatever the government of the day is actually doing, but their aspiration seems largely to be to replace the existing party in power with their own brand of homogenised rule. Thus while there may be alternation of governments, this does not have the same meaning as would be expected in an ideal-type Western democracy. Thus it can be argued that post-communism resembles a semi-authoritarian system by consent. Paradoxically, elections produce non-competitive outcomes because there is only a limited aspiration for competitive politics.

This raises the interesting question of how one should approach the analysis of politics in societies where for the time being there is an evident element of consent for semi-democratic practices and where this system is legitimated either by nationalism or by etatism, or by a subtle combination of the two. The form and content of politics diverge and in this post-communist paradigm, the rise of social and political pluralism is inhibited by the interests that have become vested in the new system. This proposition is not intended to suggest that the new system is wholly inimical to pluralism. Islands of autonomy do exist and could conceivably come to constitute the foundation for a political order that more closely resembles the ideal-typical democracy in the name of which communism was dislodged. These islands are tolerated to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the prevailing legitimating ideology. Where nationalism dominates, ethnicity will be regarded as the major danger; where it is etatism, lip-service to the market and political contest may be paid, but the state will function in such a way as to weaken their growth. And there is an arbitrariness in all this. The group actually in power will tolerate these islands of autonomy to the extent that its own position is not threatened, so that self-limitation, the rule of law and the tacit ground-rules that enable civil society to operate will only be observed to the extent that the power of the rulers is not seriously infringed (see Pusić 1994).

One of the consequences of this emerging pattern is that the response of those who are powerless or feel themselves to be so is to opt for symbolic politics. Anyone who follows the practice of post-communist politics closely will be struck by how frequently political issues acquire a symbolic character. This phenomenon is explained in the first place by the legacy of the communist past, when people could express their dissent from the then existing repression by making symbolic gestures. This has not disappeared, so that for many people political action consists precisely of symbolic gestures rather than seeking to act directly on the behaviour of institutions. The trouble with symbolic politics is that while it may make those participating in it feel good, this wears off after a short time, requiring a renewed effort, thereby continuing and accentuating the cycle. That, in turn, inhibits the learning process whereby people, whether as individuals or in groups can become familiar with the procedures necessary for making institutions real. Symbolic action is a kind of short-circuiting of the orderly political process as understood in the West and, more than anything else, it fails to provide material benefits. The outcome is to produce a growing gap between leaders and followers, and the potential for popular dissatisfaction becomes greater. Furthermore, the hopes and energies invested in symbolic politics strengthens the moralising, abstract, remote quality of politics as such, making it beyond the reach of the individual and thus weakening any sense that goals can be attained by using the existing system. This is obviously undesirable from the perspective of democracy.

One of the negative outcomes of this development is that the emergence of the market is seriously impeded. Where the ideal-typical market is concerned, the central role of the state is to protect property rights and to oversee the enforcement of contracts. In the real world, of course, political pressure intervenes in the economy in various ways to distort the interplay of supply and demand. The problem in the post-communist world is that this political intervention is capricious and weakens or undermines the operation of market actors and market forces. Not least, the personalised and politicised patterns of activity give rise to various forms of corruption, state subsidies, bureaucratic obstruction and other similar phenomena. Again, looking at Central and Eastern Europe in an ideal-typical way, an argument could be made that politics ought to be minimised until a strong entrepreneurial class has emerged from the rubble of communism, but this is made impossible by the democratic forms that these states have adopted. Interestingly, the Chinese model, in which the communist party continues to hold monopoly political power but allows free markets to operate may turn out to be more effective in the long term in assisting primitive capital accumulation, but it is unlikely that any post-communist state in Europe would follow the Chinese path. Too much hangs on democratic legitimisation, not least integration by the West. Besides, it would be all but impossible to legitimate anything even vaguely resembling a totalising system for the time being.

Communist Successor Parties

This last proposition applies with the greatest force to left-wing ideologies. The prospects for a revival of the Soviet-type system are very poor. Nevertheless, this does not mean that elements of the past have not survived and are not usable in the construction of left-leaning systems. Here the most significant development has been

the rise of the former communist parties in a democratic socialist guise, notably in Poland, Hungary and Lithuania. This development has left many observers, especially in the West, bemused. The thought that communist parties should be returned to power in free elections has been an unexpected and, for many, a distasteful event. Yet that judgement is too simplistic. A typology of communist successor parties is necessary to make sense of what has been happening.

In the first place, there are the nostalgic authoritarians, whose electoral support has, in fact, varied from small to minimal. The second category are the chauvino-communists, those who rapidly discarded their communist legitimisation at the collapse and adopted a nationalist one instead. Parties in this category are characterised by their never having been fully ousted from power. They retained control of some of the state machinery and operated on an opportunistic-populist basis by looking to monopolise the nationalist agenda. The third category are those who were, in fact, genuinely ejected from power, undertook a measure of reappraisal and accepted the rules of the democratic game - constitutionality, openness, self-limitation, popular sovereignty etc. It should be noted here that communist successor parties have one enormous advantage over all other political groups. Unless they were actively involved in repression, like membership of the secret police, they do not have to account for what they did during the period of communist rule. All others do. Anyone attempting to legitimate political action under post-communism in an anti-communist fashion has to appear as a morally pure, as uncontaminated by communist rule. In practice, this Caesar's wife principle is unsustainable. Anyone living under communism - except those under the age of, say, 30 in 1989 - had to have made some compromise with it and the question of how much of a compromise made in the past is acceptable in the very different conditions of the present cannot be answered. Indeed, it becomes a highly contentious issue, because it permits the delegitimation of political action by reference to a moralised perception of the past, in which those making the delegitimating accusations are themselves in a vulnerable position by reason of their own past compromises.

This is a complex and painful issue and it is hard to know how it should be dealt with. Different post-communist countries have tried different routes. Some, like Rumania, have simply ignored it. Ceausescu was shot, a few of those closely associated with him were sacked or formally disgraced, but otherwise the issue was allowed to peter out. Elsewhere, as in the former GDR, the system of coming to terms with the past has been formalised to an enormous extent, so that the Stasi (secret police) files have been opened, all 170 kilometres, and are available to anyone who wants to consult them. In effect, this accessibility has been used by the Bonn establishment to impede the rise of an East German elite, most notably when after the 1994 elections, the German communist successor party, the PDS succeeded in entering the Bundestag and embarrassingly the veteran writer Stefan Heym was elected as the oldest member with the right to open the assembly. The Bonn establishment immediately found police files and sought discredit Heym. There is an interesting suggestion that a part of the explanation for why the nationalist-conservative right in Hungary moved so emphatically back to the language and ideas of the 1930s was precisely to avoid having to confront their activities in the 1980s (see Kovacs 1994). However, this problem of a

compromised past does not, by definition, affect the former communists, subject to the exception noted above, because they need make no secret of their past involvement.

Only the nostalgic authoritarians are in any way seriously vulnerable on this issue and they, as argued, are marginal in political terms. Still, all three currents share a high level belief in the use of the machinery of the state to achieve their objectives and, by and large, in a relatively slow tempo in the move towards marketisation. There the similarities end, however. The nostalgic authoritarians can be discounted as a serious political force, except where electoral arithmetic might give them influence (Slovakia after the 1994 elections and Rumania provide examples). The chauvino-communists are a serious force in Rumania, because effectively they have remained in power since the overthrow of Ceausescu. In Bulgaria, the situation is more complex, but not wholly unlike what prevails in Rumania. The BSP lost power very briefly, for eleven months in 1992, and it won power again in the 1994 elections, partly on a modernising platform. But the BSP appears to be an uneasy coalition of modernisers and nationalists. In Poland, Hungary and Lithuania, the communist successor parties underwent a measure of internal transformation and appear to be embarking on a cautious modernisation of the system. One of the potential ironies of this situation is that if these former communist parties succeed in this endeavour, they could very well end up with having created the necessary preconditions for a successful market economy or the contemporary equivalent of capitalism. The Czech Republic constitutes a partial exception to the pattern of the emergence of a successful of communist successor party. Here the conservative coalition led by Vaclav Klaus has dominated politics and the left, including the moderate left, has been rather weak. The explanation largely lies in the leadership skills demonstrated by Klaus, which has satisfied Czech voters and has pre-empted any left-wing challenges. Klaus's success implies that the forward surge of the former communists elsewhere is at least in part attributable to the failures of the non-communist elites which took power in the aftermath of the collapse.

The Rise of the Right

Right-wing challenges are of a different order. These movements are characterised by populism, xenophobia and anti-alien ideologies, they may well be racist, anti-democratic and antagonistic to integration in Europe. Racism at this time is primarily anti-Roman (Gypsy), but incorporates anti-Semitism too in some countries. The problem faced by the new right is that they have to rely for support on politically, economically and socially semi-marginalised strata - the actual and potential losers in the transformation process. These strata are easily mobilised by extremist slogans, but their support tends to melt away when success is not delivered quickly.

In effect, the right has to adopt an anti-modernising stance, rejecting the distorted modernity brought into being under communism, and to call for a return to a "purer" past, which is heavily mythicised. This rejection implies a refusal to accept that the communist revolution has, in fact, produced real changes which can be undone. These changes included the solution (though very brutally) of the peasant question, the construction of a modern infrastructure or some of it, the introduction of industrial working practices (though of a rather antiquated kind) and the establishment of an

industrial base (outdated and inefficient), patterns of collective consumption and some elements of education, welfare and health provision on a universally accessible basis. These can create the infrastructure for a modern definition of citizenship. How this part of the communist legacy is to be dealt with and integrated into a market economy is a key problematic for post-communism. The extreme right rejects it verbally, though it has not had the opportunity to show what it would do if it had power. The moderate right has employed marketising rhetoric but changed little in practice. The moderate centre has gone further in dismantling state control, viz. shock therapy in Poland. The former communists have sought to square the circle by introducing marketisation and keeping state provision in being.

The relationship between the right and nationalism is a complex one, but reliance on nationalism is not an exclusively right-wing phenomenon. It would be hard to classify Slobodan Milosevic as right-wing, for example. Nevertheless, right-wing movements do rely on an appeal to nationhood and nationalist ideologies as a part of their platform. Definitions and distinctions have to be made very carefully in this area. In the first place, nationhood should be understood as an authentic experience with genuine functions in the maintenance of communities. At the same time, because one of the functions of nationhood is to serve as the means of acting out the affective dimension of collectivities, it is extremely easy to make nationalistic appeals of an emotional kind which severely restrict the cognitive space of a community and allow ethnic entrepreneurs the freedom to manipulate their constituencies. It is in this area that the irrationalities associated with nationalism acquire their power and their dangers.

In the post-communist context there is an added factor to be entered into the equation - the ontological void left by the collapse of communism, coupled with the massive disorientation that is bound to be felt by any community undergoing the kind of civilisational transformation that Central and Eastern Europe is experiencing. When serious material changes are added to the mixture, with the sudden impoverishment of some strata and the enrichment of others, the siren song of populist and nationalist leaders gains serious political significance. The rise of nationalism and movements using nationalist slogans is, therefore, understandable in the circumstances, something which does not make them more attractive. The long term solution can only be based on the slow shift towards basing the relationship between rulers and ruled on citizenship rather than ethnicity and the creation of a political culture in which all can share regardless of ethnicity. This feat has never been an easy one.

As far as the post-communist world is concerned, ethnically homogeneous or near-homogeneous states have a much easier task than multi-ethnic ones, but even in these states (Poland, Hungary, Lithuania) the fears of those most vulnerable to the buffetings of change are readily exploitable by reference to scapegoats, aliens, and conspiracy theories. Other forms of ideological thinking in which every effect has a cause and all phenomena are to be explained in terms of a single, transcendental world-view will tend to capture the allegiance not of the weakest social strata but of those who gained something under communism and see these gains as threatened by the transformation. Both leftward and rightward shifts in the post-communist world can be explained in these terms.

This does raise two questions. One of these is the danger of polarisation. When extremists gain power, they tend to give rise to antagonisms in their own image and to produce processes which are inherently conflict-generating. Thus in these situations, political actors will automatically assume that opponents are enemies and take precautionary measures accordingly. This results in each antagonistic group legitimating its activities by reference to the other, so that the outcome can easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy. These processes can be observed, for example, in the relationship between Milosevic and Tudjman. Each needs the other in order to legitimate his own rule and the demonisation of the other serves only to enhance or accelerate the process.

Modernisation and the Left

The other problem concerns the fate of the communist successor parties. They have won office on the tacit or explicit promise that they will successfully bring about the modernisation of the state, which is understood as bringing about prosperity with the minimum of pain. What happens if they fail in this? The answer is open for the moment, but it can only point in a very negative direction, because it will mean that moderate options of both left and right are exhausted. It will be at that juncture probably that right-extremists will have their best chance of gaining power.

Finally, to round off this analysis, a few words should be said about the nature of the societies created by communism in order to help with an understanding of the political spectrum. Essentially, one can identify three broad social categories. There are the democrats, those who accept the values of open competition, the avoidance of zero-sum games, compromise and toleration in both politics and economics. This group is probably the smallest of the three, but it is not entirely non-existent. It is noteworthy that in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia around half of GDP was produced by the private sector by 1994 and that a similar proportion of the labour force was privately employed. This is a significant development, because it implies that a stratum of entrepreneurs is emerging, with an interest in maintaining the democratic system; but even counting in the shadow economy, a sizeable section of the private sector remained dependent on the state for subsidies or were private in name only (cf. Young and Reynolds 1994). Further, the gap between the private and state sectors is widening in terms of corporate cultures, in the rising fear of unemployment among those working in state-subsidised sectors and in attitudes towards competition and democracy.

The second group is the segment created by communism. Its characteristic feature is that it acquired urban values as a result of communist industrialisation, it depends on the state for fairly high levels of collective consumption and it is cautious, if not indeed fearful of competition and contest. It dislikes social differentiation and believes in a variant of negative egalitarianism, in which all should be brought to roughly the same level. It finds the ostentation of the new bourgeoisie very hard to tolerate. On the other hand, it does accept that modernity as understood in the West is the ultimate goal and that Western patterns of consumption are a desirable objective.

The third segment is the most intractable. This is made up of those who were not integrated successfully into modern, urban ways, who retain a readiness to listen to

traditional appeals, both of nationhood and of the peasant community and who are profoundly threatened by the changes that they see around them. They dislike Western styles and technology, they are distrustful of integration into "Europe" as a desirable aim and prefer an ordered hierarchical society to democracy. Furthermore, it should be noticed that last segment does have something of its own intellectual leadership, capable of providing it with an ideology, symbols and rallying points. It would be a fateful error to ignore these factors. While the first two segments can combine on a number of objectives, the third is and will remain an antagonist and will be difficult to assimilate to the values of democracy. Yet without a sizeable social base and an intellectual legitimisation the future of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe will be open to question.

In this area, the West can probably do more than it is currently doing to promote democratic values. The single most important step in this direction would be the acceptance of free trade in the goods that the area actually produces - steel, textiles, foodstuffs - but it is precisely here that the objections of Western producers have so far proved an insuperable obstacle. Politically the West could do more to give moral support to its natural allies, the democrats, but once again the West finds itself divided over the most effective ways of achieving this, as demonstrated repeatedly over the post-Yugoslav crisis. Overall, therefore, the outlook for Central and Eastern Europe is gloomy but not hopeless. The coming years will undoubtedly see crises, failures in democratic practice, convolutions and the like, but a gradual move towards the strengthening of pluralism and constitutionalism should also be in evidence.

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POSTKOMUNIZEM: KRATKA BIOGRAFIJA

POVZETEK

Obdobje tranzicije v postkomunističnem svetu je končano. Vsi politični sistemi se sicer neprestano spreminjajo (ali pa zaidejo v stagnacijo), vendar pa je obdobje hitre transformacije, v katerem so postkomunistični sistemi dobili sedanjo podobo, doseglo zaključno vmesno fazo. Gotovo prihodnost ne bo brez sprememb, vendar pa bodo počasnejše. Obstaja potencial za približevanje demokraciji, kot je uveljavljena na Zahodu, vendar pa bo doseganje teh standardov in praks počasnejše, kot so bila pričakovanja v obdobju 1989-90. Bistvo postkomunizma je, da tvori sistem sui generis, ki ga označujejo nekatere demokratične prakse z večjo ali manjšo naklonjenostjo pluralizmu, tako da sta politično in ekonomsko tekmovanje postala realnost, hkrati pa so v njem pristone protidemokratične ideje in prakse. Kolikor so povezane s strukturnimi ovirami demokratizaciji, pomenijo, da bo pot doseganja resnične demokracije dokaj dolga. Prvo oviro demokratizaciji predstavlja pretiran in neusposobljen državni aparat, ki izvira iz obdobja komunizma in nima pravno-racionalne kulture, pač pa je obremenjen s politizacijo in rigidnim spoštovanjem pravil. Postkomunizem nadalje označuje množica razcepov v družbi ter med družbo in državo. Med njimi je najpomembnejši prepad med javno in zasebno sfero, ki ga povzroča v obdobju komunizma ustvarjena predstava o moralno "dobri" družbi in o "zli" državi, kar povzroča, da je še vedno vse interpretirano z moralnimi kategorijami. Na splošno velja, da je bolje uporabljati osebne zveze, kot pa spoštovati pravila. To spodbuja nastajanje klientelističnih omrežij in nove nomenklature. Politične stranke niso zgolj predstavniki parcialnih interesov, ampak so primarni vir samozaščite v sicer sovražnem svetu, saj velja formalni nabor pravil za nesmiselnega — in tako je krog zaprt. Stranke na oblasti, naj bodo leve ali desne, so sovražne vsaki kritiki. Medtem ko je načelo svobodnih volitev povsod sprejeto, pa nikakor ni sprejeta ideja o demokraciji kot nečem več od občasnega plebiscita. Obstaja nekakšno soglasje za poldemokratične prakse, sistem pa se legitimira bodisi z nacionalizmom, bodisi z etatizmom, ali pa s subtilno kombinacijo

obeh. Ena od ključnih posledic takega razvoja so ovire nastajanju trga. Možnosti za oživitev sistema sovjetskega tipa so sicer zelo majhne, kar pa ne pomeni, da niso preživeli mnogi elementi preteklosti, zlasti ko gre oblikovanje levo usmerjenih sistemov. Na drugi strani desno usmerjene stranke in gibanja označujejo populizem, ksenofobija in rasistične, protidemokratične ali protievropske ideologije. V celoti so torej obeti za vzhodno in srednjo Evropo precej temni, ne pa brezupni.