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Transition, Consolidation and Development of Parties and Party Systems in Central Europe 1989-2009

- Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary

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The aim of this publication is to highlight the changes that have taken place politically over the last 20 years in Central and Eastern European countries. In the first section, the various phases of the political transitions are presented. This is followed by a special review of the political parties and party systems. The next section is devoted to regime types and consolidation of democracy. Thereafter, specific issues of great importance are addressed: the political right and left, coalition formation, for and against presidentialism, the political elites, party institutionalization and development of party culture. The approach is descriptive and explorative, not to theory testing and theory formation.

The main emphasis is on Central European countries, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

It is the author's hope that this presentation will provide a better insight into the major political changes that have taken place in the 20 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

I. Introduction: stages of transformation, political parties and party systems in the CEEC's.

1. Stages of transition and post-communism

By most observers, political parties are considered a necessary but not sufficient precondition for successful transition and consolidation in the Western understanding of the term. Transition studies have often been accused of “over-optimism”, teleological bias, neglect of historic and cultural barriers for successful transition and the stateness problems and overestimating significance of elections (“electoral fallacy”), political parties and elites (Guliyev, 2005). In other words, consolidation was only one among many possible outcomes of the transition. As we shall see in the section on consolidation of democracy, several ex-communist countries, in particular countries in the CIS region have not moved towards consolidated democracy but rather some kind of hybrid regimes.

On the other hand, “transitologists” criticize what they see as a structuralist and one-sided emphasis on broad structural historical legacies. According to them, the legacy-inspired approach does not prove helpful in explaining the fate of the political parties in terms of the political dynamics of the post-1989 period. In other words, agency is placed over structure, choice over legacy, and action over institutions (Lewis, 2004), as legacy-inspired approaches tend to produce analyses that are too deterministic, and conclusions that are too static (Hanley et al., SEI Working paper no. 94: 24). Studies on topics like privatization and lustracje confirms the strength of the actor-based approach and demonstrate the relative autonomy and contingency of political dynamics and the actor's strategic choices.

Nevertheless, in the early 1990s, the formation of political parties was mainly analyzed structurally with emphasis on historical factors (“the legacy of the past”, see the figure 1), in particular the impact of the (late) post-totalitarian regimes. As a whole, the transitions in Central and Eastern Europe were signified by the impact of structural variables like the common imperial and communist past and the great geographical distances, after 1989, the depth and the speed of the changes of society were due to complex dual or triple transitions. However, before long the transitology and political and institutional agency approaches became dominant, irrespectively of

the fact that the significance of political and institutional design of the freedom of action was low due to structural barriers and path dependency.

We must not forget that in the CEECs leaving state socialism was closely connected with the type of pre-1989 regimes. The “breakthrough” in 1989 in the “mature” and “soft” state socialist regimes of Poland and Hungary carried out through peacefully pacted transitions (Poland) or evolutionary “simple change” (Hungary) often introduced by reform-minded groups (“soft-liners”) within the communist parties. The “hard” and “frozen” post-totalitarian regimes of Czechoslovakia and the GDR were vulnerable to *implosion*, i.e. a radical and fast “break-down” of existing institutions, including the ruling communist parties. Finally, in Romania and Bulgaria, the “breakthrough” in 1989 was primarily due to a coup d’etat by reform-minded groups within the communist parties (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

As noted by *Grzegorz Ekiert* (Ekiert, 1996), the legacies of 40 years under communist rule had shaped a powerful pathway and produced many features unique to the Central and Eastern European democratization. The rejection of the old system proved not to be total and unconditional as “freedom” had a different meaning for different groups and nations.

The changes in the second half of the 1980s confirmed that “revolutions” do not necessarily take place when the non-democratic systems are most repressive, but rather when the old systems try to *reform themselves* not being able to *reproduce themselves* (Baylis and Smith, 1998: 91-92, 132). The result was a “hollowing out” of state socialism followed by decay, crisis, system demise and collapse.

Regime types under (late) real socialism:

Poland: national-accomodative (Kitschelt etc., 1999), mature post-totalitarian (Linz and Stepan, 1996)

Czechoslovakia and the GDR: bureaucratic-authoritarian (Kitschelt etc., 1999), frozen post-totalitarian (Linz and Stepan, 1996)

Hungary: national-accomodative (Kitschelt etc., 1999), mature post-totalitarian (Linz and Stepan, 1996)

Bulgaria and Romania: patrimonial (Kitschelt etc., 1999), sultanistic (Linz and Stepan, 1996)

The breakthrough in 1989:

Democratization by pacts (Karl, 1990)

Simple change (about Hungary)

Imposition (used about former GDR)

Transplacement and replacement (Huntington, 1991)

Refolution (Ash, 1990)

Restoration or rebirth (Soltan, in Antohi and Tismaneanu, 1990)

Implosion or system collapse (Highey, in Aurel and Barany, 1999)

“Post-communism” constituted a specific regime type that started from the break-down of state socialism and ended at the post-transformative phase, being divided in three or four different stages with each signifying a move from extraordinary to ordinary politics under complex double or triple transformations (figure 1).

In the first stage characterized by extraordinary politics and transition anomie, the new rules of the game were not yet established. For that reason, most people were forced to behave according to short-term survival strategies. The old system was paralyzed, but the new one did not work yet. The extraordinary situation was signified by “tabula rasa” and a “systemic vacuum”. Parties in the “standard” version were almost non-existent, as we were dealing with proto-parties and “party non-systems”.

Figure 1:
Stages of transition:

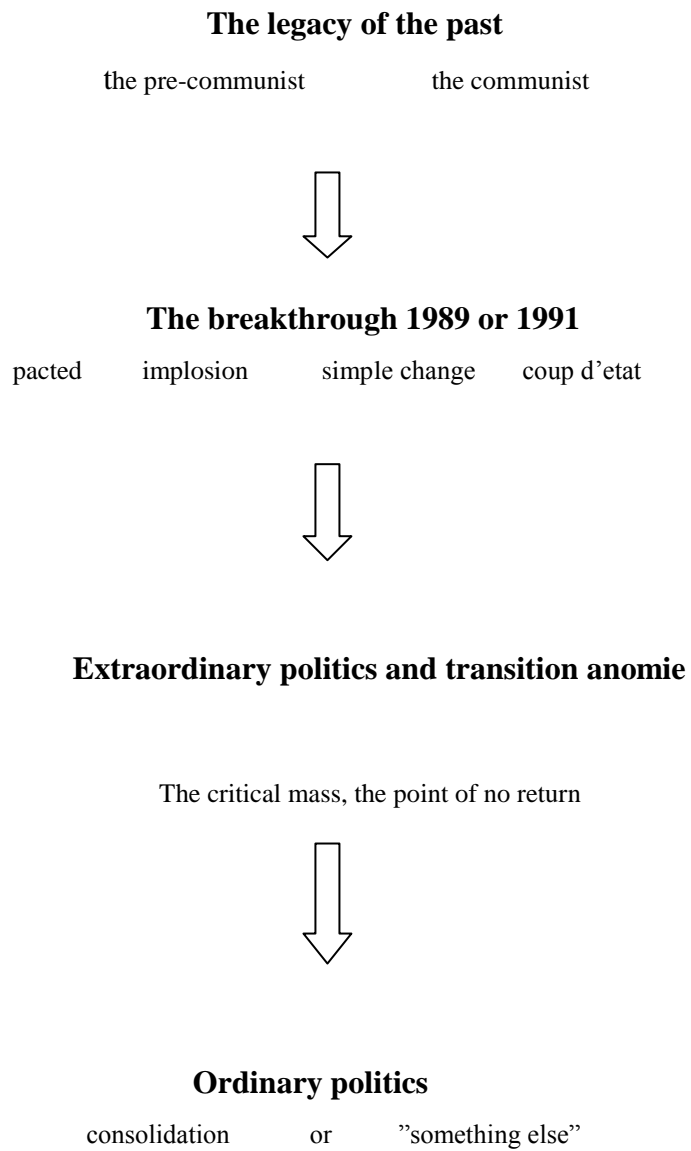


Figure 2: Transformation classifications, characteristics and dynamics

1985-1989: The late stage of real socialism

”extrication”

”anti-politics”

”blackmailing”

polarisation according to ”we” versus ”them”

the official system versus the anti-system

autonomization and strengthening of civil societies/anti-system

spontaneous privatisations

active adaption (”the Gorbachev-factor”)

“self-limitation”

1989: The breakthrough

the official system becomes weaker, the anti-system stronger

implosion (DDR and Czechoslovakia)

“simple change” (Hungary)

reinvention of politics

“rebirth”

total articulation

pacted transitions (Poland)

“party coup d’etat” (Bulgaria and Romania)

”refolution”

partial revolutions

evolution

1989-1990: Transition anomie/extraordinary politics/ "unsettled times":

new anti-communist party movements, historical parties and post-communist parties

fragmentation, fission and fusion of parties

"party non-systems"

democratic/government overload and functional overload

output-articulation

"over-parliamentarization"

"over-participation"

institutionalization under systemic vacuum

political crafting

"retrospective utopias"

depolitization and demobilisation

governance without alternatives ("path-dependency")

"speeding up" of transformation ("przyspieszenie", Poland)

symbolic politics versus programme politics

de-communization ("lustrace")

elite-circulation and/or elite-reproduction

political crafting and entrepreneurship

inclusionary civic nationalism versus exclusionary ethnic nationalism

shadow institutionalisation

marketization and privatisation

short-term strategies of survival

1991-: ordinary politics, moving towards:

a. "petrification"

formalist democracy

defective or deficient democracy

majority rule, maybe in the "tyrannical" form

focus on technology of power ("cartelization")

clientelism and clientura

move towards delegative democracy

democracy by design

freezing of old cleavages

polarized pluralism

shadow institutionalization

adversary politics

democracy by design

sovereign democracy

democracy by default

post-communist cartel parties

authoritarian democracy

non-party pluralism

pluralist stagnation

neither plan nor market, maybe "crony capitalism" like in Jeltsin's Russia

or towards:

b. consolidation

embedded democracy

the "two turnover test" passed
democracy as "the only game in town"
fair and free elections
pro-democratic civil society
fair play between government and opposition
formation of stronger civil societies
erosion of political authoritarian charisma
rule of law
functional checks and balances
depersonalization, routinization
consensualism and consociationalism
de-ideologization and pragmatization
freezing and de-freezing of cleavages
functional institutionalisation
functional market economy

The first stage was marked by "extraordinary politics" (Balcerowicz, 1994), "perplexity" (Wnuk-Lipinski, 2001), "unsettled times" (Innes, 2001) and "transition anomie" (Kabele, 1999). The opportunities to express own interest were almost unlimited, rarely coordinated and signified by "total articulation". The new rules of the game were neither established nor accepted by society. Thus, most citizens were forced to "muddle through" relying on short-term strategies of survival. Or as formulated by Kabele:

"This provisional situation characterized by a rich dynamic of social problems, together with an unbalanced and changing distribution of gains and losses. The resulting conflicts become- in successful cases- part of the universe myth. In thus universe of myth, these conflicts are seen as a series of crisis/tests, which push the society indirectly from the old order to the new. This originally

open transition comes to a close when the participants cease to see the current events as provisional” (Kabele, 1999).

As put by *George Schöpflin* (Schöpflin, 1993), the first stage was signified by weak institutionalisation, lack of confidence among people, atomization of civil society, a desire for ideologization of almost all in society and a widespread resistance against politics as such (“anti-politics”). The CEECs simply lacked the historical experiences with political parties as in Western Europe, thus precluding long-term party ties and close links to important social groups. Many citizens could simply not place themselves in the new party system. Many political parties maintained shallow organizational structures, lacked credible roots in society and were operated by elite actors, sometimes by ruling regimes and wealthy businessmen (Bader, 2009: 100). Maybe they were able to control the political situation, but not to govern the country. The new politicians, however, had to take far-reaching decisions under high insecurity and time pressure. In such unsettled times, social preferences and projects for the new society were naive, imprecise and vague. The lack of confidence between elites and populations and “moral panic” in society was striking.¹ In this “unsettled” time, systemic cleavages, identity politics and moral politics are more noticeable.

Moving closer to “ordinary” interest-based politics, the political life in general became more stable and predictable, but not necessarily democratic. Membership of the EU became realistic not only considered a public good but a public necessity as well becoming a “valens issue”, i.e. an issue on which all the relevant and responsible parties, the post-communist parties included, agree and declare the same objective but dispute each other’s competence in achieving the desired policy (Innes, 2002: 90). Leadership and good or bad governance came to play an increasing role for the voters’ choice at the elections, which became more retrospective.

The *tabula rasa* account that accentuates the uniqueness, fluidity and chaotic environment of the first stage of post-communism seems to be most appropriate to use when studying the first “extraordinary” stage of post-communism. Moving towards “ordinary” politics and retrospective elections, the *tabula rasa* account of the first stage was challenged. Politics became more rule and interest based and more stable and predictable. After a short period of time, the new “homo

¹ Piotr Sztompka, “Nie Ufaj Nikomu”, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 1-2 December 2007.

economicus” forced out the old “homo sovieticus”. Thus, new concepts had to be used and invented to capture the new post-communist situation (see the list of concepts above). In the first years of post-communism, the political parties and party systems had qualitatively specific “extraordinary” characteristics, which distinguished them from the Western European. The situation was both unique and “extraordinary”.

2. Political parties and party systems

As put by *Peter Mair*, citing *Rudolf Wildenmann* (Mair (ed.), 1990: 3), even a short list of the functions of political parties is long, because

“parties structure the popular vote, integrate and mobilize the mass of the citizenry; aggregate diverse interests; recruit leaders for public office; and formulate public policy. Most important of all, within the liberal democracies it is primarily parties, which organize modern government in such a way that, as Wildenmann notes, party government is the crucial agency of institutional legitimation”.

Today political parties serves more as means of communicating within the elite and mobilizing ideological and political resources in intra-elite struggles than a way of representing social interests. They are sometimes defined as minimalistic, in which case they are considered as “any political group that presents at elections and is capable of placing by elections candidates for public office” (Sartori, 1976: 64). That definition contrasts the maximalist type of definitions demanding formulations used by for example *Jan-Erik Lane* and *Svante Ersson* (Lane and Ersson, 1999: 132), who say that

“political parties are organized collectivities orientated towards the pursuit of some combination of the goal of electoral success and in the end of political effectiveness, i.e. the capacity of parties to have an impact upon government policy-making. Differences in strategy and tactics between parties may help explain the variation in the capacity of parties to cope with a changing if not turbulent environment”.

Thus, maximalist definitions demand a more robust party organisation, and parties must be able to recruit people to fill important positions in society, control and coordinate politics and ensure

quality and stability in public administration. Moreover, parties are considered as associations, which by competing with other parties take part in election campaigns in order to gain governmental power and take responsibility for the state.² In other words, political parties are often regarded as functional agencies, as they serve specific purposes. Seen in that perspective, they are considered channels for “expressions”, fulfil specific roles and solve specific tasks in relation to the political system.

The formation of political parties has been an integral part of the transitions and consolidation of democracy. *Aleks Szczerbiak* and *Seán Hanley*, (Szczerbiak and Hanley, 2004) explore the formation of political parties by including a number of non-structural “transitional “political” “work-questions”, for example:

- That choices made by political actors during the *critical junctures* and formative moments matter, i.e. decisions taken in the first years (1989-91) may determine the development of parties
- That *institutional*, macrostructural as well as microstructural factors matter, e.g. that the proportional electoral system may produce more cohesive parties, and a parliamentary regime tends to produce more successful parties and stable party systems than (semi)presidential systems
- That *elite-cohesion and ideological construction* matter, e.g. the existence of charismatic leadership and cohesive generationally defined elites generate more stable parties and party systems

As we shall see in the following, different notions and definitions of political parties and party systems have been used. In the operating style, most political parties in the CEECs shared the competitive logic of Western catch-all parties, but they lacked their ideological and organisational anchors.

² Inka Słodkowska, ”Partie i ugrupowania polityczne polskiej transformacji”, in: Jacek Wasilewski (ed.), 1997.

Often we were dealing with catch-all single-issue movement parties without a clear ideological profile and political programmes. The party systems were fragmented and the format multi-party, and the establishment of political parties and party systems became closely connected with the stages of post-communism and the different subsystems and arenas of democracy, e.g. civil society and economy.

Each stage of post-communism brings new conditions for what can be accomplished in the subsequent stages. Because the transformation was so profound and in most countries started quite unexpected, the post-communist Eastern and Central Europe became a region of great interest to those who were trying to gain a better understanding of how political parties are formed and developed (Toole, 2007: 541).

Types of political parties after the fall of communism

New movement parties: established spontaneously at the time of crisis and demise of the old systems. Quickly after the formation, internal divisions took place due to the lack of coherence on leadership levels and policy disagreements. Thus, these parties can be seen as “transitory”. Examples: Civic Forum (OF) in the Czech Republic, Solidarity in Poland, the popular fronts in the Baltic countries.

Clientelistic parties: parties dominated by informal networks consisting of elite groups, often with a charismatic leader. Are mostly to be found in patrimonial authoritarian or semi-democratic systems, to some extent also in the CEECs.

Historical parties: were re-established, “reborn”, i.e. in most cases existing during the mid-war years but became outlawed under communism. Examples: the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), which after WWII was merged with the communist party (KSM) by force.

Post-communist (“successor”) parties: existed under communism as formally independent parties cooperating with the communists inside the national fronts and in parliaments. After 1989, they strived to transform themselves and find a new party identity freed from the negative “baggage” of the communist past. Examples: The Republic of Poland’s Social Democratic Party (SdRP), the Peasants Party (PSL) in Poland, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP).

Non-reformed (or only partly reformed) Communist parties (“hardcore”): communist parties keeping the old party name and maintaining the old Marxist-Leninist ideology and centralist party organization. Examples: the communist parties in the Czech Republic (KSCM) and Slovakia (KSS).

Protest parties: established either exogenously or endogenously, rejecting the existing parties and the mode of governance, often appealing to non-politics by conducting “clean hands” policy and maybe also rejecting the new democratic order. Sometimes they have gained a great black mail potential, sometimes becoming “responsible” and relevant parties by taking government positions. Examples: MIEP in Hungary, Res Publica in Estonia, Selfdefence (Samoobrona) in Poland.

Studies of political parties alternately concentrate on variables like size, ideological and political characteristics, social links, membership, organisation and leadership, i.e. problems related to party institutionalisation (Kopecek, 2007: 11). As far as the party systems are concerned, emphasis has mostly been on the (effective) number, the concentration of parties, i.e. the party system format, the structure of the ideological spectrum, polarisation and characteristics of electoral support.³ In the later stages, also the distinctions between types or “families” of parties known from the studies of political parties in Western Europe became more useful, e.g. mass parties, cadre parties, catch-all parties, cartel parties, programmatic parties, protest parties, clientelistic parties and charismatic led parties, (Fiala etc, 2003: 191; Kopecek, 2006 and 2007). Thus, moving closer to ordinary politics, a convergence of types of parties and party systems to the Western types took place to some extent.

It is worth noting that parties in the CECCs have been divided according to partly overlapping criteria. *Neoliberal* pro-market and pro-western parties are contrasted to *neo-traditionalistic* particularistic and *social democratic* political parties. The parties have alternately been regarded as progressive, traditionalist, liberal and authoritarian. On that basis, we can distinguish between modern/rational versus neotraditionalist/nationalist parties. Furthermore, pro-market and pro-western parties have been contrasted to market sceptical religious, agrarian or populist socialist (Thomas, 1999: 8).

The divisions between mass parties, cadre parties, catch-all parties and cartel parties may be relevant. Many parties in the CEECs seemed to move towards the catch-all electoral-professional type of cartel party models, built up hierarchially and centralistic governed with tenuous links to the social groups in society. The parties seemed to concentrate on “a wider clientele of voters ... rather than opt for the well-defined segments of society”.⁴ Agrarian parties, e.g. the PSL in Poland and the Independent Smallholders Party (FKGP) in Hungary were equivalent to class parties. Modern pro-market liberal parties suffered at the elections due to the absence of a new strong and prosperous middle class (“the missing middle”). The right-traditionalist political parties are sometimes considered a result of civilizational “backwardness” and unfinished and distorted modernisations.

³ See e.g. Jean Blondel, “Types of Party System”, in Mair, 1990:302.

⁴ Peter Kopecky, “Developing Party Organisations in East-Central Europe: What Type of Party is likely to emerge?”, *Party Politics*, 4, 1995:515-534.

Before 1989, “post-communist” parties had cooperated closely with the communist parties within the national fronts. “Historical” non-communist parties were forbidden during the communist rule and became “reborn” after the demise of communism. We also find spontaneously established parties, and perhaps, therefore, we can hardly place them on a right-left scale.⁵ In some cases, the memories about the uprisings against the communist regimes and the demise of the old regime created specific “foundation myths” sometimes leading to an “early freezing” of socio-cultural cleavages in society.

The *party systems* constitute one of the most important subsystems of democracy with emphasis on the *interaction* between the parties. As regards the *party system format*, the Hungarian system came closest to the logic of bi-partism and high party concentration. Moderate multi-party systems became the most frequent system in all countries.

Functional party systems are characterized by competition as well as the willingness to reach a political compromises. The effectiveness of party systems can be understood as the capability of avoiding or resolving political crisis, defined as a major internal disruption in the political processes (Antoszewski, in Hlousek, Chytilék, 2007: 145). Looking at how parties connect society and government, we must include three functions. Basically, party systems must *aggregate* social cleavages, *translate* social cleavages into political cleavages, if not, they *block* the politicization of social cleavages. As put by *Matthis Bogaards*, the one-party state tends to maximize the blocking of cleavages; the two party systems seem to be best at achieving aggregation; and the multi-party system seems most suited to “translate” voter preferences (Mungiu-Pippidi, Krastev, 2004: 250).

As put by Sartori, a “party system is precisely the system of interactions resulting from interparty competition”; therefore, party systems consist of “patterned interactions of its component parts as “interactions provide the boundaries or the boundedness of the system” (Sartori, 1976: 43-44). In the majority of Central and Eastern European countries, one can speak of a gradual emergence of party “systems”, but in the CIS countries, the fluid, ever-changing collections of parties hardly qualified to be called party “systems”. Cases with a significant rate of party replacement are not referred to as “inchoate” or “weakly institutionalized” party systems but rather as party *nonsystems*.

⁵ Michal Klima, “Consolidation and Stabilization of the Party System in the Czech Republic”, *Political Studies* (1998): 496.

In that situation, the distinctions between “parties” and “factions” also become blurred (Bader, 2009: 102).

Sartori also makes a distinction between first, two-party systems like in Britain and the US with moderate plural systems and limited fragmentation and moderate centripetal competition, second, party systems characterized by polarized pluralism, third, highly fragmented and ideologically polarised party systems, and finally, the “predominant” party systems, where only one party is in the position of a majority in parliament over a long period of time. Decisive is *the way* parties interact - as “working multi-party systems”, “non-working multi-party systems” or as “immobilist” multi-party systems.

Furthermore, important is the distinction between *closed* and *open* structures of party competition. Closed and highly predictable structures of party competition are typified by small or negligible changes in the range of governing alternatives or in the pattern of alternation, with new parties having no chance to break into the set of possible government parties. A relatively open structure of party competition is characterized by a diverse set of patterns of alternation with varying profiles of alternative coalitions, along with relatively easy access for new parties to the government (Strmiska, in: Hlousek, Chytilék, 2007: 110-111). Some countries are signified by strange and unpredictable coalitions.

The system concept is meaningless, unless it also includes characteristics that go beyond the component parts, i.e. beyond a separate consideration of its component elements. In other words, the parties are functions of the interaction with other parties reacting and acting in a competitive interplay with other parties. In case the interaction fails, party *nonsystems* or weak party systems (Almond and Powell, 1996: 237) emerge. In such cases, conflicts (and interactions) *within* the parties tend to become stronger than conflicts *between* the parties. In addition, party systems might be high or low polarised, depending on the intensity of polarisation, and they may be fragmented or segmented in case of multi-partyism and a wide ideological gap between the parties.

Strong polarisation tends to generate adversary politics, when the relations between the larger parties are characterized by confrontation. In such cases, the political life is marked by a permanent election campaign. The political debate has been polemic and personal, nonetheless, anti-system

parties in general did not do well in the elections. Thus, parties which aimed at destroying the new post-communist system did not necessarily get any great electoral support, and adversary politics on actor level often took place between parties being ideologically and programmatically close to each other.

3. The formation of political parties

New political parties in the CEECs were established top-down, supplied from above more than demanded from below and established almost over night as small "sofa-parties" and mostly by intellectuals. From the beginning, policy-seeking was almost absent due to the dominance of the post-communist "We-Them" systemic cleavages, but soon incentives like policy-seeking, vote-seeking and office-seeking became important variables also determining the behaviour of the political parties.

Contrary to South European countries like Greece, Spain and Portugal, before 1989 the parties in the CEECs had neither been in the position to establish institutionalised structures internally nor externally, i.e. in exile. In addition, political parties were created under rapid, deep not yet finished economic and social transformations and under unexpected deep economic recession. Several new parties had their origin in dissident circles during the old system. Before 1989, many of the new political leaders had been forced to live in a "ghetto" without much contact to the "real life". For that reason, anti-political attitudes were widespread. Due to the low institutionalization, most new parties tended to "hide themselves" behind apolitical charismatic personalities. Before the formation of the parties, discussions about the right strategies for the transformation were rare. Only few were able to foresee the speed and the depth in social changes, caused by the rapid breakdown of the old system.

As the market for political parties was almost totally open, the establishment of a party became a "simple notification". In other words, the supply of parties was extensive, but the voters' demands on parties were difficult, if not impossible to determine. The parliamentary origin of many parties and the top-down mode of party formation were striking. The formation of parties as such did not necessarily reflect certain cleavages in society, rather we were dealing with "transitory" preliminary formations or proto-parties. The catch-all profile, the aim to represent the "whole people", was widespread due to an abstract symbolic policy. Some parties – the historic – were "re-invented" or

“reborn”. Some were new-old “post-communist successor parties”, which were forced to and therefore also aimed to find a new post-communist identity; some authentic historical parties, for example social democratic and agrarian parties, and other new parties were anticommunist catch-all movement-parties, i.e. negative alliances appealing to all anti-communist-minded sections of society.

Parties (and politicians), pretending to be “above politics”, were successful in the first elections, mostly due to resistance against party politics. In the first phase, the political culture was not favourable for formation of standard type political parties and party federations and professional and responsive politicians. Political parties might “control” the political situation, but did not govern their countries. Dynamics like extrication, total articulation, output-articulation, anti-politics, over-parliamentarization and adversary politics were impossible to eliminate just over night.

Also several country-specific characteristics could be observed, some due to *structural* factors, e.g. the legacy of the past, some due to the *country-specific* circumstances at the time of the demise of the old systems and some to the *chosen strategies*, i.e. the subjective factors. Like in Western countries, studies of *internal* party dynamics have been rather few and difficult to carry through.⁶

The development of political parties and party systems were closely connected with consolidation of democracy and can, therefore, largely be explained at the same levels, i.e. actor, structural, institutional and policy-programmatic. Nationwide democratic polities cannot be sustained without the organizing and mediating role of political parties. Thus, one important function of the parties is to further identification with the democratic process by aggregating the different interests in society, thereby counteracting excessive particularis. Actor type explanations were prominent when emphasizing the significance of strategic choices and leadership processes as such (“political crafting” and “political entrepreneurship”). It is worth noting that structural factors are subjective when economic growth and social mobility are falling, such as was the case in the early years. When the economic growth and social mobility decline, group consciousness grows and may pose new challenges to the political system in the shape of input articulation.

⁶ More about that subject, see Szczerbiak, 2001: 94.

In the beginning, the political parties tended to have weak organizations with only little presence outside the big towns and only tenuous ties to the civil societies. They are to be broadly defined including well-organized mass parties as well as pro-parties, loose political associations and clubs, political factions and movements. Furthermore, in several cases the parties tended to be cadre configurations, not mass organizations like in the West. Most parties were established spontaneously in the wake of the demise and collapse of the old systems. Only in Janos Kadar's Hungary, the foundation of political parties took place over one-two years, for that reason, we did not find broadly based anti-communist movement parties like in the Czech Republic (The Civic Forum), Slovakia (Public Against Violence), Poland (Solidarity) or Bulgaria (SDS). In the beginning, the political capital, i.e. the spontaneous support from the society, was high, but became more short-term than first expected. And, as noted by *Abby Innes* (Innes, 2002), the Eastern European parties had to satisfy two different constituencies simultaneously, the one internal (the people), the other external (IMF and the EU), sometimes the latter was inhibiting the satisfaction of the former.

In contrast to Western Europe, political parties in the East were formally established as mass parties, but they had to find their social base by "looking after their voters". The low levels of institutionalization and the weak nature of their links to their supporters made the parties themselves very unstable, increasing the possibility of further realignment of the party systems. Under those circumstances, patronage and clientelistic style of politics became widespread. Weak links to the voters implied that many parties miscalculated voter preferences. Political entrepreneurship and ideological crafting played a significant role. At the first free elections, the post-communist successor parties tended to overestimate electoral support, for example at the Polish 1991 elections, where the anti-communist forum parties, e.g. Solidarity and Civic Forum, did surprisingly well. Weak linkages to the social groups and low party institutionalization made most parties more dependent on the media, thus being a danger to the new won freedom of the press. In addition, the boundaries between parties and interest groups tended to be porous. In general, the legacy of the communist past had an "anti-political" bearing on the nascent party systems and party types. To the extent the label "political parties" can be used, it must be used in the "minimalist" sense, so parties have to be seen as political units that put forward candidates on joint lists at the national elections - and not much else.

The political parties are only able to decide the political agenda if a majority of the electorate feel as well represented through political parties as through interest groups, e.g. trade unions, the church, the military or, in the worst case, informal institutions like mafia-type economic organizations or other illegal networks.⁷ Especially in the first stage, the parties misjudged the preferences due to the weak links between parties and social groups. Also, political economy and close links between the political and economic arenas was striking. Thus, shadow institutionalisation was not only limited to the countries on Balkan and in the CIS. Specific for Poland was the strong position of the church and the trade unions (Solidarnosc and OPZZ). The CEEC's new parties never became mass parties in the traditional way, rather, constituting weak institutionalized clientelist post-communist catch-all parties, sometimes with charismatic leadership, later transformed into electoral more professional and centralized cartel parties.

From the outset, the party fragmentarization was high. Party fission and party fusions often in the shape of party federations and umbrella parties were frequent. Furthermore, extensive focus on identity politics and symbol politics and weak links to society gave the new parties particular characteristics. The institutionalisation was sporadic, at best, as the "reinvention of politics" took place in a political and ideological vacuum without clear links to important social groups in society. The collapse of the old systems quickly made place for an almost unlimited fight between different proto-democratic actors ("total articulation"), spokesmen for the old system and the opposition ("we versus them") and, not to forget, between groups *within* the two opposite camps ("between us"). Without the common enemy, the former dissidents found their "enemies" also within their own camp.

Both the old communist parties and the new movement parties laid claim to "represent the people", thus acting in catch-all ways. Conservative-traditionalistic, e.g. Solidarity in Poland, and neoliberal parties, e.g. ODS in the Czech Republic, behaved like premature catch-all parties appealing to voters from all social strata. By contrast, medium-sized parties tended to act like interest-based class-orientated parties, to a large extent relying on "automatic" votes of their direct constituencies (Ágh, 1998: 115).

⁷ In the minimal sense political parties can be defined as "any group that presents at elections and is capable of placing through elections candidates for public office" (Sartori, 1976: 64).

Some argued that new anti-communist movement parties resembled the old communist parties as regards political discourses, institutions and policy style. For many citizens not only reform communists, but also former dissidents, became the “others” - i.e. they were entwined in communist party type intrigues, not representing the normal electorate, thereby becoming inappropriate representatives of the people (Innes, 2001: 87). *Paul G. Lewis* argued that the new anti-communist parties were disposed to:

”mirror the inclusive, monolithic communist organization; their antagonism to state authority; their inclination to strive in political action for broad symbolic expression rather than group representation all seemed in some ways to point as much back to the practices and structures of the traditional Soviet style communism as forward to the processes of modern democracy and structures of Western pluralism” (Lewis, 1994: 264).

The political parties were formed either *exogenously*, i.e. under the influence of voter preferences and other outside influence, or *endogeneously*, i.e. according to the dynamics within the already existing parties or between the parties. The clientelistic characteristics were striking, including the close links to the economic sector. On the one side, the party identities were created by interplay between the past and the present, on the other, between the national and the international level and between the national and regional level. The weight laid on the past, the present and the future was different. Thus, on the one hand, the formation of political parties as such was marked by the circumstances leading to the demise of the old system and on the other, by the characteristics of the new political elite.

Thanks to a strong “foundation myth” the new movement parties obtained a predominantly historically derived identity or a predominantly presently derived identity, i.e. related to the day-to-day politics. After a short time, most movement parties, like the popular fronts Solidarity and Civic Forum (OF), were divided in new independent political fractions or new parties. In case of presently derived identity, the party identity is shaped primarily according to contemporary political appeals.

In the former Yugoslavia and Russia, elections on republican level took place before the elections on the national level. The parties were chiefly regionally based, thereby undermining the legitimacy

of the central authorities and those parties that were reaching the whole country. Strong presidentialism gave rise to “floating parties”, i.e. “parties of power” bound to the oligarchy (“clientura”) having easy access to the media and in most cases established shortly before national elections.

Valeri Ledyayev (Ledyayev, 2008) uses three sets of concepts – domination, configuration of power forms, and effectiveness of power - to depict the nature of the political regime in modern Russia. The administrative class has, through close relations to the president, the parties and the economic sector, been the dominant actor, as it has the power to control political processes and use the state as an effective instrument of domination. In his opinion, the configuration of power corresponds to the bureaucratic nature of domination. The state under Putin has been much more effective, coherent and powerful than it was under Yeltsin, to some extent due to the hegemonic role of the presidential party (“Unity”).

In the case of the CEECs, the parties were created top-down, only rarely from voter preferences, as these were at best vaguely formulated. The parties were mostly established spontaneously without much knowledge about the exact demand for political parties. Also, most political programmes and policy statements were mostly vague and abstract. The absence of long-term programmes and clear-cut cleavages and social interests in society should be seen in the light of the ongoing fast and complex triple transformations and the rapidly changing political, social and economic structures of society.

Despite weak linkages to civil societies, the parties captured a crucial position after the second free election. The parties remained badly institutionalized, but by no means insignificant. Gradually a professionalization and cartelization took place, but because of party’ist properties the parties felt tempted to abuse the new won power. Several non-political actors played an important role and thus, to a large extent capturing the role intended for political parties (“shadow institutionalisation”).

In specific “extraordinary crisis situations”, e.g. Hungary in 1995 and the Czech Republic after the 1996 election, characteristics like de-democratisation, party-ism and reinforcement of antidemocratic discourses and anti-politics became strikingly detrimental to the further

consolidation of democracy. The parties were established by institutionalization from above and mobilization from below, but the freedom of manoeuvring in the economic and social policy remained low. The new parties aimed to satisfy both their own electorates and Western governments and institutions, e.g. the EU, but in practice before long, a distinct political demobilization set in and instead of politics most citizens concentrated their efforts on short-term strategies of survival and activities in the new private sector.

Thus, in the beginning, the work as a politician was often considered a "call" or a "mission". New broad catch-all movement parties such as Solidarity in Poland and Civic Forum (OF) in the Czech Republic legitimised themselves primarily by references to the fight against the old system, thus presenting themselves as broad catch-all parties. A great problem was that the day-to-day needs of the people were thereby downgraded. The absence of close links to social interests in society was considered a virtue, as parties should be placed above group interests. In the new post-communist discourse, the label "party" was negatively loaded as the notion of "parties" in the eyes of many citizens was connected with the former one-party state. Therefore, many new "parties" called themselves "movement", "centre", "forum", "alliance", "agreement" or "union". Thus, the slogan of Civic Forum (OF) in the Czech Republic was simple: "Parties are for the party-people, but Civic Forum is for all".

At the time of formation, we were mostly dealing with "political clubs" and "intellectual milieus". Party programmes and government responsibilities were not necessarily the most important. As late as in January 2000, opinion polls showed that 80 pct. of the Czechs and the Slovaks believed that the political parties' interest in the electorate was limited to winning their support in elections, and that this attitude was not to change. Many people shared the opinion that the post-communist state effectively "belongs" to the political parties, as the state was perceived as their own property - a legacy of the communist past (Innes, 2001: 208). Furthermore, a series of political scandals tarnished party images. In the eyes of many citizens, the parties looked like self-interested and self-centred power-orientated organizations. No surprise that the feelings of antipathy and anti-politics were rather strong.

Due to the low priority of peoples "day-to-day problems" many identity-based parties suffered major election defeats in the beginning of the 1990s, paving the way for political "comebacks" for

the "post-communist" parties. Ordinary politics gave rise to the so-called post-communist "transformation fatigue", exaggerated expectations, transformational disappointment and also some post-communist nostalgia were all benefitting from mainly the new-old post-communist parties. Everyone had to work hard, but only few became wealthy. Some post-communist parties achieved electoral success not only due to reform fatigue but also to a higher party institutionalisation and better programme crystallization.

The liberal Václav Klaus in The Czech Republic took account of the fact that most voters preferred political parties with high institutionalization and clear-cut political programmes that appealed to broad sections of the people. For that reason, Klaus used the name "Civic Democratic *Party*" (ODS).

In established and consensual type democracies, voters' behaviour reflected the most important social interests in society to a great extent. If political parties distanced themselves from the societies they represent crisis will emerge, unless the parties are able to attract the sufficient number of voters by non-class symbolic appeals in which case anti-communist identity politics, not interest-based politics, determine the voter behaviour at the elections. Most new anti-communist movement parties underestimated the significance of the retrospective utopia and the "Soviet man".

The electorate did not show any great interest in becoming party members. In most parties, the interest in attracting new members was rather limited due to the fear of internal divisions in case of an influx of new people. Anyway, institutionalization "did matter". The well-organized parties with sufficient resources might suffer election defeats, but they are more capable of obtaining a political comeback. In contrast, poor institutionalized "forum parties" might win elections, but they are not in possession of a weak institutional "immune system", in case of internal crisis or increased party competition.

To conclude, in spite of the rather weak links to civil societies and socio-economic cleavages and low institutionalisation, the political parties played an important role in society. Unfortunately, due to the "party-ist" characteristics, inexperienced leaders and weak civil societies' misuse of the new won political power became the code of practice. Clientilism and nepotism gave rise to demobilization, political apathy and anti-political feelings. Sometimes, non-political actors simply

displaced political parties ("shadow institutionalisation"). In specific political crisis situations, like in Hungary in 1995 and the Czech Republic in 1996-1997 and 2006, de-democratisation, party-ism, populism, anti-politics, reinforcement of antidemocratic discourses and political stalemate were striking and to a great extent detrimental to further consolidation of democracy.

4. Stages of party and party system development

That leads us to mapping out the different stages of party development. As already mentioned, parties were marked by the communist past, especially the last stage of real socialism. It must be considered that state socialism developed differently in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The notions "mature post-totalitarian" and "national accommodative" were used about the "soft" and mature state socialist systems in Poland and Hungary; "centralist-bureaucratic" and "frozen" about the post-totalitarian regime-type in Czechoslovakia and the DDR (Kitschelt et al., 1999; Linz and Stepan, 1996).

Parties in the CEECs were established in state socialist systems in crisis and decay and with the first stage of post-communism marked by extraordinary politics, extrication, political crafting, transition anomie and functional and government overload. The parliaments became almost "law-making machines" (leading to "parliament overload"). Most new political parties were embryonic "proto" "sofa-parties" marked by internal splits and veto group type factions. The problem was to find new constituencies and political issues on which to compete, and the political strategists did not know what the electorate would tolerate by way of hardship (Innes, 2002: 88). Under those circumstances, the demand of parties was difficult to determine. As noted by *Edmund Mokrzycki*, maybe exactly for that reason the new political leaders tended to base their calculations and political strategies on simplified holistic and radical constructions and neoliberal utopia with a built-in belief in a harmonic and natural order after in four decades being harassed by Marxist-Leninist propaganda.⁸ Unfortunately, they underestimated the significance of the retrospective utopia and the "Soviet man".

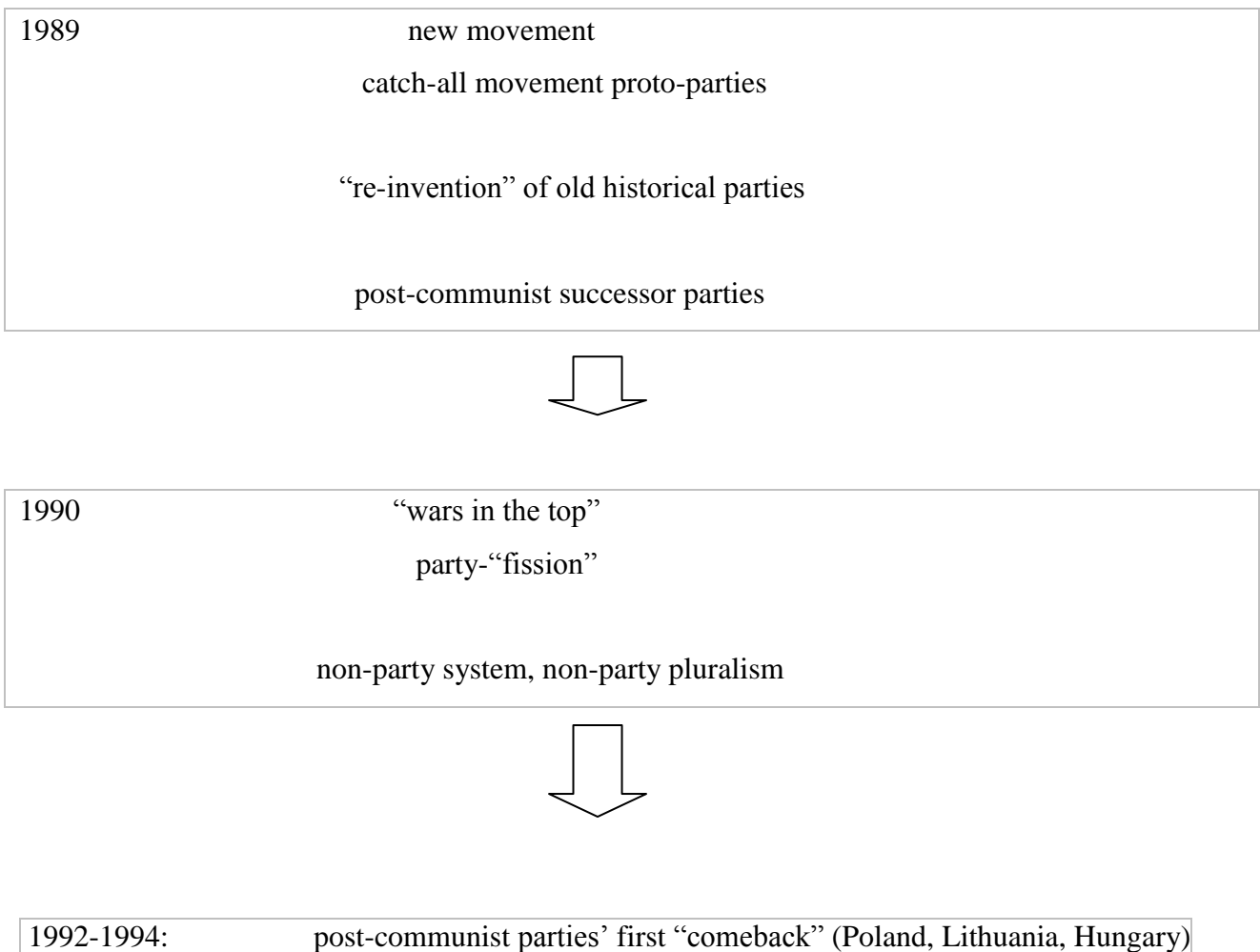
In the first stage of extraordinary politics and transition anomie, the party systems, i.e. interaction *between* parties, were not sufficient as the interaction mostly took place *within* the party

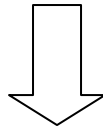
⁸ Edmund Mokrzycki, "Kapitalizm Oswojony", *Gazeta Wyborcza* 11-12 August, 2001: 10.

movements. Due to the low party institutionalisation, political entrepreneurship and political crafting came to play a prominent role, but most parties were forced to “look inwards”, aiming to secure higher institutionalization, formulate consistent programmes and improve elite-cohesion. Only few differences between the party programmes could be observed, and most programmes were both abstract and vague. The historical parties were forced to organize themselves almost from scratch, while the post-communist parties had to find a new, maybe a “new-old” identity and reach a compromise between the past and the present, certainly no easy task for the post-communist successor parties.

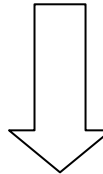
Figure 2: Stages of party development

Year





1996-1998: formation of several mostly new right-wing party alliances (“party fusion”), move toward triangular party systems (Poland, Hungary)



In Poland: the post-communist parties “second comeback”

realignment of moderate multi-party systems
(Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria)

Some spoke about “early freezing” or a partial consolidation of the party systems (Ágh, 1998: 103), but a de-freezing of some of the old cleavages could be observed as the old post-communist “we” and “them” divide lost some of its former significance. Furthermore, the cohesion inside heterogeneous opposition circles was undermined shortly after the fight against the old system had been won. Several “wars in the top” of the parties erupted, and a new distinction, therefore “we against us”, to some extent replaced the old distinction “we versus them” known from the late 1980s.

In the first stage of post-communism a well-developed democratic party culture was almost absent. At that time, internal democratic debate and critique were not regarded a party resource, rather a “conspiracy” against the party leadership and a “contra-revolutionary” enterprise. Short-term factors, not long-term visions and ideologies, became decisive as early as the second and third

round of free elections. Still, too many parties constituted weakly institutionalized electoral type political parties.

Weak links to social groups and low party institutionalization increased the significance and the impact of the media endangering the independence of the media as many parties were tempted to control the media. The “wars in the top” in the new forum parties weakened the interaction *between* the political parties and the crystallization of party systems. Slowly, the “non-system” characteristics disappeared.

After some time, the elections became retrospective, and “moral politics” was replaced by “output democracy”. The elections mostly evidenced “politically motivated *government* blame”, they were no longer referenda for or against the old systems and decided by “politically motivated *system* blame”.

In the *second* stage, when moving to more “ordinary” and more “mature” politics, the political parties acquired more power without necessarily becoming more legitimate. The activities of many citizens moved from the political sphere to the economic. The elections in the late 1990s evidenced that institutional design, campaign strategies, organizational resources and the mood of the electorate substantially matter as determining the final outcome of elections. Moving to more “normal politics”, democracy was named “input democracy” characterized by retrospective elections, neo-corporatism and more interest-based politics. A relatively unimportant role was played by party membership. Instead, the most crucial role was played by the party leaders. Thus, the new parties were more likely to resemble Kirchheimer’s catch-all, Panebianco’s electoral-professional and Katz and Mair’s cartel party than Duverger’s mass party model (Szczerbiak, 2001: 101).

In the *third and fourth* stage, more political parties normally pay more attention to the external frames focusing more on long-term policies and strategies provided that the transition was successful. A political learning takes place and more attention paid to formulation of the right strategies and programmatic work. The freedom of manoeuvre in the economic and social policy remained low, but some politicians learned to compete better over operating styles, tactically

modulated principles and post-modern issues rather than over programmatic substance (Innes, 2002: 88).

The true constraints, under which the parties had to operate, became more apparent to the public. Elections became even more retrospective, signified by politically motivated *policy* blame. In those circumstances, the separation of parties from civil societies might be lower and a regular consolidation of the party systems will take place provided that the transition made progress. However, not all the political parties and party systems were able to move to consolidation, instead they remained weakened by the new-old “sickness” of transition anomie such as low party institutionalization and absence of a stabilizing middle class (“the missing middle”). As mentioned earlier, the attention moved explicitly to the economic sphere giving rise to demobilization and lower election turnout.

In the late stages of post-communism, symbolic communist-anti-communist cleavages from the first stage inherited from the past were to some extent defreezed. The freedom of manoeuvre in the economic policy remained low due to external conditionalities and a lack of economic resources. Misuse of political power (“party-ism”) was still striking due to short-term political horizons of politicians and civil servants, the close links to economy and the low freedom of manoeuvre (“path-dependency”).

In the third and fourth stage, the political parties became better institutionalised, but in most cases in the shape of the establishment of centralised top-down governed professional electoral catch-all cartel parties and fragile election alliances forced upon the parties due to high thresholds for obtaining seats in parliament. The party systems became more “cartellized”, i.e. the access of new parties was low, also because the state funding regimes discriminated in favour of existing parties. However, the changes in each stage have been non-linear but not necessarily very helpful for further consolidation.

In most cases, the party coalitions, e.g. AWS in Poland and SDK in Slovakia, were fragile constructions, neither sufficiently institutionalised nor supported by a common identity and party culture as each party inside the alliance cared about its own identity. Thus, we were mostly dealing with *negative* election alliances kept together primarily by references to the common enemy (i.e.

”post-communists”). In some cases, party alliances tended to be purely tactical aiming at minimizing the waste of votes at the elections. The ultimate goal was to establish a common right-wing government after the election victory and transform alliances to new “standard” parties or functional party federations. In contrast to the Polish Right, after 10 years the left-wing party alliance SLD in Poland succeeded to transform itself into a disciplined standard party having until then been an alliance consisting of 20-30 groups located on the left side of the political spectrum. The right-wing election alliance AWS in Poland was not able to solve the most important institutional, policy and programme problems and had to pay a high price for that in the 2001 election.

Most parties and party federations tended to become post-communist catch-all and cartel parties, thus, primarily focusing on state power and aiming to appeal to as broad sections of society as possible. However, bad governance, misuse of power, clientelism, political capitalism and corruption was still weakening the position of political parties, not least the government parties.

In the late 1990s, the Central European party systems moved closer to the classical European party system models, consisting of a centre-left versus centre-right bipolar system, sometimes a tripolar multi-party system based on socio-economic cleavages (Ágh, 1998: 111). The neoliberal discourse lost some of its original electoral appeal. Elections became more retrospective and only few governments passed the test at the elections. The embryonic characteristics became less striking, but the intake of new party members remained low. The parties seemed to become more “outward-looking”. Interest groups gained more influence, sometimes being able to delay political and economic reforms, e.g. privatization and restructuring of public finances. Some political groups still relied on the movement line, but the majority of the electorate seemed to prefer political parties with strong leadership, professionalism, clear, long-term and consistent political programmes and good performance in the media. Thus, party institutionalisation still “did matter”. Government coalitions were different, in the case of Slovakia sometimes highly heterogeneous. After 2000, new protest parties, that be populist and/or extremist right-wing parties, gained electoral success in several countries.

It is also worth noting that economic recession brought many parties of power under heavy pressure, but neither was macroeconomic progress any guarantee of success. Thus, the socialist-led

governments in Poland and Hungary lost elections in spite of a rather good macroeconomic performance. The access to the political scene became more difficult as the costs of entrance became higher due to financial constraints and modest access to the media. A defreezing of the old “we-them” cleavage took place, but to a different extent and with different speed. From the outset, the political culture seemed to be the most consensual in the case of Hungary, but that changed from the late of the 1990s.

Quality of governance became decisive. Therefore, corruption and poor governance gave rise to hard as well as soft political populism. In general, the voters’ judgment over the parties was merciless. The national elections were decided by “*politically* motivated policy blame”, not “politically motivated system blame” at the founding elections that benefitted the new anti-communist forum parties.

In conclusion, we can say that party and party system development are partly explained by the legacy of the past and social and economic, i.e. *structural* factors, partly by *dynamics of the transitions*, e.g. the political style and the policy of the political leaders, the ways of governance, the political crafting, the institutional set-up and the changes on policy and programme level. The significance of each variable varied over time and changed with time. Political crafting and entrepreneurship played a large role in the first stage due to the power vacuum and the high political capital.

5. Consolidation of democracy

When dealing with post-communism and political parties most observers have paid attention to questions about stabilization and *consolidation* of democracy. Alternately, attention has been paid to “technical” versus normative aspects. Consolidation has a normative and teleological kernel in the shape of the belief in a steady change toward more stable advanced democracy and market economy.

The short-term goal of the transition to democracy was to enhance political stability and minimize the risk of a setback or return to the old political order. In other words, democracy and market economy must be “the only game in town”. If not, we can speak about “something else”, a state

signified by a non-consolidation, maybe pseudo-democracy, semi-democracy, hybridization and petrification.

Concepts like “transition”, “transformation” and “consolidation” are defined differently. In the following, I talk about “transition” as the stages from the “breakthrough” and the time just after, signified by extraordinary politics and transition anomie and until the first free and fair election, also named “founding elections”. The explanations of transition paths are often clustered around three sets of variables:⁹

- *Structural*, e.g. level of socio-economic development, patterns of modernization and industrialization, and prevailing cultural patterns, all of which can be linked to the modernization paradigm
- *Institutional*, such as designs of executive-legislative relations and electoral systems and the shape of parties and party systems
- And *actor-behavioural*, such as the power constellation of elites or even very particular and contingent policy decisions. In other words, in this case emphasis is on the policy content.
- Finally, the *policy and programme* level is included, by that we mean the ability of parties to solve the “day-to-day” problems and formulate long-term consistent political programmes.

In the first stage of post-communism, the institutional set-up vital for a consolidated democracy e.g. political parties, elected parliaments and independent courts is established, but it does not function optimal seen in the context of consolidation of democracy. As regards the consolidation of democracy, all the Central European countries passed the “two-turn over test” as far as the political power has been handed over to the opposition peacefully in the case of election defeat for the ruling parties, but the democracy in the CEECs can hardly be seen as consolidated in “advanced” sense. Democratic consolidation requires self-limitation among the power holders as well as by the

⁹ See Petr Kopecký and Cas Mudde, “Explaining Different Paths of Democratization: The Czech and Slovak Republics”, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 3, September 2000: 69-70.

opposition. In order to consolidate political fundamentalism, political capitalism, identity politics and anti-politics, all signifying the late stage of real socialism and the first stage of post-communist must be overcome as quickly as possible. A defreezing of old cleavages, e.g. the old “we versus them” divide must occur at least to some extent, it probably happens unevenly from country to country.¹⁰

Negative type consolidation was achieved shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991 as a return to the old system was considered impossible after the breakdown of communism and the Soviet Union. In other words, the consolidation of democracy is closely connected with *regime survival*, i.e. prevention of regress to the old state socialist system (“erosion”). As argued by *O’Donnell and Schmitter* (O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986: 3), transition away from the authoritarian system might well constitute a transition to “something else”, i.e. not necessarily a democratic system.

As put by *Andreas Schedler*, consolidation has been an outmost ambiguous concept and a “moving target” due to the fact that consolidation “never ends”. The concept does not have a core meaning, and many has treated consolidation as a catch-all concept and for that reason it has been used with different meanings. Dealing with the different types of democracy, Andreas Schedler distinguishes between authoritarian, electoral, liberal and advanced democracies, at the same time he speaks in favour of “peaceful coexistence” between the different interpretations and meanings of the concept.

Moreover, Schedler contends that institutional insecurity and blurred temporary boundaries of democratic transition are defining features of democratization, thus recognizing structural fuzziness of transition and consolidation. Therefore, if uncertainty is taken seriously, regime transition and consolidation are not to be seen as discrete stages with neat starting points and end points, rather they are to be conceived as vague periods of institutional fluidity whose outer boundaries are indeterminate.¹¹

¹⁰ As mentioned by Gábor Tóka, there can be talk about cleavages in a party context “if an enduring organizational form is given to a politically mobilized opposition between such members of relatively closed groups who have distinct values, beliefs and identity”, see Gábor Tóka, “Party Appeals and Voter Loyalty in New Democracies”, *Political Studies* (1998), XLVI: 596, Tóka refers to Bartolini and Mair, *Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability*, O. Knutsen and E. Scarbrough, “Cleavage Politics”, in J. van Deth and E. Scarbrough (eds.) (1995), *The Impact of Values*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 492-523.

¹¹ Andreas Schedler, “What is Democratic Consolidation?”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 9, No. 2, April 1998: 91-107, and “Taking Uncertainty Seriously: The Blurred Boundaries of Democratic Transition and Consolidation”,

Wolfgang Merkel (Merkel, 2004) argue that over half of all new electoral democracies represent specific variants of diminished sub-types of democracy, which he calls *defective democracies*, which he divides in four diminished subtypes: exclusive democracy, illiberal democracy, delegative democracy and tutelary democracy. Consolidation comes close to *embedded democracy*, according to Wolfgang Merkel, consisting of five closely interdependent partial regimes, electoral regime, political rights, civil rights, horizontal accountability and effective power to govern.¹²

According to Lise Storm (Storm, 2008: 217) too many definitions of democracy are either too general or too narrow. The result was a proliferation of alternative conceptual frameworks, including a surprising number of subtypes all involving democracy “with adjectives”. Therefore, she speaks in favour of the elemental neutral definition of democracy that includes only seven possible regime categories ranging from no element of democracy to three elements of democracy plus additional features. The definition basically operates with two different types of regimes, those with no elements of democracy and those with one or more, i.e. with different levels of democracy, from one core element to three plus additional features. By using the elemental neutral definition, she says, we are more able to avoid conceptual stretching without the use of diminished subtypes. That makes it possible for scholars to place regimes on a democratic continuum considering democratization as a move towards the attainment of more core democratic elements and/or additional features regardless of how many elements of democracy they possess, and what these elements are.

Juan J. Linz and *Alfred Stepan* (Linz, Stepan, 1996: 7) emphasize that democratic consolidation requires much more than elections and markets. Consolidated democracies require a state, i.e. stateness problems must be solved. Furthermore, five interacting arenas have to be in place in order for consolidation to exist, first, a free and lively civil society, second, a relatively autonomous and valued political society, third, a rule of law, fourth a usable state bureaucracy and fifth, an institutionalized economic society. The reform of public administration is important when building a democratic state. Problems connected to weak administrative structures are compounded by the absence of a functional civil service and professional central and local administrators (Sakwa, 2002: 123).

Democratization, Vol. 8, No. 4, Winter 2001: 17-19 and “To take Uncertainty Seriously: The Blurred Boundaries of Democratic Transition and Consolidation, *Democratization*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Winther 2001: 1-22.

¹² Wolfgang Merkel, “Embedded and Defective Democracies”, *Democratization*, Vol. 11, No. 5, December 2004: 33.

Furthermore, Linz and Stepan argue (Linz, Stepan, 1996: 3) that transition to democracy is moving toward completion

“when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power that is the direct result of a free and popular vote, when this government de facto has the authority to generate new politics, and when the executive, legislative and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies de jure”.

Terry D. Clark (Clark, 2002: 65) argues that Linz’ and Stepan’s model suffers from theoretical incoherence or outright lack of explanations supported by theories. The five arenas are as interdependent, but the absence of theoretical linkage leaves, they argue, open the charge that they have only defined a model for a static ideal end-state (a consolidated democracy) and not much more. The way out of the morass is a theory that permits scholars to meaningfully consider an end to the process without sacrificing consideration of stagnation or reversals. So important is it to reach conclusions determining under which circumstances the transition tends to stagnate or reverse (“setback”) and *why*.

From the experience after the early post-1989 years, Attila Ágh concludes that new democracies in many cases constitute semi-democracies or even pseudo-democracies. Later, he became more optimistic (Ágh, 1998: 17) describing democratic *transition* as “the mixture of two systems in a creative chaos, with complicated and painful process of democratic institutionalisation and socio-economic transformation” and democratic *consolidation* as “the coherent emergence of the new system in all social sub-systems, with the establishment of a democratic political culture - the invention of democratic traditions”. Transition and consolidation constitute complex sociational processes with institutionalisation, social integration, participation and formation of a new political culture after 40 year with Stalinism, neo-Stalinism and different forms of post-totalitarian real socialism. Furthermore, Ágh, distinguish between *external* and *internal* consolidation, where external consolidation constitutes the social links of the parties and the establishment of lines of communication in society. The internal dimension deals with institutionalisation within the parties themselves with new lines of communication between the different centres of decision making, e.g.

the party leadership, the parliamentary group and the party member local organisations (Ágh, 1998: 110).

Jon Elster, Claus Offe and Ulrich K. Preuss (Elster etc., 1994: 4) stress the significance of “institutional agency” and “transformative agency”. The structural impact makes a difference, but also *actors* who are able to establish new and robust institutions necessary for further deepening of democracy, by which also a firm linkage is developed between rules and procedures for decision making. Seen in that perspective, consolidation is regarded (Elster etc., 1998: 247,305) “a condition in which conflict is limited and contained within a framework of enforced and recognized rules”. Consolidation becomes endangered, if categorical conflicts bound to identity and ethnicity take the upper hand. In short, the approach here is mainly institutional and emphasis is on the interplay between “legacies”, i.e. the legacy of the past, institutional engineering and decisions, i.e. actor and policy aspects.

It is worth noting that there is no guarantee that transition is a move from authoritarianism towards advanced democracy. As underlined by *Farid Guliev* (Guliev, 2005), several post-communist countries neither became fully democratic nor clear-cut authoritarian, some became semi-authoritarian, some extremely patrimonial or sultanistic with no prospects of change and often unstable and semi-anarchic (Georgia and Ukraine). In some cases, we were dealing with *competitive authoritarianism* that presumes a certain settlement of democratic institutions but legally and “morally” provides grounds for the succession or rise of yet other authoritarian leaders (Korosteleva, 2004: 125).

This confronts us with the question of why communist autocracy has not been replaced by genuine democracy and sometimes even has a prevalent tendency to become *more* undemocratic, leading to pseudo-democracy, a permanent grey zone or maybe outright dictatorship. To the group of semi-authoritarian belong countries like Egypt, Venezuela, Senegal, Croatia and sultanistic semi-authoritarian regimes e.g. Azerbaijan. Too little research seems to have been undertaken on the emergence and persistence of non-democratic authoritarian regimes (“authoritarian status quo”) maybe due to the first stage of “third way euphoria” with the build-in overestimation of the role of elections, the teleological tenets, underestimation of cultural factors and informal structures and

exclusive focus on transitions in Latin America, Southern Europe and Eastern Europe (Guliev, 2005).

We must not forget that anti-entrepreneurial, anti-capitalist attitudes and collectivist, egalitarian features and lack of market orientation had long penetrated the CEE societies. In other words, at least from the beginning, a “Soviet man” was to some extent implanted in most peoples (Berend, 2009: 199).

Mikael Wigell argue that several third wave hybrid regimes combine democratic features with authoritarian practices bringing them in a “grey zone” between closed authoritarianism and liberal democracy. He suggests a regime-graded typology with four main types of regimes: democratic, constitutional-oligarchic, and authoritarian, and further divides the category of democratic regimes into four subtypes: liberal, constitutional, electoral and limited (Wigell, 2008: 230). Operationalizing liberal democracy, he emphasises two dimensions, electoralism and constitutionalism. The introduction of democratic elections does not in itself ensure the transition to liberal democratic rule. In many cases, the most significant is not one regime being more democratic than the other, rather that they are becoming *differently* democratic (“more or less of what”) (Wigell, 2008: 231, 248).

Lucan A. Way's notion “*pluralism by default*” deals with political competition specifically in weak states, e.g. Moldova and to a large extent Ukraine and Belorussia. Pluralism by default describes countries in which institutionalized political competition survives, not because leaders are especially democratic or because societal actors particularly strong, but because the government is too fragmented and the state at the same time too weak to impose authoritarian rule.¹³ *Frane Adam* and *Matej Makarovic* argue that some post-communist democracies can be called “deficient”.¹⁴ In that case, the institutional structures, the cultural patterns, and the prevailing attitudes within the public sphere and among the political elites are basically democratic. But deficiencies from the time of extraordinary politics such as instrumental understanding of democracy, lack of efficiency in democratic institutions and lack of trust in the system, limited elite circulation and media pluralism, etc., are still relevant.

¹³ Lucan A. Way, “Pluralism by Default in Moldova”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 4 October 2002: 127-141.

¹⁴ Frane Adam and Matej Makarovic, “Postcommunist Transition and Social Science: The Case of Slovenia”, *East European Quarterly*, XXXVI, No. 3, September 2002.

In case of *democracy by design*”, known from presidential rule in Russia, those in control of the state machinery attempt to and succeed in shaping the institutions and procedures of a competitive election in ways that ensure an outcome favourable to the designers themselves.¹⁵ Under ”competitive authoritarianism” and “delegative democracy”, *Paul D’Anieri* speaks about “machine politics”, where the dominant party organization strives to maintain control for long periods of time using a combination of patronage, favouritism and intimidation to skew elections decisively in its favour (D’Anieri, 2005: 232, 243), a regime type also termed electoral clientelism and authoritarianism (Kuzio, 2005). In other words, consolidation demands considerable “self-limitation” on behalf of government parties as well as opposition parties. Controlling the media, extorting financial support from business people, using the government payroll to gain votes and controlling the counting of votes are among the main instruments used by the “machine politicians”.

In the case of Russia, the label “phoney democracy” was used, later, under Putin, democracy became more “controlled” and became “democracy by design”, which *Richard Sakwa* defines as

“those in control of the state machinery attempt to shape the institutions and procedures of a competitive election in ways that ensure an outcome favorable to the designers themselves” (Sakwa, 2002: 145).¹⁶

After Putin, there has been talk about regress to imitation democracy or competitive, bureaucratic authoritarianism, and more positively in the Kremlin terminology named “sovereign democracy” emphasizing centralisation of power and state control of elections and over the economy and respect for each country’s national traditions.

“*Authoritarian situations*” could be observed to some extent in all CEECs, e.g. in Slovakia under Meciar and Hungary under Viktor Orban. Here the dominant political agents exclude other agents from the political process securing for themselves some control over the political life including the mass media.¹⁷ The democratic institutions are in place, but the democratic rules are “hollowed out”

¹⁵ Michael Urban, “December 1993 as a Replication of Late-Soviet Electoral Practices”, *Post-Soviet Affaires*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (April-June 1994): 128.

¹⁶ Sakwa refers to Michael Urban, “December 1993 as a Replication of Late-Soviet Electoral Practices”, *Post-Soviet Affaires*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (April-June 1994): 128.

¹⁷ A term used by e.g. Juan Linz, “The Future of the Authoritarian Situation or Institutionalization of an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Brazil”, in Alfred Stepan (ed.) (1973), *Authoritarian Brazil. Origins, Policies and Future*, New Haven, CT, and London, Yale University Press: 233-254.

due to the winner parties' focus on keeping political power according to the principles behind the winners, "that takes it all".

Democracy may be consolidated if a democratic regional hegemony, e.g. the EU uses meaningful incentives and disincentives promotes and implants democracy. The EU factor played an significant role, e.g. in the case of Spain's and Portugal's transition to democracy, and the experiences from those two countries have played a certain role in the case of crafting democracy in the CEECs. Anyway, some differences between the Southern European and the Eastern European ways of consolidation are striking. Thus, the economic consolidation and market economy in Spain and Portugal were much more advanced at the time of democratic breakthrough. Therefore, the way down the "valley of tears" turned out to be shorter and less painful in Spain and Portugal than in the CEECs.

From advanced democracy to "something else" - regime types

Advanced consolidated embedded democracy

Liberal democracy, e.g. the polyarchic (Dahl) or elite type (Schumpeter)

Electoral democracy, with a one-sided focus on elections, maybe a move toward electoral autocracy

Majoritarian democracy of the consensual (Britain) or tyrannical (Slovakia under Meciar) type

Illiberal democracy with the absence e.g. of fair and free competition and the lack of rule of law

Authoritarian democracy, maybe as façade type democracy, by some used in case of Hungary under Orban

Competitive authoritarianism, which may resemble Aristotle's definition of demagogical democracy that presumes a certain settlement of democratic institutions but at the same time provides ground for the succession or the rise of yet another authoritarian leader (Korostelova, 2004: 125)

Delegative democracy, e.g. in (super)presidential systems, in case of Ukraine under Kutja named "machine politics", signified by patronage, favoritism, intimidation, patron-client politics (D'Anieri, 2005)

Controlled democracy, i.e. all the main arenas somehow "controlled" by the ruling elite, by Kreml named "sovereign democracy" (Surkov)

Imitation or façade type democracy (Furman, in *Osteuropa* 2007)

Phoney democracy, e.g. used about Russia under Boris Jeltsin (Sakwa, 2004)

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|--|
| Domain democracy with great power to certain non-democratic elected institutions, e.g. the military |
| Fake, manipulative, pseudo democracy by default (Alexey Pushkov about Russia under Jeltsin (Aydin, 2005) |
| Democracy by default, weak state, weak government, weak opposition, e.g. Moldova |
| Democracy by design, “shaped” top-down, e.g. by super-presidentialism |
| Sovereign Democracy (Putin’s Russia) |
| Deficient defect non-consolidated democracy (Merkel, 2004) |
| Bureaucratic authoritarianism, sometimes used about “Putin II” |
| Electoral authoritarianism (Kuzio, 2005) |
| Sultanistic semi-authoritarianism like in Azerbaijan (Guliev, 2005) |
| Authoritarianism in the “classical” way, e.g. post-totalitarian systems, e.g. the CEECs after Stalinism |
| Outright totalitarianism like the Soviet Union under Stalin and Nazism |

As said, the transformations in the CEECs were anti-communist but not necessarily democratic (Przeworski, 1991). Evidence shows that democracy may avoid erosion and breakdown even if the party system is not fully developed, and democracy may erode and break down even if the parties and party systems are well institutionalised. There has been much talk about a “transformational crisis”, some due to structural factors, but to some extent also caused by mistaken policies (Berend, 2009: 74).

Basically, the transition to the new system encouraged two types of conflicts, one between those resisting the old system and those defending it, and another between different “proto-democratic actors”, mainly former dissidents aiming to secure the best possible prospects for themselves in the new post-communist system (Przeworski, 1991). Many options were open, including the transition to non-democratic regimes, e.g. autocratic, electoral, procedural or other types of non-consolidated democracies.

Nevertheless, in spite of several set-backs democracy became “the only game in town” in almost all the CEECs. The “two turnover test” was passed, as presidential and governmental power was peacefully transferred to the opposition in case of election defeat for the parties in power. However,

without further modernization, more equal social rights, greater civic participation and political tolerance and institutionalisation, the transition to a more advanced democracy will not take place and a “democratic government” will not constitute a “democratic regime”.¹⁸ In most countries, “velvet indifference” and de-mobilization followed the first stage of mobilization, finding expression in lower electoral participation. In some cases, e.g. in Slovakia under Meciar, democratization was “blocked”, became “illiberal” signified by “regression” (“konsolidacni regres”, Kopecek (ed.), 2003: 22).

Consolidation in the CEECs may be called “advanced”, but not finished and for some countries, e.g. Poland after the 2006 election, we may even speak about “blocked” democracy. Furthermore, consolidation has not been a linear process. The parties were exposed to two parallel challenges, Europeanization and globalization. Most relevant, political “players” and most citizens adapted themselves to competitive multiparty elections and accepted the basic civic and political rights, but the support for democracy turned out to be more diffuse than specific. Trust and good governance became most decisive. The support for the *basic* rules of democracy remains high in spite of anti-political feelings, negative attitudes to democratic institutions and critique of the parties in power. After joining the EU, there has been talk about a “post-membership frustration wave” and “transformation fatigue” and “transformational disappointments” due to the too high expectations among the new EU member countries. Collectivist, egalitarian features and the lack of market orientation had penetrated the societies in Central and Eastern Europe (Berend, 2009: 197, 199), leading to soft and hard populism and sometimes right extremism. The EU conditionalities (“the Copenhagen criteria”) that limits nationalism before the EU membership, e.g. in relation the neighbour countries, did not work after becoming a member of the EU, and populism and illiberalism became more striking. In Eurozine (2008-10-10), *Tonis Saarts* speaks about a new unbalanced and majority-dominated political landscape evidenced for example at the June 2009 EU Parliament elections, where the nationalist extremist Jobbik in Hungary gained no less than 15 per cent of the votes and 3 seats.

Thus, in spite of several setbacks, most worst-case scenarios have been avoided, in particular “ungovernability” and “Weimarization”. Electoral democracy has been reconfirmed as the “only

¹⁸ Referring to O’Donnald (1994), Włodzimierz Weselowski distinguishes between “democratic government” and “democratic regime” in “Political Actors and Democracy: Poland 1990-1997”, *Polish Sociological Review*, 3 (119), Warsaw, 1997: 227.

game in town” and the preferred regime for the majority of citizens. Thus, to conclude, concerning consolidation of democracy in the CEECs we can still, 20 years after the breakthrough, use *Zoltan Barany's* formulation from 1999:

“What we currently have in Eastern Europe are imperfect, and in some places fragile but, most importantly, *functioning, working, democratic polities*” (Braun and Barany, 1999: 107).

6. Left-right divide and post-communist cleavages

The left-right divide known in already established political party systems cannot be used unconditionally. From the outset, the communist successor parties constituted a rather easily identifiable bloc, but to define exactly who is centre-right from amid the array of nationalist, conservative, Christian, liberal and populist groupings has not been easy (Szczerbiak and Hanley, 2004: 1). The left and right exist in peoples' mind, but differently in each country. The patterns of ideological structuring are intimately linked with the most important cleavages in society and each country's concrete experiences.¹⁹ The left-right divide evolving in the Czech Republic after 1989 came rather close to the left-right division known from the West, according to which attitudes to state regulation and the welfare state tend to become the most decisive single factors separating the parties.

In the case of Poland, the left-right axis has been associated with the *socio-cultural* dimension, in particular questions about the proper role of the church in society and attitudes to the communist past. Parties with a strong anti-communist and anti-market and euro-sceptical characteristics are called *right-traditionalist*. On social issues and questions about state regulation, the Polish traditionalist right-wing parties sometimes behaved more "social democratic" than most post-communist parties, including the democratic left alliance SLD and the Peasants Party (PSL). Thus, symbolic politics and low programme crystalization were striking in the right-traditionalist camp at least compared to the conservative-liberal camp and most parties on the political left, that be (post-)communist or not.

¹⁹ Attila Ágh, "Party Formation Process and the 1998 Elections in Hungary", *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Spring 2000: 292, and Radoslaw Markowski, "Political Parties and Ideological Spaces in East Central Europe", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30: 3 (1997): 122.

On the other end of the scale, we find the conservative-*liberal* parties. These parties are strong supporters of free market economy. Furthermore, they are pro-European and against restitution to the church and church interference in politics, e.g. in questions about religious instruction in schools and abortion. The Freedom Union (UW) in Poland, the ODS and ODA in the Czech Republic and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) in Hungary belong to parties of the conservative-liberal type.

The *political left* has been divided in “hard” orthodox communist parties, soft left-wing social democratic trade unionist post-communist parties with roots in the reform sections of the communist parties and the “modern” nomenclature and finally “soft” authentic historical social democratic parties with roots dating back before the communist takeover and forced unifications of the social democratic and communist parties. Some have been more successful than others. As argued by *Grigore Pop-Eleches* (Pop-eleches, 2008: 467) communist successor parties can be identified along three dimensions: *institutional continuity*, *leadership and personal continuity*, and *ideological continuity*.

The Slovak Smer-SD belongs to the more successful left parties. The Smer-SD benefitted from an externally driven change in party competition and from an internally centralized, flexible structure that allowed it to adapt quickly and effectively. Thus, the Smer-SD abandoned traditional notions of mass party organization and ideology in favour of a flexible, centralized structure and loose, centre-left programmatic commitments. The Smer-SD was fortunate to be in possession of a capable and adaptable leader (Robert Fico) and trusted associates and could also benefit from the weak and divided opposition in parliament. So far, they have proven successful in identifying electoral messages changing them when necessary. In government, the Smer-SD demonstrated an ability to satisfy popular demand and avoid the scandals that sundered other left parties, e.g. the SLD and the MSZP (Rybar etc., 2008). Other left parties found themselves with a more divided membership and a limited electorate. The Polish SLD and the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) succeeded to form new “re-born” “new-old” parties but left behind much troublesome baggage of their past. The two left parties suffered severe electoral defeats in 2005 (SLD) and 2009 (the EP election, MSZP).

The *agrarian* parties are not easy to place on the right-left axis. In Poland, the peasants party PSL has constituted a centre-left party because of the historical background in the communist period and

the cooperation with the left alliance SLD after 1990. The Christian-Democratic KDU-CSL took part in the ODS-led governments in the Czech Republic, after the 2002 election in Vladimir Spidla's social democratic government. In Hungary, the Smallholders Party (FKGP) appeared as a class party entering only government coalitions with the centre-right Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the FIDESZ.

Post-communist conflicts and cleavages

- (post-)communism versus anti-communism (all countries)
- state versus church (e.g. Poland)
- liberalism versus cosmopolitanism (e.g. Hungary)
- National ethnic conflicts (e.g. Slovakia)
- Socio-economic cleavages (The Czech Republic)
- Free market versus regulated market (The Czech Republic)

From the outset, cleavages in the post-communist CEECs tended to be multidimensional and, as put by *Miklos Haraszti*, to a certain extent *cultural* and *political* (communist - anti-communist).²⁰

Therefore, some observers rightly speak about specific “cleavages and conflict lines of transformation” (Hlousek etc., 2004: 48).

Kitschelt and his collaborators identified four possible divides around which post-communist elite politics might be organized: a *regime-divide* comprising attitudes to the system as a whole, an *economic-distributive* divide, comprising attitudes to free market versus state intervention; a *national-cosmopolitan divide*, comprising attitudes to national particularism and internationalization, and fourth, a *socio-cultural* divide, comprising attitudes towards traditional social institutions versus individualism and libertarianism (Fowler, 2004; Kitschelt et al., 2001).

According to the cleavage hypothesis, social conflicts are translated into party alternatives; that is, political parties essentially represent different groups in society. The cleavage hypothesis presumes the existence of definable cleavage, which split up groups of voters. Together with institutionalist

²⁰ Miklos Haraszti, “Young Bloods, Hungary’s election results promise a new taste of political salami”, *Transitions*, July 1998: 48-52.

explanations, sociological explanations, of which the cleavage hypothesis is the best-known example, are the dominant in theories about the origin of parties and party systems (Bader, 2009: 103).

As noted above, the socio-economic divide has been most pronounced in the Czech Republic, the regime divide most striking in Poland, and the national-cosmopolitan and socio-economic divide rather strong in Hungary. In the 1990s, Slovakia represented a case of weak left-right division, however, after the 1998 and 2002 elections the principal political conflict began to be shaped by socio-economic cleavages along the left-right axis (Gýarfášová and Krivy, in Hlousek and Chytilek (eds.), 2007: 83).

In the case of Poland, it came to a substantial change in the dominant post-communist divide, post-communists versus post-Solidarity. At the 2005 elections, the principal competition was organized around socio-economic issues or the “liberal versus solidaristic Poland”, dominated by competition between, not the left and right, but two right parties (PO and PiS). The Civic Platform (PO) simply re-profiled itself as more socially conservative and “patriotic”. Thus, the old divisions that had dominated Polish politics in the 1990s were becoming history and lost some of its former significance (Szczerbiak, 2008: 428). In most CEECs, systemic cleavages played an important role, and attitudes to the past have been a mobilizing issue, first in the shape of the post-communist divide, later as (populist) protests against corruption and poor governance (Wolek, in Hlousek and Chytilek (eds.), 2007: 57).

Thus, in the first stage the parties and individual participants became representatives of the (post-) communism versus anti-communism conflict. In the later stages of post-communism, the socio-economic cleavages, e.g. the conflict about the free market versus regulated market and about the social and economic policy, became more decisive. Still, many citizens could not locate themselves in the new party systems. Socio-cultural cleavages connected with national ethnic conflicts and nation building have been most striking in the “deviating case” of Slovakia due to the rather late and complex nation building here, making political parties and party systems unstable, re-aligned “immature” and “non standard”. Socio-economic cleavages were rather weak in the case of Slovakia, as far as the first years of independence are concerned, but at the 2006 elections socio-economic cleavages became crucial for the substantial rise in the Smer-SD’s voter support.

7. More about anti-communism and the Right

The right-left dimension deviated much from those known from established party systems in the West, and anti-communism is defined differently by nationalists, Christians, liberals and populists. Conservatism traditionally relies on historical continuity and opposing radicalism of every kind, but after the fall of the communist regime, conservatives were forced into radical positions of advocating fast change, while economic and political status quo was defended by the political left (Egedy, 2009).

Right-*liberal* parties paid attention to economic subjects, supporting the shock therapy type transition from plan to market, and therefore did not set subjects about “lustrace” (“purification”) and “dekomunizacji” high on the political agenda. In short, conservative-traditionalists do not recognize their post-communist competitors as legitimate opponents. By contrast, according to social liberals like Tadeusz Mazowiecki in Poland and Jiri Dienstbier in the Czech Republic the reckoning with the past ought to be structural and not primarily a question about “moralism” and political revenge. The conservative-traditionalists spoke in favour of “speeding up” the “purification” of the new won post-communist system. In other words, different opinions about the past became questions about the future Poland, and disagreements about the role of the Church in society divided the political parties more than questions about economic and social policy. The conservative-liberals and the conservative-traditionalists were also divided on questions about state regulation and free market economy. However, also in Poland socio-economic cleavages came to play a greater role at elections.

The right-traditionalist parties were divided in a *moderate* Christian conservative and *fundamentalist* wing. The fight between Jozsef Antall and Istvan Csurka within the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the split within Sajudis in Lithuania and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) in Bulgaria are illustrative examples. On the fundamentalist traditionalist right, the black and white judgments were impressive not only directed against “post-communists”; “enemies” were found also within their “own camp”. By contrast, neoliberalism was mostly a reaction against the party rule and the old plan economy transmitted to the CEECs from the West and only weakly rooted in the society.

The conservative-traditionalists are to be located on the political right, mostly due to nationalistic and patriotic slogans and semi-authoritarian and anti-modernistic attitudes. Among the conservative-moderates the policy tended to be characterized by “pragmatization without de-ideologization”. Consequently, conservative-traditional politics confronted both liberal individualism and socialist collectivism. The conservative-traditionalists spoke in favour of state intervention, a pro-family policy, social justice and soft or hard Euroscepticism. For the conservative-traditionalists the enemy was not only the “post-communists” but also the “traitors” within their own political camp, mainly the neoliberals and EU federalists, who “betray the country”. The many “wars in the top” within the right-wing camp inevitably enhanced radicalization and polarization especially on the symbolic and personal level.

According to *Gergely Egedy* (Egedy, 2009), Hungarian conservatism existed in two varieties, patrician and mobilizing. Both claimed to defend the “natural order” of things from subversion by alien influences. The patrician values encompassed phenomena like “prudence”, “pragmatism” and preferences for the “middle way” referring to Christian-Democracy, ensuring that support for the nation would not lead to extremist chauvinist and xenophobic attitudes and ideologies. Jozef Antall, the first non-communist Prime Minister, belonged to the first moderate “prudent” patrician group. The patrician conservatism of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) combined a moderate Christian-Democratic type rightist cultural position with a dominantly right-wing (though not neo-liberal) economic position, while the mobilizing conservatism of FIDESZ combined a markedly rightist cultural position with a mixed-leftist orientation in connection with the economic role of the state. The mobilizing conservatism of FIDESZ (and the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Poland) brought about a revolution in the political discourse of the Hungarian right resulting in a radical break with the language of patrician conservatism of Jozef Antall characterized by constant references to history and the institutions of the rule of law. The PiS in Poland to a larger extent based its mobilizing on social dynamism and conservatism with references to Polish history and law and order.

Discontent and frustrations might give rise to wide-spread *right-wing populism*. As put by *Kai-Olaf Lang*, similar to the term “Euroscepticism”, it is possible to think about at least two broad categories of populism, “hard populists” versus “soft populists”. Hard populism questions the very rules of the game, the separation of powers, or social pluralism. As mentioned above, soft populists

do not want to overthrow the political order, although they often aim to create a new political system (Lang, in: Bútorá, Gyarfásová, Meseznikov and Skladony (eds.), 2007: 127), make it illiberal and majoritarian.

Jacek Kucharczyk and Joanna Fomina emphasize that the fears and discontents with the transition gave root to at least three different strands of populism: economic populism, radical anti-communism and anti-modernity identity populism. Sometimes, the three strands were embodied in the same political party (Kucharczyk and Fomina, in: Bútorá, Gyarfásová, Meseznikov and Skladony (eds.): 83).

Among *national-populists* anti-elite, anti-urban and anti-cosmopolitic attitudes were striking. For national-populists “the people” had a social meaning, leading back to the archaic agrarian societies’ loyalty to the conservative ruling class. By many, politics was considered “dirty business”. For national right populists, the support for democracy was conditional as subjects linked to moral and ethics, e.g. questions about free abortion, are regarded “above politics”. Under communism they fought for political freedom, but after the victory they did not necessarily love the new won freedom. As politicians, many from here behaved like “amateurs”. However, in the long term the political arena could not be stabilised by abstract symbolic politics, and the fate of the governments were determined mainly by good or bad governance and most elections became retrospective. Elections were not as they were in the beginning, primarily referenda for or against the new versus the old system.

8. The dilemmas of the Left

Just after 1989, the socialist ideology as such was brought in a deep discredit. The fall of communism had discredited socialism in all its variants, that be as a discourse, an utopia, a revolution or as an inspiration for personal emancipation (Schöpflin, 2000: 66). The neoliberal discourse was not seriously challenged by the left. As rightly mentioned in a round table discussion in the Polish daily “Gazeta Wyborcza”, the Left simply lacked a new “great vision” for the new post-communist system.²¹ It was primarily the failures on the political Right that gave the “successor parties” several election victories and political comebacks in the first half of the 1990s.

²¹ 29-30 November 1997.

From the outset, the political scene had been left to former politically inexperienced dissidents, right-wing intellectuals, parts of the former nomenklatura and impoverished middle class. Passing the “tears of valleys” a “retrospective utopia” and a “transformation fatigue” emerged. Many citizens felt the economic transformation more as a “shock” than “therapy”, and “democracy” seen more as instability and injustice than stability and justice. In other words, the new order did not as first expected signify more law and order, economic development, “catching up” with the West, better governance, more honesty in politics and - not to forget - more social justice.

Different explanations of the rise in left support have been put forward, some have been socio-economic, some more structuralist sociological. Thus, *Jacek Lubecki* (Lubecki, 2004) examines the pattern of electoral support for successor parties in Hungary, Poland, East Germany and Russia and concludes that strictly economic issues are of a secondary importance. On the individual level, lack of religiosity and middle age has been the best predictors. In Russia, with its low religiosity, the supporters of the successor parties tended to be rural and older than fifty-five. He also concludes that regions characterized by the predominance of large country estates and rural poverty in the pre-communist era, where masses of poor peasants and agricultural proletarians experienced the communist period as a time of unprecedented socioeconomic advancement, have also been the areas where successor parties have enjoyed the highest and most consistent electoral support. The agricultural proletarians and poor peasants, whether continuing to work on state or collective farms, migrating to the communist-built urban centres, making political careers as party apparatchiks, or working on private plots of land owed to communist land reforms, constituted one of the backbones of the communist order and core voters of the post-communist successor parties (Lubecki, 2004: 13, 43).

It is worth noting that parties with roots in the old system despite the flight of members were in the position to maintain several old-new networks and more party members than the new movement parties and besides that were gaining a higher institutionalisation and also in possession of greater financial means. At the same time, the post-communist successor parties had to fight energetically to be recognized both at home and abroad e.g. within the social democratic Socialist International (SI).

After 1989, the communist successor parties as well as the social democratic parties were forced to carefully reconsider the new post-communist situation and define a new, different and more feasible “common sense socialism”. They succeed to transform themselves earlier and faster than first expected. The main task was to free themselves from “hardcore” communists and appear to the electorate like authentic, pragmatic, professional and reform-minded standard political parties, speaking in favour of a more just and more regulated market economy. The former communist parties, the reform-minded part of the nomenclature, chose expressively technocratic and centristic pathways. Seen from the conservative-traditionalistic point of view, the turn to the post-communist left was marked by political economy, nomenclature type capitalism and money laundry.

The Left became divided into two different groups, on the one side, *traditionalist* post-communist parties stubbornly adhering to the Marxist-Leninist and trade unionist principles, and on the other side, “*modern*” social democratic parties who were adhering to Western European social-liberal values. At the same line, *Krzystyna Skarzynska* calls attention to on the one hand the *economically* orientated and on the other, the modern *identity* orientated Left.²² To the first group belonged trade unionist underlining classical welfare state values, social justice, economic regulation and slow privatisation.

The “modern”, technocratic, social-liberal and international minded groups appealed especially to the young better educated living in the bigger towns, while for left “traditionalists” the motivation for voting Left were mostly based on *social* or cultural values. Both groups - modernizers and traditionalists - rejected the demands about more strict lustrace and decomunization. The “modern” left’ aim was to finish the project for modernisation that was introduced by reform-minded communists in the late 1980s. The two different lines on the Left (modernizers versus traditionalists) we find also *within* the parties themselves. Unreformed communist parties failed at the elections if we do not take into account the rather stable performance of the Czech communists (KSCM) at all the elections since 1989 and the Slovak communists temporary comeback at the 2002 election.

²² Used by Krzystof Pankowski, in “Od lewicowosci zawstydzonej do prawicowosci zagrozonej- zmiany w deklaracjach politycznych polakow i ciagu ostatnich piecu lat”, *Politicus*, No. 1-2(7), Warszawa: Biuletin Instytutu Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1995: 55.

Political strategies were to a large extent determined by the aims of *recognition* and *survival*. As also noted by *John Ishiyama* and *András Bozóki*, the communist successor parties succeeded to pass their own internal transformations. The post-communist parties chose various strategies of adaption, and those strategies changed considerably over time. Seen in that perspective, the party changes are often regarded as rational and purposeful moves by parties responding to internal or external stimuli. Major changes in policies and strategies have often been precipitated by poor electoral performance.

Thus, Ishiyama and Bozóki identify four different adaption strategies: the national/populist, the orthodox communist, the modernization/reformist and the national communist:

- *Leftist-retreat* involves the successor party embracing its marxist traditions (rejecting the free market), repudiating western influence, and adopting the status of an anti-system opposition party. This pattern was exemplified by the PDS in Germany and KSCM in the Czech Republic.
- The strategy of *pragmatic reform* attempts to distance itself from “dogmatic Marxism” and redefining the party involved as a “European” social democratic party consisting of “experts”, “technocrats” and “pragmatists”.
- The *national-patriotic* strategy, which unlike the pragmatic reform strategy does not involve the attempt to redefine the party as a “European” social democratic party. Rather, the aim of this strategy was to associate the party with nationalism, a modern ideological alternative to communism. That strategy often led to the formation of “red and brown” coalitions or so-called “nationalist-patriotic” and “fatherland” fronts such as has been the case in e.g. Russia and Romania.

The takeover of governmental responsibilities came earlier than first expected. The participation in government had a de-ideologizing, pragmatizing effect. As noticed above, the limited freedom of manoeuvre in the economic and social policy turned the political Left closer to the political middle, but at the same time removing them far away from voters and the civil societies. At the national elections in 1996 and 1997 in Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania and Poland, the social losers and

socially marginalised often felt themselves deceived by the “post-communists”. Therefore, many became “non-voters” or as an alternative supported right-traditionalist market sceptical populist parties. The electoral support for the neoliberals remained rather modest, mainly encompassing the “transition-winners”.

Being in government, the policy of the Left was determined by the low freedom of manoeuvre in the economic and social policy marked by a high specific post-communist path dependency. In contrast to socialist parties in Southern Europe after the fall of communism, the left parties in the CEECs had to change societies from plan to market under extremely difficult conditions internally and externally without carrying through the social reforms promised in the election campaigns. Also, the left governments were forced to pass the “valley of tears” before – slowly – moving to economic growth.

9. Forming Coalitions

Several *election party alliances* emerged with the aim to pass the threshold requirements stated in the election laws, only rarely the result of an approximation on the elite or the policy and programme level. So, the obstacles for establishing functional party federations turned out to be almost insurmountable. The main problem for the party alliances was to create sufficient loyalty and cohesion on actor level and on the policy and the programme level. A common “federal” identity turned out to be impossible to establish. On the macro level, the change of party identity can be explained as much by factors internal to the parties in the federation as by external factors, i.e. more party competition.²³

In many cases loosely institutionalized *party alliances* and *umbrella parties* were established, but, as noticed above, we were mostly dealing with negative party alliances that were focusing on a common enemy such as the SDK in Slovakia (against Meciar), the AWS in Poland (against “post-communists”) and the Four Coalition (4K) in the Czech Republic (Klaus and Zeman). Those party alliances were not able to obtain sufficiently stable definitive party memberships, rather we were, as formulated by *Attila Agh*, dealing with divided elites and “participants in their actions” (Ágh, 1998: 103).

²³ John Ishiyama and András Bozóki, “Adaption and Change: Characterizing the Survival Strategies of the Communist Successor Parties, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 2001: 32-51.

The movement parties strived to express the "original" and "ideal" unity of society and party. However, they were organizationally fragile, in most cases only transitory political phenomena, never constituting functional political parties like we find them in "standard" competitive multi-party systems.

Figure: Party cooperation and alliances in the CEES

| Types of cooperation/alliances | Characteristics | Examples |
|---|--|---|
| Transitory governments | Usually formed just after the demise of the old system and until the first free election, often set up according to a compromise between representatives from the old and new system, i.e. the opposition. Sometimes established in stalemate political crisis situations. | The first non-communist governments in Poland and Czechoslovakia until the first free elections. Apolitical "expert" governments like the Bajnai government in Hungary 2009, the Fischer government in the Czech Republic 2009. |
| Negative party alliances | Cooperation between parties primarily based on a common enemy, i.e. the (post-)communists and in spite of disagreements on both policy and actor level | Election Alliance AWS and the AWS-UW government in Poland, the SDK-led government in Slovakia after the 1998 election, Democratic Convention in Bulgaria, and (partly) the 4K in the Czech Republic |
| Tactical alliances and "umbrella parties" | Party cooperation with the primary aim to secure the parties involved a better representation in parliament by minimizing the waste of votes at elections | The first stage of the four party cooperation (4K) in the Czech Republic, "Przymierze Polski" in Poland at the municipal and regional elections in 1998. |
| Cartel agreements | Power sharing agreements, in which case the policy content is neglected, the aim is to keep other parties out, the majority principle, "the winners take it all" | The agreements between the ODS and the CSSD in the Czech Republic after the 1998 election, especially the first "opposition agreement" just after the 1998 election |
| Imposed agreements | Cooperation between parties established after heavy pressure from the international society, i.e. the West, e.g. the EU | Difficult to find in the "pure" form, however, the government established after the 1998 and the 2002 election in Slovakia are examples |
| Free "self-chosen" alliances | More coalition alternatives exist, only few historical structural obstacles and no pressure from the international society. Agreement on policy level is the most important, old cleavages and personal disagreements may be obstacles | The coalition established after the 1998 election in Hungary between the FIDESZ and agrarian party the FKGP. The FIDESZ could have established a broad coalition with e.g. the Socialist Party (MSZP). After the 2002 Czech election the CSSD could have continued the cooperation with the ODS, but chose the Coalition (K) as its partner in government |

| | | |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Historical compromises | Cooperation that overcomes deep-rooted historical, i.e. structural cleavages. Reflect a high defreezing of post-communist systematic “We versus Them” cleavages | The governmental coalition between the Socialist Party (MSZP) and the liberal Alliance (SZDSZ) after the 1994 (and 2002 and 2006) elections in Hungary |
|------------------------|---|--|

The rise of umbrella type parties was caused by the fragmentation and party splits after the first free elections. The umbrella parties are in possession of a hegemonic core that dominates smaller parties. Small parties may only survive if they enter coalitions with stronger (“hegemonic”) parties to pass the thresholds requirements and obtain seats in parliament. Most important was to minimize the waste of votes caused by high election threshold requirements. Umbrella type inter-party cooperations have taken place on both the political right and left. Thus, the cooperation between the MDF and the FIDESZ in Hungary and between the Labour Union (UP) and the SLD in Poland took the shape of “hegemonic” party-alliances or “umbrella parties”. Before the 2002 election in Slovakia, several new election alliances emerged. Some, e.g. the Hungarian minority parties, were transformed into new common electoral “parties” because of changes in the election rules decided by the Meciar government.

After some time, party alliances may change their role and then be party federations with a stronger decision centre maybe in the end becoming unified standard parties. The question, however, is to what extent the parties involved are willing to give up their own party identity. Unification and standardization were difficult in particular for parties with a long historical tradition and a well-established party culture.

A third model was the establishment of *pure tactical alliances* (see the figure above). In that case, the parties involved are capable of cooperating programmatically and to put forward joint lists at the elections, but limit themselves to coordination on the policy level without the intention to transform themselves into party *federations* with “shadow cabinets” and joint long-term political programmes such as was the case of the AWS in Poland and the SDK in Slovakia. In other words, the parties maintain their own party identities and their own party institutions. For that reason, the day-to-day policy problems are often discussed more “relaxed” and “practical”. From the outset, The Four-Coalition (4K) in the Czech Republic and “Przymierze Polski” in Poland constituted “pure” tactical party formations as we were not dealing with distinct negative alliances as was the case of the AWS

and the SDK. However, before the 2002 election 4K tried to transform itself into a party alliance with a joint election programme and a “shadow cabinet”. However, after the victory at the founding elections and after the transformation into party federations, several “wars in the top” erupted. Heterogeneous government coalitions were striking in the case of Poland and in particular Slovakia.

Lack of loyalty and cohesion on actor level has been impressive. On the Polish Right, several politicians changed party four or five times. In the case of the SLD in Poland, both the transformation into a party alliance and later into a unified “standard party” took place successfully, in some other cases no final decision about the final institutional set-up was made (the Czech “Quad Coalition” (4K) and “Przymierze Polski”).

Thus, to sum up, the ultimate aim of most party alliances was to be to establish functional party federations in the longer term transformed into unified “standard” parties. However, most political groups regarded party alliances as only tactical and therefore a temporary unit. Maybe exactly therefore the lack of loyalty and cohesion on elite and programme level has been striking almost from beginning.

10. Presidentialism

Parties and party systems developed differently in presidential and parliamentary systems. As put by *Robert Elgie* (Elgie, 2005), the debate about the relative merits of presidentialism and parliamentarism has a strong history and was revived in 1990 with Juan Linz’ articles about the supposed perils of presidentialism and the virtues of parliamentarism. There has been reasonable consensus among scholars that presidential systems are less conducive to democratic consolidation. Party non-systems and weak party systems tended to create presidential or semi-presidential non-consolidated systems. Consolidated and functional parliamentary systems with weak presidentialism seemed to have been as much an *effect* of strong parties as a *cause*, and it is also difficult to separate those two processes analytically (Hanley et al., SEI Working paper No. 94: 22).

Strong presidents, acting “above politics”, may “compensate” for the absence of strong and legitimate parties, but at the same time block further consolidation of democracy. In order to strengthen their political position, the presidents sometimes strived to set up barriers for the development of “anti-presidential” parties such as has been the case, e.g. in Russia, Ukraine and

Poland. Often presidents circumvent political parties, especially if party affiliation is seen as a liability. Therefore, presidents in some cases prefer rather nonpartisan, technical cabinets instead of “political” (Bader, 2009: 106).

Steven Fish (Fish, 2006) contends that parliaments and political parties according to the motto about “Stronger Legislatures, stronger democracies” do better under parliamentary systems. In other words, inverse relationship may exist between presidentialism and party strength (Bader, 2009: 106). Strong legislatures and strong parties often serve as a weighty check on presidents and are thus a more reliable guarantor of horizontal accountability than weak legislatures. Furthermore, indirectly elected presidency tends to lower incentives for charismatic leaders (and presidents) to pursue alternatives to party formation and thereby act “anti-politically” as a “no-party man being” beyond politics.

Thus, presidential systems may weaken the political parties and also the democratic process taken as a whole. Presidential systems seem to be rather rigid, as it is almost impossible to change the president in mid-term without bringing down the regime itself (Sakwa, 2002: 104). The presidential veto and the reference of laws to the constitutional courts sometimes delayed the political decision processes. The problem has been greatest, when elected governments were denied financial laws and tax laws already adopted by a majority in parliament. The disagreements among parties and the “wars in the top” within parties in time of presidential elections suggest that direct election of presidents may further encourage party fragmentation and impair stabilization and crystallization of party systems.

In Slovakia, the rivalization and disagreements between President Michal Kovac and Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar undermined the democratic process and gave rise to a heavily polarized political system. The successor as president (Gasparovic) became a careful “hands on” president. Commenting on the political development in Slovakia, he recognized that the reforms introduced by the Dzurinda government had helped to generate more foreign investments and economic growth and secure Slovakia’s membership of the EU. The main problem, he said, was the growing social inequality in society.²⁴ At the 2009 presidential election, Gasparovic was re-elected as president

²⁴ *Pravda*, 2.11.2005, “Gasparovic:Vláda dovládne”.

thanks to social and national political slogans and the support of Prime Minister Robert Fico and the Smer-SD.

According to the Hungarian constitution, the power of the president is modest. Nonetheless, all presidents since 1989 tried to the utmost to influence the policies of the governments. Laszlo Solyom seems to be the most “activist” among the presidents in Hungary, e.g. in specific political crisis situations (as in October 2006) and in foreign policy, e.g. in relation to the neighbouring states and speaking in favour of protection of the Hungarian minorities. A visit in August 2009 to Komarno in Southern Slovakia was blocked by the Slovak government. Laszlo Solyom had been invited to Komarno by a local civic committee to attend the unveiling ceremony of a statue of Saint Stephen, Hungary’s state-founding king, on August 21. He turned back on the bridge connecting the two countries after having been told by the Slovak foreign Ministry that his participation in the ceremony posed a security risk.

President Václav Havel in the Czech Republic as well as president Lech Walesa in Poland criticized the behaviour of political parties showing a distaste for politics and in particular *party* political organization, thus raising several questions about the role of political parties for consolidation of the new won democracy (“anti-politics”). The election of Lech Kaczynski as president at the 2005 election signified a move toward high presidential “activism”. As the Law and Justice Party (PiS) won the election to parliament, no serious “cohabitation problems” was to be found before the October 2007 election.

The Slovene former president Janez Drnovsek’s activism in domestic politics and humanitarian efforts abroad did not necessarily make him friends among the political elites at home, e.g. in the case of setting up a civil society group in Slovenia and promoting humanitarian and peace initiatives for Kosovo and the Darfur province in Sudan. On Kosovo, he made his own peace proposal even before the UN sponsored negotiations about the future status of Kosovo had started. In the case of Darfur he delivered a personal message to the Sudanese president without first asking Prime Minister Janez Jansa.²⁵

²⁵ Ales Gaube, “Omnipresent President”, www.tol.cz 20 February 2006.

In Romania and Ukraine, a bitter fight between the president and the government in 2007 paralyzed the political life. At a referendum in spring 2007 in Romania, the president (Basescu) came out as the winner, but the voter turnout was low (42 pct.). In Ukraine, the president (Yushchenko) as well the Prime Minister (Yanukovych) concentrated on what has been called “self-aggrandizement.”²⁶ Yushchenko re-wrote the constitution by claiming powers of dissolving parliament on nebulous charges of “usurped power”, appointing and firing judges single-handedly, replacing the general prosecutor, ignoring court decisions, and directly commanding Interior Ministry troops. For his part, Yanukovich ignored valid presidential decrees and was accused of suborning a judge of the Constitutional Court, paying protestors to gather in Kyiv, and acting to circumvent constitutional limitations on the parliamentary majority formed by the Party of Regions, which Yanukovych heads.

The election of Václav Klaus as new president of the Czech Republic in 2003 signified a move away from the “anti-politics” civic-based, Atlantic and pro-EU line of former president Václav Havel. Thus, Klaus refused to give up his extraordinary ties to the ODS, and did not hide his support to those parties in opposition to the social democrats. He repeatedly warned against restrictions of human freedom by the state power and bureaucracy and made it clear that he sees such trends not only in the Czech Republic but also in Europe. He also criticised some NGOs, which he said aimed to interfere in peoples’ lives without gaining any democratic mandate won by elections, thus leading the country away from liberal democracy towards illiberal *post-democracy*. “Our country must be a free space for the consistent application of the civic principle in which democracy does not degenerate to become post-democracy and in which the republic of free citizens does not disintegrate under the pressure of various expedient groupings that strive for political power – under the veil of noble statements and without any political mandate” – he declared in his October 28 address in 2005.²⁷ Klaus also vetoed a government proposal about registered partnerships for homosexuals and refused to sign the Lisbon treaty before he knew the result of the new Irish referendum October 2009 and signed the treaty only after gaining opt-out from the treaty on fundamental rights.

Klaus’ rival at the presidential election in February 2008 became Jan Svejnar. Like Klaus, he was a liberal economist, a teacher in economics at Michigan University and unlike Klaus with dual

²⁶ Ivan Lozowy, “Let the Games Begin”, www.tol.cz 6 June 2007.

²⁷ www.ctk.cz 31.10.2005.

Czech-US citizenship. Svejnar was supported by the CSSD, the Greens (SZ), some senators from minor groupings, and some lawmakers from the Communists (KSCM) and the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL). Nevertheless, in the end Klaus succeeded in getting the necessary majority in parliament for his re-election.

Basically, the absence of clear constitutional rules and the difficult cohabitation between presidents and governments were due to weak democratic culture and high party system polarisation. Several times, the President and the Prime Minister have belonged to different political parties. Thus, cohabitation “in the French way” took place in Poland under the post-communist government (Walesa versus the SLD-PSL government) and the AWS-UW government (Kwasniewski versus the AWS-UW government).

In some cases, the direct intervention of presidents overcame governmental crisis and “deadlocked” situations. That was the case in 1993 when president Lech Walesa dissolved the parliament after a vote of non-confidence against Hanna Suchocka’s government, and later when Walesa intervened against Jan Olszewski’s government. President Václav Havel’s intervention in late 1996 that removed Václav Klaus as Prime Minister was controversial from a constitutional point of view, but the final outcome, the establishment of a caretaker government and a new un-timely election in summer 1998, looked like the best solution in the then prevailing almost “deadlocked” political situation.

It is worth noting that the formation of new parties sometimes followed successful presidential campaigns. Thus, the rise of the Movement for the Construction of Poland (ROP) was initiated by Jan Olszewski, a candidate at the 1995 presidential election. Shortly before the 1995 election, Lech Walesa established the presidential party (BBWR), and after the 2000 presidential election the presidential candidate, Andrzej Olechowski, together with some defectors from the Freedom Union (UW) and the AWS established the new liberal platform (PO). In the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary with parliamentary systems, no distinct presidential parties have succeeded to enter parliament.

11. The political elites

The formation of political parties was closely connected with the emergence of new *political elites*. At the time of the demise of the old systems individual politicians had good opportunities to leave their mark on the political agenda (“political crafting” and “political entrepreneurship”). The nature of the post-communist party-forming elites, in particular the degree of cohesion and positioning in early post-communist politics, played a critical role in explaining the nature of choices at particular critical junctures. In other words, most politicians in the early post-communist politics have to be seen not only as political entrepreneurs, but also as *ideological* entrepreneurs by crafting integrative often nationalistic narratives with broad popular appeal (Hanley et al., SEI Working paper 94: 32, 39).

James Tool (Toole, 2003) and *Jon Elster, Claus Offe and Ulrich K. Preuss (Elster etc., 1998)* belong to those who argue that so far the development of political parties in the new democracies in an unseen extent has been pushed forward by the new political elites and the significance of political elites for further consolidation of democracy (“institutional agency”). Prime Ministers, presidents and some other ministers, especially the ministers of finance, obtained an important position due to the prevailing chaotic situation and the weak party institutionalisation. As we have seen, the parties were mostly established top-down and therefore became elite driven. Shortly after the demise of the old systems new elite structures emerged. Special interest was attached to the new non-communist elites and the fate of the nomenklatura. In addition, many naturally desired an answer to the question who will become the “winners” and who the “losers” in the new post-communist environment.

Political elites we can shortly define as individuals and groups who by occupying strategic positions in society are able to regularly and substantially influence the political decisions. By “substantial” we mean that without the impact of elites political outcomes would be different. This begs the question, who in society occupy the most powerful posts and who in society are capable of influencing and controlling those in power and how and why certain elite groups are able to act cohesively and others not.

Research of political elites often rely on theories about elite *reproduction*, where systemic changes do not lead to renewal on the personal level, or about elite *circulation*, in which case the main focus

is upon the instalment of *new* elites. In case the changes on elite level are modest and only cosmetic we have to do with “within-private” regimes (Braun and Barany, 1999: 8). Russia under Yeltsin is one among several examples of such within-private regimes, as the new post-communist elites to a great extent were recruited from the old nomenklatura. However, we also see within-regimes in the CEECs.

As put by *Jacek Raciborski* the mechanisms of elite reproduction are somewhat varied: from the hereditary principle to the practice of cooptation of capable individuals into the elite and to various types of electoral mechanisms for converting financial, social and cultural capital into political capital. The elitist paradigm assigns political elites a crucial role not only in “settled times” and “ordinary politics”, but also - and maybe in particular - in situations of drastic social change and transformation of statist authoritarian regimes into democratic systems and market economies. As democracy and market economy become more established, the reactive strength of the *government elite* increases, and the relative strength of the parliamentary elites, party elites, and other parts of the political elite declines. At the same time, political power becomes dispersed and diffuse (Raciborski, 2007: 18-19).

Many, including *A. Lijphart*, stress the importance of political elites for further stabilisation and development of pluralistic societies in cases where the ethnic and social divisions are deep and promote polarisation and political conflicts.²⁸ In this respect, Yugoslavia is important. High elite fragmentation inevitably deepens polarisation and causes greater party competition. Therefore, it is crucial for democratization to defreeze political polarization and install a more consociational type democracy. In other words, high elite consensus was important by enhancing political stability and consolidation.

From the mid-1980s, with the changes taking place in the Soviet Union, the old elites were forced to concentrate on strategies of survival. On the one side, since 1989 the old nomenklatura has been accused of usurping political power, on the other side, there have been warnings against “demonising” the role of the nomenclature by saying that a great part of the old nomenclature contributed to the smooth transition from plan to market and consolidation of the new won democracy.

²⁸ A. Lijphart (1977), *Democracy in Plural Societies: A comparative Exploration*”, Berkly, California: University of California Press.

John Highley distinguishes between consensually united and ideocratically united elites.²⁹ Consensually united elites share the same views on development of society meaning that the different networks and elite groups co-exist rather harmoniously. In contrast, ideocratically united elites adhere to common attitudes and belief systems. The conservative-traditionalistic typically was ideocratically united elites, but only as long as the common enemy, i.e. the (post-)communists were still present. Often the ideocratically united elites behave intolerant by striving to secure for themselves high support, if necessarily by non-democratic procedures, even by use of means of force.³⁰

Before 1989, the old elites were forced to act under constantly growing insecurity in the Soviet Union. After the demise of the one-party systems, the modernising old nomenklatura aimed to exchange political power with economic. The party loyalty and the cohesion declined incessantly. In Hungary, a great part of the nomenklatura was a leading force in undermining the old system as many from the nomenklatura listened more to advisers from the IMF and the World Bank than the ruling communist parties and Kreml. Others among the power elite adopted distinct “new-old” attitudes of survival. In general, the attitudes to introduction of democracy and market economy were positive, but neither the elite nor the Hungarian people rejected all that had taken place in the old system.

After 1989, different types of political leaders came to power. Thus, the Hungarian Attila Ágh differentiates between four groups:

“Politicians of morals”, who played a significant role in the first stage. Mostly they appealed to patriotic and national values with references to their own “heroic past”. As politicians they acted reserved, improvised, morally, non-professionally and almost aristocratically captured by a specific “liberation myth”. Poland’s Jan Olszewski and the Czech Republic’s Václav Benda belonged to this first group.

“Politicians of historical vision”. Politicians from that group left the political scene rather quickly after the demise of the old system. Before 1989, they had not been active as dissidents. As politicians they often based their arguments on ideologies and discourses back in pre-communist

²⁹ John Highley, in Braun and Barany, 1999: 52-53.

³⁰ *ibid.*: 52-53.

times. Before 1989, they often had entered compromises with the power holders. The political style was often arrogant, non-compromise seeking and unprofessional. Former Prime Minister in Hungary Józef Antall and the Christian Democrat Jan Carnogursky in Slovakia belonged to that group. Many politicians in the Baltic countries shared a feeling of fulfilling a historical mission by re-establishing independence after 50 years of communist rule. Nonetheless, some from that group had at one time had been politicians under the old system, sometimes expelled from the communist parties due to a lack of party discipline.

“Politicians by chance”, i.e. those who were “carried” into politics because of the then prevailing extraordinary politics and transition anomie. Several times people from that group became an embarrassment for the further consolidation of democracy due to their aggressive self-promoting style aimed at political career. Several from that group became involved in political scandals, and many absurd, often populist and xenophobic slogans were put forward. Stanislaw Tyminski, Lech Walesa’s rival candidate at the 1990 presidential election, Miroslav Sladek, the leader of the right-wing populist Republican Party in the Czech Republic, Istvan Czurka, the extreme right-wing nationalist in Hungary, and Vladimir Zjirinovski, the leader of the populist Liberal Democratic Party in Russia, belonged to that group.

The old nomenklatura, which has done rather well. Especially the modern and flexible part of the nomenclature made a good showing. The conservative “hardcore-heads” either resigned from politics or became nationalists. Poland’s president and former leader of the left federation the SLD Aleksander Kwasniewski and Hungary’s former foreign minister, Prime Minister Gyula Horn belonged to the “modern” and accommodate part of the old nomenklatura.

Finally, Attila Ágh mentions the *new professionals*, a “mixture of old and new”, mostly consisting of experts and professionals from the old regime or youngsters without any political links to the past. In the first generation of professionals, i.e. people from the “second tier” of the old system, we find Václav Klaus, the party leader of the liberal party ODS and the later the president of the Czech Republic, and Leszek Balcerowicz, the former Minister of Finance, leader of the liberal Freedom Union (UW) and later the Polish National Bank governor.

In agreement with Atilla Ágh, *András Bozóki* from the Central European University in Budapest, breaks down the new elite as follows:

- To the first group belong the *professionals*, who were “born” into politics, who recognised that, and were able to adapt themselves to new situations and find their bearings in new and unpredictable situations. Many reform-minded communists belonged to that group.
- The next group was *those doing “missionary work”*, i.e. persons who felt to perform a historical mission. Here, we were dealing with writers and other cultural personalities, who were “carried” into politics. For that group politics was not a goal in itself, the goal was almost meta-political.
- To the third group belonged *the “divided”*, i.e. people who were not power orientated and with an unclear vision about their own role in politics and the political future. Many from that group resigned from politics with the professionalisation or bureaucratisation of politics.
- Finally, there were people who soon after the breakthrough in 1989 resigned from politics, some returned to their former work, others moved to the new private sector and became political advisors.

Furthermore, it is important, how many *resources* and how great a “capital” that belong to the different elite groups (Szelelyi e.a., 1995). As regards “capital” we can differentiate between four different types:

- *Economic capital*, i.e. the possession of property and access to finances, state subsidies etc.
- *Cultural capital*, e.g. education.
- *Societal capital*, e.g. close networking horizontally and vertically.
- The ability to *convert capital* by using the already established networks to exchange political by economic capital.

As put by *Ivan T. Berend* (Berend, 2009: 240), the new political atmosphere allowed the advancement of young, second and third-tier cadres to leading positions within the reform-communist parties. They were often new recruits of the former communist elite, often from the countryside, not visible to the public when system change took place. They often became leaders of post-communist, now socialist parties, while members of parliament and socialist governments. Furthermore, relatively many from the economic elite kept their previous managerial jobs, but the transformation of the old nomenklatura elite into a new capitalist class was relatively marginal (Berend, 2009: 243). Referring to Enyedi (Enyedi, 1998: 27) Berend contends that the major beneficiary of the transformation was the late communist technocracy and the managerial elite while the former communist top political nomenklatura lost its position. Former dissidents found their place in new political parties gaining access to political power. However, the status of the intellectuals changed, as many simply lost their social importance and prophetic role (Berend, 2009: 246).

Sometimes a distinction was made between “laissez-faire”, “transactional and “transformational” political leadership (Heywood, 1998). In case of laissez-faire leadership, we have to do with the delegation of political power to lower levels of decision making. In the case of transactional leadership, we find a “hands-on” leadership with the emphasis on pragmatic goals as party unity and party cohesion; and finally in case of transformative leadership, the main emphasis is laid on visions, inspiration and charismatic leadership. The goal is the closest as possible contact between elites and voters by means of political mobilisation aiming to carry through the most urgent reforms of society.

As noted above, most political parties were established top-down and for that reason became elite driven. Most new elites were in short of strategic visions without institutional capacity to translate visions and strategies into action. In the first stage, the leadership was mostly of the “hand on” type as far as the new elites had to formulate a new complex project for transition under high insecurity. Gradually, political leadership became more transactional, but the policy remained decided without close contacts to voters and party members. “Agency of leadership” and “political crafting” played important roles in the first stage of post-communism. By contrast, the institutional structures became more important when moving to “settled times” and more “ordinary politics” (Innes, 2001: 112).

It is difficult to say which among those elite groups became winners or losers in the new post-communist system. So much can be said that the old but at the same time modern part of the nomenklatura all together did rather well. The former communists belong to the fourth group in Ágh's classification and the first group in Bozóki's. Before 1989 many former communists had acquired a considerable political experience, but after 1989 brought in the defensive, at least at the beginning. The "moral politicians" lost political influence after the comeback of the post-communists, but some came back after the pendulum again moved to the right. Often moral politicians and nationalistic-minded intellectuals had to give way to pragmatists. New pragmatists and post-communist technocrats were mostly recruited from the second rank, i.e. outside the old nomenclature, but also outside the dissident circles. Only rarely former dissidents belonged to the transition winners.

Some regretted, others with great satisfaction observed the "moralisers'" loss of significance in politics. Before 1989, in all the countries intellectuals have played an important, sometimes even a "mythical" role, in the Czech Republic people like Palacký, Jungmann, Masaryk and Havel. At the conference held in Budapest in 1996 on "Intellectuals between moral and politics", the mayor of Budapest, the liberal *Gabór Demszky*, said that in Hungary many former dissidents and nationalistic-minded intellectuals left politics for the new Hungary was no longer in need of "educators" and "parents", and *Adam Michnik* shared those views and criticised former dissidents for not being able to adapt themselves to the new times.³¹ "Our heroes fought for freedom, but they did not learn to love it".

We must not forget that the peaceful "revolutions" in 1989 were driven by relatively small counter elites and intellectuals. Like Balcerowicz in Poland and Klaus in the Czech Republic some were economists and technocrats. In Slovakia under Meciar and Bulgaria under socialist rule, clientelistic structures played a significant role, binding together the economic and political sphere. Thus, two things the new non-communist leaders had in common: the possession of political power and the lack of political experience and professionalism. In the words of *Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski*, the new leaders were the alert of "elite conspiracy" that may threaten their new won political power, that be

³¹ Demszkys and Michniks views are mentioned in Tismaneanu in Antohi and Tismaneanu, 1999: 153-154.

from representatives of the old system or people within their own political camp.³² As mentioned above, the first generation of non-communist leaders were mostly ideocratically united. Likewise, personal networks and new-old coalitions played a big role. People like Václav Klaus and Leszek Balcerowicz left their mark on the political agenda and the policy, in other words acting like “political entrepreneurs”.

It played a great role that before 1989 many new leaders had been dissidents and been long away from “real life”. They had not been elected democratic, rather “appointed” due to the extraordinary situation and due to a considerable political support from the West. At the beginning the room of manoeuvre was great due to political capital. However, the common enemy and the personal networks played a greater role than ideologies and programmes. Disagreements and “wars in the top” gave rise to legitimacy problems. Evidence showed that in the new post-communist system a dissident background did not necessarily become a political resource. Nevertheless, some dissidents, Havel, Göncz and (in the first stage) Walesa, achieved a great popularity among the electorate. In several countries, the presidents became more popular than prime ministers and party leaders, and in case of Hungary and the Czech Republic, the presidents strived to move “above politics”.

When the transformations moved to the stage of more ordinary politics, the political elites should be more inclusive, and the negative sum games replaced by a positive sum game. In order to move in that direction better education and a political neutral and well-educated bureaucracy were needed. The power vacuum of the first stage gave bureaucrats and economists, financial experts a great influence, but more importantly was to facilitate the social and political dialogue and weaken the new-old clientura by installing younger, neutral better educated people in the most important positions in society.

It is also worth noting that the reform-minded part of the nomenklatura was able to “twist oneself” in the new system. Some joined the political parties, even right-wing parties, others aimed to convert political power to economic power. This strategy of survival was especially important in case of privatizations.

³² Gerd Meyer (Tübingen), “Towards a Political Sociology of Postcommunism: The political Cultures of East Central Europe on the Way to Democracy”, in: Andrzej W. Jablonski, Gerd Meyer (eds.), 19996: 22-25. The subject is also mentioned by Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski in an interview in the weekly *Wprost*, 7 February 1999 (“Dolina Lez”): 19-20.

In the first stage radicalisation and extrication were admission cards to the new post-communist elite (Marshalek (ed.), 1992: 78), but from the mid-1990s the first elite generation revolutionary had to give place for the *second generation* liberal-minded reformers. In other words, the first generation of “elite breakthrough” was replaced by the second-generation post-transitional “elite of consolidation” (Frentzel-Zagórgska, in Frentzel and Wasilewski (eds.), 2000: 11). Thus, gradually a more professional political class emerged. Many from the second generation elite were well educated and belonged to the “lower noble class” under late communism. As noted by *Ákos Róna-Tas*, those people had probably also made political careers if the old state socialist systems had not collapsed.³³ They were ambitious, in most cases able to adapt themselves to the new post-communist system.

The political learning became more painful than first expected. Some problems had to do with difficulties when moving from working “underground” to “above the surface”, i.e. legally. With political freedom, new coalition and networks emerged between the political parties and the new cultural and economic elites, including technocrats. Under the new circumstances, civil societies played an unobtrusive role. A great part of the efforts was aimed at promoting sufficiently high loyalty and cohesion among the elite, demobilise the civil societies and make it responsible and accountable.

At the outset the political leaders were not elected democratically. They were “appointed”, i.e. “accepted” by most people because of the underground work and the widespread support from the West. Some became charismatic leaders, e.g. Lech Walesa and Václav Havel, but after some time a depersonalisation (Havel) or erosion of charisma (for example in the case of Walesa, Meciar) set in. The high freedom of manoeuvre was due to the great political capital, but that capital was more short term than first expected, and for many citizens the new political leaders reminded them too much about the former communist as political style and political communication were concerned. In general, the new power structures were signified by close personal contacts with several interlinked elite networks. Also the lack of political experience among the new leaders became a great problem. The majority of the electorate seemed to prefer “disciplined” and professional politicians, if necessarily politicians and technocrats from the reform-minded part of the pre-1989 nomenclature.

³³ *Ákos Róna-Tas*, “Path Dependence and Capital Theory: Sociology of the Post-Communist Transition”, *East European politics and Societies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Winther 1998: 113.

The division and fragmentation took place at an unfortunate point of time, for under the transition anomie and economic recession (“the J-curve”) political truce and consensus were badly needed. On the centre-right, the ODS in the Czech Republic and the FIDESZ in Hungary belonged to the few parties with high cohesion, professionalism and political and ideological crafting. Before 1989 many from the FIDESZ in Hungary had belonged to the nationalistic opposition, while many from the ODS in the Czech Republic in the 1970s and 1980s had joined the “grey zone” consisting of critically minded technocrats who were holding posts in official research and financial institutions. In that position they were in little need of independent organizations such as Charta 77, rather they were gravitating towards neo-liberalism of the Chicago or Austrian Schools (Hanley et al., SEI Working Paper 94: 35).

In many new parties, the leadership consisted of closed circles of rather political intolerant elites. Over ideologization and destructive political infighting were aimed at the accumulation of political and economic power. Differences of opinion and political debates were not seen as a political resource, rather as an attack on the nation and the party and the party leader. Communication failed not only within parties and political elites, but also between the elites and the citizens.³⁴ The lack of responsiveness to civil societies turned out to be a barrier for further consolidation of democracy.

Even countries considered as “forerunners”, e.g. the Czech Republic, experienced several setbacks. The new elites remained too far away from civil society and lived too “closed” mainly focusing on the work in parliament (“over-parliamentarization”). The first stage was marked by the economic and social problems and the need for reforms, but the capture of the state apparatus and the reckoning with the past took too much time and too many resources. As a consequence, not only the policy and programme development but also the quality of the law-making process was neglected.

The fall in political participation was very much due to indifference to the civil society. Because of low party institutionalisation contacts to the electorate and party members were few mostly mediated through the written or electronic press. The number of party members was low, though in some cases increasing. Thus, the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) had 16,000 members in the late 1990s, 7,000 more in 2004. The Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) had 45,000 members in 2004, 16,000 less than six years ago. A party press and journals were badly needed, but the party

³⁴ See e.g. Jiri Pehe, “Ceske demokraticky system postrada nekretere dimenze”, *Hospodarske Noviny* 20 January, 1998:6.

life remained downgraded in the mind of most elites. Between the elections and in the election campaigns most parties were not capable of bringing their political messages sufficiently close to the voters and the party members, as most party candidates had not been subject to the political training and learning.³⁵

To improve the quality of governance, political neutral and un-corrupt civil servants were needed. Crucial was to develop viable alternative government coalitions and improve democratic governance, in case that did not happen protracted crisis and stalemate post-electoral situations may take place (Strmiska, 2001: 29-30). The problems of governance became stronger due to the low wages in the public sector and the delayed reforms. The high elite-circulation was followed by politization and close links between the civil servants, the new private sector and the political elites. Often parties and ministers were accused of nepotism and clientelism. In Hungary there was talk about “italianization” of the transformation due to a fragmented party system, widespread corruption, black economy, clientelism and well-organised mafia-like clienturas, i.e. “political machines” reminding us about the oligarchic system in Russia and other CIS countries. Slovakia under the rule of Vladimir Meciar has been considered as an illustrative case of clientura based political economic systems.

From 1993-1994 new opportunities emerged for the “modern”, pragmatic and accomodating part of the old nomenklatura. Some from that group came from reform-minded socialist parties, which won the first or second free elections in Lithuania, Poland and Hungary. Many were technocrats who wanted to finish the modernization project, which they started but not finished in the 1980s. Before 1989 some had been rather young without strong links to the top echelons of the old state socialist systems. The political socialization they obtained in socialist systems in decay, working in the “second echelon” social strata until opportunities for political careers emerged. Often the relations between those groups were based on elite settlements going back to procedures and discursive practices from the years leading up to the breakthrough in 1988-89. The main problem for the new “post-communist” leaders was the still too low freedom of manoeuvre in the economic and social policy.

³⁵ See e.g. Martin Potucek, “Ze Sredni Europy na Balkán?”, *Ekonom*, 1997, Praha: 84.

12. Party institutionalization

By distinguishing between mass parties and cadre parties and underling the impact of the circumstances leading to the formation of parties, *Maurice Duverger* (Duverger, 1954) belongs to those, who emphasized the significance of party institutionalisation and party organisation. Normally, it is assumed that changes in the relative strength of parties are minor in case the parties are in possession of a relatively strong organisation with close bonds between party and voters. By contrast, if the parties are weakly institutionalized, they may be taken over from the outside by small elite groups.

In case of high institutionalisation, the parties are able to mobilize their core voters. Close links between parties and voters foster party loyalty and better election results. Sometimes the voters even identify parties with *institutions*. In case the institutions are strong, the voters are in possession of structures to which they make references and orient themselves (Mair (ed.), 1990-72). From the outset, historical parties with roots in the old system were in possession of a relatively strong organisation and close bonds to the voters. However, we must not forget that many non-communist parties achieved a higher party institutionalization and better political training of the leaders because of a high financial support from foundations and some sister parties in Western Europe and the US.

The subject has been included in several analyses of political parties. The Polish *Ewa Nalawejko* belongs to those who, at an early point of time, underlined those processes that impact the party institutionalisation (Nalawejko, 1997). Special emphasis is laid on the internal dynamics. Institutionalisation, she argues, involves processes reflected in well-known practised and recognisable patterns of behaviour. Furthermore, institutionalization controls behavioural patterns by formal and informal rules and norms. After some time, the patterns of behaviour become more internalized due to increasing bureaucratization and routinization of behaviour. Institutionalization gives better opportunities to “produce” and “craft” and not only reflect the most significant social cleavages in society. *Aleks Szczerbiak* (Szczerbiak, 2001) has carried through concrete analyses of party institutionalization. As he points out, until now rather low attention has been paid to the internal party dynamics, as these subjects are relatively difficult to analyse due to the limited access to data.

The party institutionalization is closely connected with those mechanisms that distribute political power between different sections of the party, e.g. the parliamentary group and the party apparatus. Institutionalisation can take place *internally* by introducing more regular decision procedures, or *externally* by stronger linkages to the society. Institutional structures play a greater stronger role when moving to more interest-based “ordinary politics”. In case of successful institutionalization, more strict rules are internalized as regards distribution of political power and routinization and legalisation of political enterprise. Institutionalisation brings about detailed and internalised rules and norms regarding cooperation on the leadership level, mechanisms of conflict resolution and internal control. Political demobilization and lower political participation that took place shortly after the breakthrough in 1989 were mostly the result of, not the reason for, higher institutionalization.

Legitimation is important, as legitimacy helps to bring institutions more freedom of action. According to opinion polls, the political parties and the parliament were in possession of low legitimation. Due to low institutionalization elections could not be won by close links to important sections of society. To compensate, better access to and more party control over the media were needed.

Institutionalisation was difficult in the first stage of high voter volatility, functional and government overload, anti-political attitudes and over-parliamentarization. Institutionalisation took place under high insecurity and transition anomie. The institutional vacuum could be observed, but the political parties were not able to fill out that vacuum. Weak parties and weak party institutionalization set obstacles for democratic consolidation because low institutionalization undermines democratic accountability and makes it difficult for voters to punish politicians. Furthermore, weak party institutionalization prevents the development of strong, stable party identification and tends to increase electoral volatility and party system fragmentation. Under those circumstances, the actors lack the information and the resources necessary to behave strategically. Empirical evidence from Ukraine and Russia show that the level of party *discipline* at voting in parliament vary with factors associated with weak party institutionalization (Thames, 2007). In addition, in case institutionalization is too weak political parties may even doubt their ability to regain power through elections.

Linkages to social cleavages and policy preferences in society are not in themselves sufficient to promote consolidation of democracy. Parties also have to be sufficiently strong organisationally in order to present the political messages to the electorate. Insufficient organisational capacity and bad party finances have led to internal splits and weak policy - and programme formulation. Formally, the institutions were in place, but the underlying *attitudes* to strengthen institutions and make them legitimate and functional, did not exist. Under those circumstances, the political agenda to a great extent was set by other institutions, such as the presidency, foreign institutions and donors, criminal structures, trade unions, mafias and other institutions outside democratic control (“shadow institutionalization”). The democratically elected institutions were simply in the position to fill out the vacuum. The worst case scenario was long-term weakening and marginalization of political parties.

In Hungary independent institutions like the national bank, the constitutional court and the ombudsman institution imposed restrictions on the law-making process, fostering a “fragmented democracy” with too much checks and balances. In fact, we were dealing with too early and too sophisticated institutionalisation. In Russia and Ukraine strong financial oligarchs, networking, clientelas and criminal structures outside democratic control arrogated to them selves a menacingly strong position, thereby weakening the freedom of action of the political parties and links of parties to civil societies. To some extent such non-democratic structures originated in the old state socialist system.

To get a greater *meaning*, institutions have to be sufficiently strong to internalise the norms necessary for the survival and further consolidation.³⁶ For that to happen, the institutions must be capable of adapting to the political environment, shape the optimal cognitive frames of references and make the complex realities “simple” for the electorate. Only thereby, sufficient loyalty and legitimacy could be obtained. A new won democracy can only be consolidated, if democratically elected institutions are strong enough to live up to their responsibilities and ensure the rule of law. In other words, party organisation must be considered an important intervening variable. No political ideology can be rooted in society without sufficiently high institutionalization.³⁷ However, the question has been raised, whether high institutionalization is necessarily more appropriate in

³⁶ Claus Offe, “Designing Institutions for East European Transition”, in Jerzy Hausner, Bob Jessop and Klaus Nielsen (eds.), 1995.

³⁷ Underlined e.g. by Giovanni Sartori, e.g. in the article “The Sociology of parties: A critical Review”, in Mair (ed.), 1990: 169.

young democracies subject to fast changes, in which the most important aspects are the ability of adaptation and flexibility.³⁸ On the other hand, weak institutionalization may cause anti-party attitudes and shadow institutionalization. In the long term, the parties are forced to facilitate better institutionalization, but higher institutionalisation may be the *result of* rather than the precondition for consolidation of democracy.

The question has also been raised, whether political institutions in the early stage constituted an independent variable and were decisive for the formation and the development of political parties, or institutions maybe are to be regarded as a mechanic reflection of the division of power between the parties involved and the most important cleavages in societies (Ware, 1996: 197). Within the parties top-down constructions and centralisation of power around a small group of persons could be observed. Under specific circumstances, the party structure becomes “stratarchical”, in which case some elements in the party organisation become more autonomous aiming at the highest possible freedom of action. That has mostly been seen in party federations like the AWS in Poland and the SDK in Slovakia both characterized by dysfunctional decision-making structures and internal splits.

As argued by *Paul G. Lewis* and *Radzislawa Gortat*, also in *Western European* most parties have moved away from maximisation of number of party members and high institutionalization towards aiming at election success, i.e. maximisation of votes.³⁹ Therefore, most political parties remind us more about Kirchheimers “catch-all, Panebianco’s “electoral professional” and Katz and Mair’s “cartel parties” than Duverger’s mass parties (Szczurbiak, 2001: 101). *David M. Olson* argues that evidence from the first 10 years of transition evidenced that party organisations are mostly developed by small groups of activists with broadly formulated and vague political messages and slogans. Thus, seen institutionally several political parties reminded us about the US type catch-all elites and cadre parties.

The heavy law burden and the high focus on state power moved parties closer to post-communist *cartel* parties. In case of higher institutionalisation, more power can be left over to the party apparatus, often professional elite groups, and most political strategies and policies, were decided top-down. Unlike in the first stage, the parliamentary groups were no longer the most important

³⁸ That question has been raised e.g. by Radoslaw Markowski in “Party System Institutionalisation and Democratic Consolidation: On ideosyncracies in the Polish Case”, in: Frenzel-Zagórska and Wasilewski, 2000: 65-89.

³⁹ Paul G. Lewis and Radzislawa Gortat, “Models of Party Development and Questions of State Dependence in Poland”, *Party Politics*, Vol. 4, 1995: 599-608.

decision-making and agenda-setting entities. Under changing and unstable elite-voter linkages, party institutionalisation was weak and most non-communist parties broad-based catch-all parties. The opposite took place within the post-communist Left. After the departure of the “hardcore communists”, the Polish left-wing alliance SLD gained a more functional organisation and a broader voter profile.

Like in Western countries most parties tried to appeal directly to the voters via the media and thereby overlook the party structures as well as the party members.⁴⁰ The party congress tended to concentrate efforts on internal elections and personal matters, and the local party organisations thereby mostly became passive tools for top-down decisions. However, after some time, the local party organisations gained a certain degree of autonomy in local affairs, especially after the introduction of administrative reforms and local elections. In most countries, new “local barons” and “kings” emerged. In autumn 2009, even the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Poland introduced direct elections of regional party leaders. Nevertheless, the central party apparatus were in position of some means of intervention, e.g. by appointment of candidates at elections and “screening” of party members. Normally, the organisational structure was vertical as well as horizontal with three or four levels of party organisation (municipal, district, regional and national). Unfortunately, not many wanted to become a party member, so parties did not become functional linkage between the political arena and the civil society. However, the negative impact of low party institutionalization might be reduced by political learning.

Most parties established special committees or party annexes dealing with subjects such as youth questions, women and environment. Right-wing parties in Poland, Slovakia and Hungary recognized that elections could not be won primarily by the use of symbolic politics and party fragmentation. At the 1997 and 1998 elections, party alliances and umbrella party constructions (AWS, SDK and FIDESZ-MDF) were established with the aim to “unite forces” and minimize the waste of votes. However, most anti-communist alliances, e.g. the AWS and the SDK constituted negative alliances without sufficient unity on policy and programme level and the necessary cohesion and loyalty on elite level.

⁴⁰ Miroslawa Grabowska, “Political Parties: Social Representative or Agent of Change”, *Polish Sociological Review* 4 (116), 1996: 307-322.

The parties secured for themselves favourable financial resources due to greater subsidies from the state thereby at least to some extent making fees from party members insignificant. Too many members may raise more conflicts in particular within those parties, which are not kept together by a common history and party culture and common ideologies and consistent party programmes. In the new TV and IT age, party members no longer play a crucial role as the mean of communication with the voters (Wightman, in White, Batt and Lewis (eds.), 1998: 163) in election campaigns.

The assumption that better party organisation in itself leads to better election outcomes can not in general, be confirmed. Thus, at the 1994 election in Hungary the post-communist Socialist Party (MSZP) gained more than half of the seats in parliament in spite of a fall in number of party members down to 40,000. At the 1993 election in Poland, the left-wing alliance SLD did well despite the fact that the number of members in the peasant party PSL, the junior party in government, was three times higher than in the SLD. Nevertheless, in the long-term parties with a small membership base may easily face insurmountable problems in particular in times of party crisis or greater party competition.

It is worth noting that some parties have aimed to compensate for low institutionalisation by high activities on *macro* level, in particular in the parliament. The high activity in parliament, however, often resulted in more disagreements on the leadership level, reinforcing “elitization” and facilitating lower party discipline. The lack of discipline and the many “wars in the top” simply drained the political parties of energy.

High institutionalisation promotes *input-articulation*, which means that the political demands are put forward in the decision-making stage. In the first stage, the input side was grossly downgraded, inevitably enhanced total articulation, output-articulation and democratic overload (Heywood, 1998: 80). Additional factors were almost hermetically closed decision-making procedures.⁴¹ The centralisation of decision making was due to the problems connected with including demands from outside, the lack of aggregation of demands and the conversion of demands to political decisions.

Also law enforcement and implementation faced many barriers. Low institutionalization was not only a party phenomenon; it also signified interest organisations, including post-communist trade

⁴¹ Bohdan Szklarski (1997): *Semi-Public Democracy, articulation of interests and system transformation*, Warszawa: Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, PAN ISP: 65-66

unions. Most parties were not in the position to “sell themselves” to the electorate due to a poor party press, a poor media profile, few party members and low administrative capacity. Under those circumstances, politics easily became zero sum plays, i.e. almost permanent election campaigns. Both between parties and within parties the wish to provide consultative forms of articulation did not prevail.

13. The party culture and party life

The party culture is closely connected with collective memories, in the CEECs about previous political battles before and under the communist rule. Collective memories constitute a specific “pantheon” and “demonology”, sometimes a “foundation myth” connected to the formation of the party, previous leaders and their contribution to the development of the parties and sometimes even connected to enemies of the party, “cowards”, who betrayed the party and evaded “unpleasant situations”. “Unpleasant situations” could be persecutions under the communist rule or as in the case of the communist parties, persecutions in the 1930’s under Nazi rule. In short, memories about “traitors” and enemies who at some time left the party and scoffed at the party, may encourage solidarity and cohesion and create a “we versus them”-based party culture foundation.⁴² Under those circumstances, controversies between parties even over rather “technical” issues developed into fierce conflicts.

To party culture in the broader meaning of the word we can add symbols like songs, flags, logos and narratives about the past, in short the *party tradition*. Normally, party institutionalization itself provide the party with symbols, a press and specific norms, rules for decision making and customs more broadly speaking. All that together constituted “the cement” to keep the party together. A well-established party culture may bring about more cohesiveness and a more “lively” democratic debate.

The party culture shall be seen as a part of the culture in society in general. In case of the Czech Republic, some observers call attention to the lack of ability to organise, the too low solidarity in society and the widespread opportunist behaviour. Moreover, the low political participation and the

⁴² Michal Waller, “Party inheritance and party identities”, in Pridham and Lewis (eds) (1996: 25).

tradition of anti-politics had a negative effect on membership of political parties and the internal party life.

The experiences from the dissident period, i.e. working “underground”, shaped a certain style of political action. Some movement parties, e.g. Solidarity, were in possession of a strong liberation myth. The liberation myth was somewhat weaker in the Czech Republic, where the “breakthrough” was rather short-term. Before 1989 the opposition had been badly organized, anti-political attitudes were strongly rooted helping to foster elite parties with too weak links to civil society. By the new political elites, the internal party life and civil society were often not assigned the same important role as was the case in historic parties.

In Hungary, the party culture was less influenced by the fight against the old regime, as that regime had been liberal, mature national accommodative and the market economy partly tested. From the outset, the Czech peoples’ perception of democracy and democratic values was rather individualistic.⁴³ Programmatic and institutional shortcomings tended to make politics almost “issueless” (Thomas, 1999: 9). In Poland, the political culture was more religious and collectivist than was the case in the Czech Republic, inspired by the tenets from the Catholic Church. The historic memories have played a significant role, but especially in the beginning and in the case of Solidarity in Poland.

The opposition to the old state socialist regime had been strong, in Poland going back to the uprising in 1956 and Solidarity in 1980-1981. As a member of Solidarity, you became a part of a bigger community (“Us” contrasting “Them”). The many different party rituals reflected a deeply rooted party culture, e.g. by group participation in church services and to carry party emblems. After the state of emergency in December 1981, many Poles carried the “pornik”, the opposition badge. On May 3, the anniversary of the 1791 constitution and the anniversaries of the uprisings in 1830, 1863 and 1944 (the Warsaw uprising) and the murder on the priest Popiluski have also been marked. The colours of the Polish flag were the colours of the Solidarity banner. Patriotic and religious rituals were closely bound to the memories about the fight against communist suppression, which were reactivated during election campaigns.⁴⁴ Or to conclude, Solidarity was rather strong on

⁴³ See e.g. interview with Jiri Musil in *Gazeta Srodkowoeuropejska*, in *Gazeta Wyborcza* 19 February 1995: 13.

⁴⁴ Włodzimierz Modzelewski (1989), “Symbolika “Solidarnosci””, in “*Studia nad ruchami społecznymi tom. II*”, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Instytut Socjologii, Warszawa.

the symbolic level, but unfortunately also weak and divided organizationally as well as institutionally.

For the *(ex)communist* parties the years working underground before and under the second world war had a special meaning, also the first years after World War II when gaining political power. In the Stalin years most political activities were concentrated on the fight against “contra-revolutionaries” within as well as outside the communist parties. The friendship with the Soviet Union, the showdown between the communist leaders and the class enemies and contra-revolutionaries encouraged high internal solidarity and cohesion, but also widespread fear and insecurity. Today’s friends may easily become the enemies of tomorrow. Also special festive days and revolutionary songs became an integral part of the party culture. After 1989, the *fight for recognition* and the pressure from non-communist groups and parties together enhanced internal cohesion.

The new *non-communist parties* had to establish a party culture almost from scratch. In contrast to the (post-)communist they could do that with “clean hands” and without “dead bodies in the cargo”. The roots of new broad anti-communist civic movements went back to the time of the fight against the old system. Unlike *historical* non-communist parties, the new movement parties did not survive only by references to history. Resistance against the state socialist system occupied an important place, but did not ensure the necessary internal cohesion and consensus on the elite level after the fall of the old system.

The re-born *social democratic parties* did their utmost to bind themselves to the party traditions going back to the time before the forced unification with the communist parties after WWII, however, without any great success. The historical social democratic parties had not played any leading role in opposition to the communist systems that be from exile or underground. Therefore, the common pantheon and the collective memories were less developed. The internal fragmentation due to generation gaps and disagreements about the proper policy line had as one of its results that at the first free elections the historical social democratic parties often were surpassed by the reformed communist parties, which more quickly than expected were able to carry through the transformation to social democracy.

For obvious historical reasons, conspiracy theories and internal “wars” weakened the development of an active and democratic internal party life. Thus, a conflict erupted over whether Poland’s National Remembrance Institute - which has custody of secret files from the communist era - should open the files to the public by arguing that national security and moral obligations were at stake. In general, the political debates and the political language between and within parties were characterized by “language of aggression”, “language of attacks”, reflecting the then prevailing polarized pluralism.⁴⁵

The new parties were facing political battles on two fronts, first against enemies in their own camps (“the wars in the top”) and second against external enemies (“insider-outsider differentials”). Often the political language was aggressive not directed against the representatives of the old regimes, but rather against “own people” sharing divergent opinions on important policy issues. Likewise, party leaders labelled opponents outside and within the party as “agents”, “traitors”, “thieves of public properties” and “foreigners”, and anti-Semitic statements have not been totally absent either. Unfortunately, today, 20 years after, the language of politics remained aggressive and unforgiving.

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