

Contradictions on the Road to Democracy and the Market in East Central Europe

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This analysis focuses on the dilemmas facing policymakers attempting the transition from one-party hegemonic systems to multiparty democracies in post-communist Europe. It investigates the hypothesis that the political conditions for building democracy and the economic conditions required for establishing market economies in these societies are at cross purposes. The author examines the role of the international political economy in the process of democratization in terms of a framework of three primary variables: identity, legitimacy, and security. In applying these variables to post-communist East Central Europe, five significant arenas emerge in which political and economic imperatives come into conflict. The analysis concludes with policy implications for Western decision-makers whose own future security needs and economic well-being are tied to successful transition from communism to viable democracy in East Central Europe and the former Soviet Union.

In December, 1991, the revolutionary transformation of Soviet politics, economy and society that Mikhail Gorbachev called for in the name of *perestroika* came full circle. But this second Russian revolution swept past Gorbachev to complete the collapse of communist political systems begun by the largely peaceful revolutions of 1989. Gorbachev could not ride the waves of political change that swept communist parties out of power and the Soviet model of "real socialism" onto the rubbish heap of history throughout East Central Europe as well as within the former Soviet Union. The hammer and sickle came down. Moscow is no longer the mecca of world communism; the Russian flag flies above the Kremlin.

Western media hail "the Year of Yeltsin," the "Decade of Democracy" (*Newsweek* 30 December 1991). This is a leap of faith, ungrounded in fact. Undoubtedly, every ending is also a beginning. However, a tornado of political hopes, economic fears, and national passions is still swirling around the neighborhood. Sovietologists, already forced into rethinking their models and methodologies, have willy-nilly become historians. Notwithstanding the temptation for extensive post-mortems, there is a need to retool, to redefine their relationship to mainstream political science. Meanwhile, scholars of Eastern Europe struggle with our own identity crisis in the wake of the revolutions of 1989-90.

Comparative communist systems, as a part of academic curricula, have gone out of the business as surely as the Soviet and East European governments that these courses studied. For those of us in comparative politics, our discipline, like the Communist world, is in transition. Yesterday's scholarship is reduced to a backdrop in the drama of political transformation. Our data for understanding

the road taken by East Central European politicians in their search for democracy and the market are largely based on journalistic accounts. We write knowing that the parties and politicians whose behavior we are analyzing today may be tossed aside by the time the article or book is published.¹

Therefore, rather than attempt to provide a score card of political players and parties, this analysis seeks to draw lessons from the post-communist experience in East Central Europe that may help us to understand the political dynamics operating as Soviet successor states attempt to redefine their relationship within the embryonic Commonwealth of Independent States. It investigates the substantially pessimistic hypothesis that political pressures and economic imperatives on the road to democratic multiparty systems and market economies in East Central Europe are working at cross purposes, creating fundamental contradictions that can abort the process of democratic transition. The focus is on identifying the underlying forces and political relationships that will influence, if not determine, the outcome for countries that O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986) could well include among their *uncertain democracies*.

Unfortunately, the growing body of what we might call democratic transition scholarship is not particularly useful for two reasons. First, notwithstanding Huntington's (1991) provocative cross-system analysis, that scholarship has largely dealt with crises of authoritarian systems that lack the particular ideological and socialization characteristics of communist parties, governments and societies. In this regard, the literature has been left behind by the pace of the collapse of communist systems. Second, as Juan Linz (1990) has emphasized, the existing typologies of democracy largely ignore institutional factors. The literature offers little assistance in dealing with middle-range questions such as whether, or if, it makes a difference if the new regime is presidential or parliamentary, unitary, federal, or confederal.² However, before considering such institutional niceties, since communist political systems are the womb from which post-communist democracies must come, it is essential to look at the legacy inherent in the rise and fall of the international communist subsystem.

The Role of International Political Economy

Marxism was a response to the seamy underside of the industrial revolution. When the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik) captured the Russian Revolution in 1917, it was responding to imperatives set in motion by the international political economy based on that industrial revolution. Marxism-Leninism was more than an ideology. It was a political culture that Modelski describes as:

that ensemble of norms, standards, and values . . . common to party members and separating them from nonparty members: "reactionaries," "capitalists," "imperialists," and the like. This culture is embodied in its own prolific literature, has

its own distinct language and symbols, its own history and its own heroes, villains, and martyrs, and its own special ritual behavior (1960, 45).

Stalinism accepted and refined that political culture, replacing “proletarian internationalism” with Russian national communism. “Socialism in One Country” became a program of forced modernization via collectivization; the Russian peasantry became an ‘internal colony’ that paid the bill for completing the industrial revolution within the Soviet Union itself (Deutscher 1949, 326-335). This established the Soviet Union as a superpower which competed quite effectively in the post-World War II bipolar international system until confronted with the scientific, technical, and information revolutions underway in the latter part of the 20th century.

All political systems are subject to the pressures from an international political economy that is itself being transformed by these revolutionary breakthroughs. Americans should not gloat too quickly about having won the cold war. The consequences of the rapidly changing world of international finance for our own society’s economic competitiveness during the 21st century are worrisome and uncertain. Notwithstanding the deficit, the size and strength of the U.S. economy buys time. However, the nature of the Soviet political system and command economy meant that the repercussions of the computer and information revolutions intensified existing pressures for change within an increasingly educated and impatient political elite, creating the infrastructure of a civil society incompatible with the stereotypic totalitarian model of the Soviet Union.

De-Stalinization and Collapse of the Stalinist Interstate System

Stalin functioned as a 20th century “Ivan the Terrible,” ruling by a mixture of charismatic authority, propaganda and fear. He was surrounded by a myth of infallibility, endowed with god-like attributes. The weakness of the Stalinist system at home and of the Stalinist interstate system (Brzezinski 1971, 105-184) in Eastern Europe was biological. Stalinism required Stalin.

After the Soviet dictator died in March, 1953, a submerged power struggle among his would-be successors began the process of “restructuring” Stalinism. Malenkov’s *New Course* advocated collective leadership, a major shift in economic priorities toward consumer industries, and “socialist legality” (a codeword for subordinating the secret police to the party). Although it undoubtedly was not Malenkov’s intent or he would not have opted for the Premiership rather than First Secretary of the CPSU, the *New Course* restored the party’s “leading role” that *de facto* had been assumed by Stalin when the party was decimated by purge. Khrushchev precipitated de-Stalinization as he attempted to outmaneuver his competition at the February, 1956 Twentieth CPSU Congress. His own abortive reform program was the precursor of Gorbachev’s *perestroika* three decades later.

The resulting transformation of the Soviet political system, in turn, reverber-

ated throughout East Central Europe, creating deep splits in the Soviet bloc. Challenges to Soviet hegemony -- riots in East Germany in 1953, the Polish October, and the Hungarian uprisings of 1956 -- followed de-Stalinization. In their search for allies to validate competing domestic agendas, Soviet politicians preoccupied with their own factional struggle destabilized the communist parties and governments of East Central Europe.

This set in motion two processes. The first involved legitimizing "national roads to socialism," more commonly referred to in the West as a form of *national communism* (Zwick 1983; Conner 1984) -- an indigenous path no longer necessarily identical to the Soviet system. It amounted to tacit acceptance of socialist pluralism in principle, if not yet in practice. Second, increasingly within Eastern Europe as within the Soviet Union itself, the basis of legitimacy shifted away from ideologically-defined promises of utopian futures into a search for legitimacy via economic performance. In 1981, Brezhnev prophetically acknowledged that creating a "really modern sector producing consumer goods and services for the population" was much more than a "purely economic problem."

The things we are speaking of -- food, consumer goods, services -- are issues in the daily life of millions and millions of people What can they buy? How are they treated? . . . How much time do they spend on their daily cares? The people will judge our work in large measure by how these questions are solved. They will judge strictly, exactingly. And that comrades, we must remember (Byrnes 1983, 74).

In Eastern Europe, as in the Soviet Union, elite-mass relations rested on a *de facto* social contract, under which people increasingly expected to have a smoothly functioning welfare state in which their standards of living, while not comparable to the outside world, slowly and steadily would continue to rise, not to fall. They took state-supported housing, education, health care, and job security for granted.

In Marxist terms, this social contract was *the base* that determined the relationship of civil societies throughout East Central Europe to the communist regimes that governed them. Many East Europeans viewed these regimes as alien, a form of Soviet imperialism, and would have liked to get rid of them. Given the military veto in Moscow, however, citizens in these societies settled for a tacit bargain: their political acquiescence and apathy for economic security. The political superstructure rested on that social contract.

Paradoxically, communist systems were the more vulnerable because public policy favored the secular, modernizing sector of society. Modernization and industrialization required an educated society. Therefore, a major component of communist public policy was education. Throughout communist Eastern Europe, substantial resources went to creating a literate society, to educate the kinds of technical and academic elites needed to build the brave, new world of Marx, Lenin and Stalin.

The contradiction between (1) knowledge needed to accomplish these modernization goals, and (2) knowledge as power to influence the information needed by party policy-makers inevitably undermined the 'leading role' of party bureaucrats. After all, professors, scientists, and managers also were party members. They had political as well as academic credentials and were frustrated by the ability of less knowledgeable party bosses to overrule their recommendations (Skilling and Griffiths 1971; Lodge 1971). Out of this social sector emerged increasing criticism of the problems that command economies had in interacting with the scientific, technical, and information revolutions of the 20th century. This attempt to modernize methods of socialist construction was fundamental to the 1968 Czechoslovak reform movement, which, as Soviet spokesmen later acknowledged, differed from *perestroika* and *glasnost* of the 1980s more in chronology than in content.

Socialism with a Human Face

The need to overhaul the political system in order to confront the changing demands of the international political economy was high on the agenda of the *Prague Spring* effort to sweep the ashes of Stalinism from the Czechoslovak road to socialism. The other key cluster of issues in Czechoslovakia in 1968 involved empowerment, participation, and non-alienation, all under the rubric of "socialism with a human face." When he took over as head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC), Alexander Dubcek wanted to draw upon the energies of the population and create a different kind of socialism. He believed that the party had nothing to fear from an open marketplace of ideas and approaches as it attempted to deal with economic decline and political stagnation. On the contrary, this was an effective strategy to bring fresh ideas into the problem-solving arena (Dubcek 1969, 13-17).

The star-crossed Czechoslovak experiment could not survive the massive anxiety that it created in the Soviet Union and among hardline East European communist leaders of the time. Allied socialist soldiers, under orders from Moscow and the capitals of the more orthodox East Central European regimes, marched in and closed down the Czechoslovak marketplace of ideas. The Brezhnev Doctrine of Limited Sovereignty in the Socialist Commonwealth (*Pravda* 26 September 1968; Remington 1969) was enunciated in justification of the Kremlin's decision to eliminate the reform wing of the KSC political spectrum.

Thereby, with the exception of Hungary, where reformers managed to continue much of the economic agenda of the Prague Spring, the reform wings of East European communist parties were essentially locked into a holding pattern. Nonetheless, demands for reform in these political systems continued within the party, and more openly among academic and technical elites outside the party apparatus, where pressures for responding to change in the international political economy could not be neutralized by political fiat.

Perestroika: “The Moscow Spring”

The Soviet Union’s Mikhail Gorbachev did not come out of nowhere. He did not wake up one morning and say, “I have a dream.” He came out of a strata of Soviet society that was incubating during the seemingly interminable Brezhnev era and which expressed itself in developments such as the Novosibirsk School (Aganbegyan 1989; Zaslavskaya 1990). These scholars, scientists, managers and closet reformers within the party itself were agents of change-to-come. They needed a champion, and Gorbachev was a politician who needed a political base.

This is not to suggest that Gorbachev did not believe in what he put forward under the name of *perestroika*. Rather, notwithstanding his resignation speech, he did not understand how fast or how far the process would go. In any event, whatever his reservations, Gorbachev began *perestroika* as a representative of something much larger than himself. That *Time* magazine’s man of the year symbolized a transformation that amounted to much more than his own leading role became clear during the abortive August, 1991 coup attempt by the “gang of eight,” if not in earlier visible evidence that he was trapped between the forces of reform and of party orthodoxy.

Revolution in East Central Europe

East Central European revolutions as expressions of popular, grassroots power began in 1988, and continued through 1991. There is a certain irony that the Cold War began and ended in Eastern Europe. In July, 1991, the Warsaw Pact formally disbanded, leaving NATO an alliance in search of a mission. As we now begin to consider the problems and prospects for democracy in East Central Europe,³ we must remember that the “Free World” did not win the Cold War on a military battlefield. Rather, ours was a victory of ideas.

As the Czech poet, Karel Capek (1969), wrote poignantly in 1938, “truth is more than power . . . and violence [can not] hold out against the need for freedom.” Five decades later, he was proven right. The truth that command economies could not meet the challenge of the scientific-technical revolutions underway became stronger than the power of East Central European communist parties eroded and eventually immobilized by gerontocratic leadership, elite intransigence, and bureaucratic politics. Dubcek’s conviction that the creative energies of populations must be brought to bear to solve the twin problems of economic decline and political paralysis was an idea whose time had come.

In 1987, when Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov was asked to explain the difference between what was happening in Moscow and what had happened in Prague back in 1968, his answer reportedly was “nineteen years” (Gati 1987, 975). Whether or not that story is apocryphal, *perestroika* retraced the road to economic recovery begun in Prague in 1968, removed the stigma of

“counter-revolution,”⁴ and re-legitimized East European “reform communism.” In short, the ghost of the *Prague Spring* had captured Mikhail Gorbachev.

Well before Gorbachev’s rejection of the Brezhnev doctrine,⁵ the new head of the Soviet Communist Party had rewritten the rules of interparty relations and thereby taken the first step toward removal of the Soviet veto over East Central European reforms. At the 27th Party Congress in February, 1986, Gorbachev stressed that no party within the communist movement had “a monopoly over what is right,” that unity among communist parties did not require uniformity (Gorbachev 1987). He then called for pooling collective experience on the road to socialism. The Soviet Union, he said, would make use of “anything which is advantageous or appropriate for our own country” (*Pravda* 19 June 1986). For the first time, a Soviet leader admitted that decision-makers in Moscow might have something to learn from their East European comrades. This amounted to renunciation of the long-standing Soviet insistence on the appearance of unity, whether or not it existed in reality. It rehabilitated Khrushchev’s “national roads to socialism,” thereby restructuring the CPSU’s dominant-subordinate relationship to East European party elites. By the following Spring, Gorbachev was on the road reassuring possible East European converts to *perestroika* that:

The entire system of relations between socialist countries . . . should be built on the foundation of equality and mutual responsibility. No one has the right to claim special position in the Socialist world. The independence of each party, its responsibility to its people, the right to resolve questions of the country’s development in a sovereign way -- for us these are indisputable principles (*Pravda* 11 April 1987).

Although this echoed the rhetoric of the 1950s, it went far beyond Soviet assumptions of that era that their East European allies would follow the zig-zags of Malenkov’s *New Course* and de-Stalinization. Rather, socialist pluralism in Gorbachev’s terms implicitly replaced Lenin’s insistence on the primacy of the Soviet model with the notion of a joint venture in building socialism.

Although Gorbachev did not insist that the Soviet reform model was the answer to the problems facing East European politicians and economists, the extent to which *perestroika* became a campaign to transform the Soviet political system prerequisite to achieving economic health made him a symbol of reform -- the “white hope” of proponents of change. This is the dimension of elite politics.

With respect to mass politics, *glasnost*, the oft-debated partner of *perestroika*, was by far the more important weapon of political struggle in Gorbachev’s war of reform. *Glasnost* made it possible to articulate aspirations for expanded political access -- for democratization of the party, and of society itself. In the popular mind, this became indistinguishable from the right to be heard.

Increasingly, outcomes were no longer just a question of what party leaders would tolerate. Throughout East Central Europe, civil society entered into the drama of political change as an anomic political actor. And, in the process,

Gorbachev himself became the unlikely political hero to a generation of young East Germans intent on having *glasnost* with or without *perestroika*.⁶

The Collapse from Within

Hungary was the first and least understood domino. Throughout 1988, reform communists in Budapest sought allies within Hungarian civil society. Indeed, they virtually created opposition groups in order to force their more conservative party comrades to move further and faster in the direction of economic reform and democratization.⁷ By February, 1989, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) officially declared that the monopoly of the communist party was not a guarantee of good government, and that the Hungarian political system needed an opposition party (Czelnai 1991). Perhaps because Western media had become used to Soviet tolerance (even under Brezhnev) for a higher level of reform in post-1968 Hungary than would have been permitted of other East European Communist regimes, the HSWP's announcement attracted little attention at that time. Now, in retrospect, it appears that Gorbachev played a more aggressive role in support of Hungarian and Polish reformers alike than was generally thought at the time (Asmus et al. 1989).

For the record, the fact that Moscow was willing to tolerate the notion of opposition parties in Hungary was the first real sign that the Brezhnev doctrine, which Gorbachev had rejected in principle during his 1988 visit to Yugoslavia, was about to be discarded in fact. This meant that "real socialism," as defined in Moscow for all those years, no longer existed, or at least wasn't important enough to defend militarily. This change in Soviet national security policy amounted to de-linkage of the pace and nature of reform in Eastern Europe from the agonizing reappraisal set off within the Soviet Union itself by *perestroika* and *glasnost*. In short, Gorbachev's "new political thinking" at minimum made possible, and, in the Hungarian case, was one precipitant of all that followed.

And the People Came

Throughout Spring and Summer, 1989, reform from above became revolution from below. In May, the Hungarian border with Austria was opened. Soldiers ordered to take down the barbed wire were joined by ordinary citizens with wire-cutters. When President George Bush came to Hungary in July, he was given a piece of that barbed wire on a plaque that read:

This piece of barbed wire was part of the Iron Curtain along the Austrian-Hungarian border. It represented palpably the division of the European continent into two halves. Its dismantling was made possible by the will of the Hungarian people in recognition of peaceful coexistence and mutual interdependence.

It is believed that the artificial physical and spiritual walls still existing in the world some day will collapse (*New York Times* 13 July 1989).

Contradictions on the Road to Democracy

The opening of the Hungarian border made escape possible for vacationing East Germans fed up with their government's refusal to join the reform bandwagon. Young couples, skilled and unskilled workers, whole families voted with their feet in what by Summer's end had become a mass exodus.

This popular rejectionism in East Germany interacted with a Polish electoral move "to just say *no*" in Poland when political elites there tried to structure the 1989 elections so as to re-open the political process to Solidarity without losing control.⁸ The electoral rules were rigged to achieve an outcome in which Solidarity would become a minor player and the Polish United Workers' Party would continue in its formal, if increasingly symbolic "leading role." It was a compromise agreement that "re-legalized Solidarity in exchange for partially-free elections" (Batt 1991, 381). The Polish Communists, who agreed to these rules, had not counted on the people using the rules against them. Indeed, Solidarity as well was unprepared for the results.

When the Polish voters went to the polls in June, they not only voted for Solidarity candidates, they voted against communist candidates, whether or not anyone was running in opposition. They just scratched out names. These voters wanted to send a message. They were mad, and they wanted communist politicians to know that they were mad.

Such popular, spontaneous mass political behavior was an essential ingredient in the largely peaceful revolutions that brought about the collapse of communist political systems in East Central Europe. Perhaps ironically, the transition to democracy in post-communist Europe is the more difficult because the revolutions of 1989-1990 were peoples' revolutions. Political victory came too fast, too easily, and, except in a few cases, without recognizable participation of political elites.

This was a remarkable example of people power -- a takeover from below, during which politicians ran desperately to get in front of the crowd. There were few politicians with a legitimizing history of dissent and charismatic authority. Obviously, Lech Walesa had such legitimacy, dating from his opposition activity beginning in the 1970s. In Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel was legitimized by the role he played in 1968, and by imprisonment thereafter. The transitional President of Hungary, Arpad Goncz, was another writer who was imprisoned and who in his youth had been attached to Imre Nagy's star-crossed government.

For the most part, however, the changes in East-Central Europe did not occur because of actions by politicians in positions of leadership. They occurred because the people rushed forward. As an East German border guard near the Brandenburg Gate on the night of November 9-10 responded when television reporters asked who had given the order to open the Berlin Wall, "The order didn't come. The people came" (Haftendorn 1991, 7). Thus, the politicians now trying to make the "great leap" into multiparty democracies for the most part are not legitimized by having led the revolutions against hegemonic communist political systems (*contradiction number one*).

Post-Communist Legacies

Eastern Europe is not really a geographic or historical region. Rather, Eastern Europe was ideological shorthand used to refer to those countries (or parts thereof) in Central Europe and the Balkans where communist parties and governments rode to power on the coattails of the Soviet Red Army, or, as in Yugoslavia and Albania, in the train of indigenous wars of national liberation.

These eight states ranged in size from Albania, with a population of three million, to Poland with almost 40 million people. They represented vastly different levels of economic development, had different historical experiences, spoke different languages, practiced different religions. The hallmark of this area was always diversity. It still is.

However, although the appearance of unity required by the presumed organic relationship between “real socialism” in the Soviet Union and East European communist regimes is no longer an obstacle to indigenous reform, the shared experience of four decades as communist political systems has created common problems for building democracy and creating market economies. In that sense, political socialization and economic expectations of communist systems become *contradictions two and three* in the transition to democracy in East Central Europe.

This is a problem born of the political restrictions that flowed from “the leading role” of the hegemonic communist party. Opposition parties did not have a chance to gain viable, legitimate political experience in the day-to-day politics of governing. To whatever extent they existed, they were underground and in a confrontational mode. Non-communist politicians lack experience at bargaining, compromising, cutting deals, speaking at fewer than ten decibels when negotiating with one another. They don’t have experience in party-building. They don’t have experience in political institutionalization -- in the art of agreement to and adherence to conventions and attitudes that build mutual trust, i.e., community. The existing cadre who have such experience are communists-recently-turned-democrats, fairly or unfairly burdened with massive credibility problems.

Equally problematic is that the first round of elections suggests that neither opposition nor born-again communist politicians began with much understanding of the relationship between electoral laws and democratic outcomes (Roskin 1991, 148; Furtak 1990). Reportedly, President Walesa, among others, regards the fractured *Sejm* that convened following Poland’s October, 1991 elections as a “direct result of faulty electoral law” (McQuaid 1991, 19). Building electoral democracy is a trial-and-error process, as our own early electoral experiences (e.g., the Electoral College tie of 1800 and the “corrupt bargain” of 1824) attest.

Meanwhile, at the mass level, partly because communist political systems have tended to create cults of personality, there is a deep suspicion of leadership -- any leadership. Political parties have a bad name. Politicians are not seen as selfless servants of the people as much as opportunists on the make for power and

privilege. There is fear that such politicians will lead in the wrong direction, while the people pay the bills.

In short, East Central European politicians on the road to democracy and the market are confronted with suddenly politicized constituencies with high expectations and low levels of trust. In these circumstances, there is reason to think twice about Western advice to make a 'great leap' into the market. Ellen Comisso (1991, 27) may be correct that *Thatcherist* strategies would require popular demobilization; however, that prospect simply is not likely in the train of recent events. Meanwhile, the construction crew for building democracy is composed of union workers whose productivity is hampered by behavior patterns resulting from the disincentives and bureaucratic restrictions of command economies yet to be overcome.

Democratic Transitions

The prospects for building democratic societies on the ruins of communist political systems and economies depend upon country-specific outcomes of the interaction of three primary searches that dominate the relationship of masses, who rejected the known evils of communism for the unknown risks of revolutionary change, to post-communist politicians who must chart the equally unknown course from hegemonic one-party systems and command economies to multiparty democracies and the market.

The Search for Identity

In the name of class unity, communist political systems deprived the peoples of East Central Europe of their historic national identities and superimposed an ideological, class-defined identity on societies that didn't like or want that identity. But there is not a ready-made 21st century identity on the shelf. That is the future. The identities that these peoples are most familiar with -- the ones that they have cherished and clung to in the privacy of their families (or in their "bathrooms," in Havel's phrase) -- are identities from the past. So, there is a strong desire to look backward, and to try to bring the past into the future as a way of re-establishing and re-asserting national identity. This is a form of political psychosis that simply has to be worked through in the same way that a trauma patient must go through a period of readjustment to some kind of reality.

Meanwhile, the temptation for politicians to play to nationalist fervor is an ever-present temptation and nightmare. The seductive danger is that East Central Europe is an incredibly mixed area (see Table 1). Historically, "national identity" typically has been defined at least partly against outsiders. In East Central Europe, those outsiders may reside within one's own country, i.e., may be someone who is not a part of your nation as you perceive it, but is within the same juridical body. Or, the homeland of one's nationality may be another nation-state, or may be a

Table 1. Post-Communist Europe Ethnic Composition*

Albania:	<i>3.1 million</i>	Bulgaria:	<i>8.9 million</i>	Czechoslovakia:	<i>15.6 million</i>
	97% Albanians		85% Bulgars		63% Czechs
	3% Greeks, Vlachs, Bulgars, Serbs, Gypsies		8.5% Turks		31.6% Slovaks
			2.5% Macedonians		3.8% Hungarians
			2.5% Gypsies		1.6% Poles, Germans, Ruthenians
East Germany: (former GDR)	<i>16.5 million</i>	Hungary:	<i>10.5 million</i>	Poland:	<i>38.1 million</i>
	99% Germans		96% Hungarians		98% Poles
			4% Germans, Slovaks, Croats, Serbs, Romanians and Ruthenians		
Romania:	<i>23.1 million</i>	Yugoslavia:	<i>23.5 million</i>		
	88% Romanians		36.2% Serbs	5.5%	Macedonians
	7.8% Hungarians		19.6% Croats	3.0%	Yugoslavs
	4.2% Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Czechs, Slovaks		9.7% Muslims	2.3%	Montenegrins
			8.9% Albanians	1.6%	Hungarians
			7.2% Slovenes		

*Sources: George Thomas Kurian, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Second World* (Washington: Facts on File, 1991); *Tanjug* 27 February 1992.

pocket-region thereof. Thus, one thing that all of these newly-minted political leaders cannot ignore is the need for a public policy regarding the well-being of their brothers who are located across a republic border, as in the former Yugoslavia, or perhaps in a neighboring country, such as the Hungarians in Romania and Vojvodina. Yet, they also must beware lest somebody else, concerned about a minority nationality within their own jurisdiction, should try to interfere in their own internal affairs.

The Search for Legitimacy

East Central Europeans involved in the revolutionary dramas of 1989 and 1990 won against parties and governments that had lost confidence, as well as credibility. These were heady, euphoric times. People were not ready for economic realism -- to hear about the down side of economic reform, or to hear from the politicians embarking on the road to democracy via market economies that things must get substantially worse before they get better.

As in Yugoslavia, where by 1988 the inability to perform economically led to increasingly sectarian ethnic politics and popular demagoguery, the popular mood reinforced the temptation of politicians in search of legitimacy to posture as men not of the *people*, but of the *nation*, who would reassert the nation as such and/or defend the rights of its members living across the border.

Hence, in East Central Europe the road to democracy is strewn with ethnic landmines and territorial irredenta. Here, posturing as champion of the nation -- as have Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic and his Croatian counterpart, Franjo Tudjman -- is a path to power that can become a downhill slide into civil war, and economic as well as human disaster. Political leaders must find ways to deal with the problems of Serbs in Croatia, Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, Albanians in Macedonia and Montenegro, Macedonians and Turks in Bulgaria, Hungarians in Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia, and Slavic minorities in Hungary. They must develop acceptable institutional guarantees for minorities within, and platforms for negotiating with their neighbors on the status of national minorities without.

The tragedy of Yugoslavia is a stark reminder of the cost of military solutions. Reportedly, Milosevic abandoned any vision of Yugoslavia and launched what Croats and many Western media view as a Serbian land grab in response to the massive March 9, 1991 protest of his authoritarian political style and economic mismanagement (*Politika* 16-22 March 1991). The Serbian opposition movements and parties have not offered much in the way of alternatives. Although challengers to Milosevic attempted to capitalize politically on the July, 1991 Serbian mothers' march on parliament, they neither rejected flatly his vision of "Greater Serbia," nor became voices for reason on the issue of the Serbian minority in Croatia.

Perhaps not surprisingly, protection of the democratic rights and human

rights of their “martyred brothers” in the Kosovo is also high on the agenda of the democratic party emerging in Albania. Hence, the likelihood is that Albanian democrats, like Serbian opponents of Milosevic, will think of democracy as national self-determination, rather than as the rights of individuals. Moreover, with or without the current communist government in Tirana, if the Yugoslav civil war spreads to Kosovo, it could easily cross the border into Albania. It already is flooding Hungary with refugees whose minimal needs further strain the struggling Hungarian economy.

Thus, *contradiction number four* is that politicians unable to deliver “bread” in the form of economic opportunity may prefer the circus of national/ethnic confrontation to political dialogue. The result does not facilitate the creation of democratic institutions and norms, such as decision rules and trust in the process and in each other (community).

In these circumstances, prospects for democracy hinge to a large extent on the interaction of the search for identity by politicians, populations, and civil societies alike. In turn, the popular search for identity is manipulated by those same politicians as they pursue their own search for legitimacy, thereby exacerbating aggressive nationalisms. The resulting ethnic tensions and violence are at the heart of a radically changed search for security.

The Search for Security

Security in East Central Europe is no longer a function of the cold war standoff between superpowers, or fear of intervention by the Red Army or “allied socialist” soldiers against “counterrevolution” as defined in Moscow (Dawisha 1990; Remington 1990).⁹ These days, security is best understood in two quite different ways. In one sense, the search for security continues to be the more traditional meaning, i.e. the search for physical security. How to feel safe from other ethnic groups with historic grievances and territorial irredenta within artificially-constructed federal states assembled after World Wars I and II? How to feel safe from increasingly nationalistic neighbors?

These are major security problems that make any sort of substantial peace dividend unlikely for the peoples and politicians of post-communist Europe. Given the high level of ethnic/national conflict and territorial irredentism, armies will change their mission, not necessarily become smaller. Warsaw Pact alliance obligations have been replaced by internal security obligations flowing from nationality policies, or from what in Yugoslavia appeared to be a creeping *coup*, as the increasingly Serbian-dominated federal army waged war on Croatia without orders from the divided Collective Presidency or the virtually-nonexistent federal government.¹⁰ Note that Prime Minister Markovic finally resigned because he was unwilling to send a budget to the largely emasculated parliament that allotted 81 percent of government revenues to the war against Croatia (*New York Times* 21 December 1991).

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Then there is the search for economic security. Students, workers, housewives, and citizens who demonstrated to get rid of their former communist parties and governments did so in large part because communist politicians had failed to deliver on economic promises. This raises a very delicate point for which the market is not a quick fix.

There is a “no pain, no gain” warning on the prescriptions of democracy-through-market economy issued by the IMF, the World Bank and economists such as Harvard’s Jeffrey Sachs. The economic condition of those ordinary people who made the revolutions of 1989-1990 must get worse before it gets better, and there is no firm limit on how much worse or how long it will last -- or on how much of either the people will take.

The Polish “cold turkey” road to capitalism comes at a high price.¹¹ Workers have to be willing to work harder for less money. Competition means loss of job security. Restitution of property means loss of housing security. If your apartment is in a building that goes back to its former owner you may have to move or pay rent many times higher than before. Overcoming shortages means rapidly rising prices and spiralling inflation.

Very few Americans or West Europeans would put up with the conditions that IMF austerity programs recommend as necessary and proper for people living in post-communist East Central Europe. The violent neo-Nazi backlash against migrant workers and refugees in the united Germany testifies to the danger of demanding too much sacrifice even in much wealthier societies.

This does not mean that creating stable democracies in East Central Europe is impossible. It does mean that doing so is a risky, largely thankless task for those politicians who tell it like it is. Moreover, that task will require much more patience, money and commitment from the West than has been forthcoming from EC headquarters in Brussels or the White House.

The political fortunes of former Solidarity Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki may be the handwriting on the wall for politicians in Warsaw and Washington alike. Mazowiecki was a good prime minister running on an economic reform platform worked out in conjunction with the IMF. He didn’t even finish as a runner-up in the November 25, 1990 Polish presidential election. Rather, the hero of Solidarity, Lech Walesa, received his main opposition from the virtually unknown, rags-to-riches Polish-Canadian millionaire, Stanislaw Tyminski. Tyminski lacked name recognition, but he represented an escapist dream to ordinary Polish voters unwilling to accept the downhill slide of their standard of living in the name of national economic recovery.

Poland’s passion for democracy appears to have cooled still more by the October, 1991 parliamentary elections. According to MP Krzysztof Kozlowski, a member of parliament seeking reelection:

A man who loses his job also loses his faith, especially in candidates for Parliament . . . People have stopped believing in democratic mechanisms. This

campaign is weak because people do not believe it is going to result in anything good for them. People are waiting for a miracle worker, a strong man (*New York Times* 28 October 1991).

There was no miracle, and only 42.9 percent of the Polish electorate bothered to vote; hardly a mandate. Those who went to the polls voted 12.3 percent for Mazowiecki's Democratic Union to 12.0 percent for the reformed Communists running under the umbrella of the Democratic Left Alliance, which translated into 62 and 60 seats in the Polish parliament, respectively. Catholic Action followed with 49 seats, the Confederation for an Independent Poland received 46, the Center Citizens' Alliance, 44. The communist Polish Peasant Party won 48 seats, while the pro-solidarity Peasant Alliance won 28, the Liberal Democratic Congress (solidarity) won 37, and Solidarity Trade Unions won 27. The Polish Beer-Lovers' Party weighed in with 16 seats. Eight other parties captured seats ranging from 2 to 7; eleven parties held one seat each (Reuter 31 October 1991; McQuaid 1991, 16). Reportedly, the "balance of power" in this fragmented legislature went to parties that promised some economic relief from the radical economic reforms (McQuaid 1991, 16). In short, Poland -- the showcase that Jeffrey Sachs holds up as in the forefront of East Central European reform economies -- is much more shaky than the Western financial advisers pushing for freer prices and more rapid privatization appear to realize. After the election, feuding between Walesa and his reluctantly appointed Prime Minister, Jan Olszewski, led to a two-month government crisis during which there was talk of parliamentary paralysis and of presidential rule. Olszewski required a vote of confidence from the parliament before he could appoint a cabinet, which is now thought "likely to loosen [Walesa's] tough economic austerity program" (*New York Times* 24 December 1991).

Thus, at the level of mass politics throughout post-communist East Central Europe, the people who are expected to pay the bill for democracy are less and less willing to do so. And, if pressed to the wall, the consequences could be violent, irrational, dysfunctional behavior that threatens not only each other and their East Central European neighbors, but EC integration agendas and European security as well. As Bulgarian President Zhelyu Zhelev's November 3, 1991 TV address warned, "nationalistic and populist propaganda" escalated ethnic tensions during the campaign for local and national elections prior to Bulgaria's October 13th elections.

Policy Implications

Those Western politicians who hail the collapse of communism as the victory of Western political/economic models have a responsibility. The West did not "win" the Cold War. But we can contribute to the consolidation of the victory of the ideals of democracy and the market, or we can substantially undermine it,

for the prospects for democracy in East Central Europe are mortgaged to Western bankers and governments (Table 2) whose unrealistic expectations of the pace of conversion to the market may well be part of the problem rather than the solution.

Table 2. East European Gross Hard Currency Debt to the West: 1980-1990
(In Billions of U.S. Dollars)

	1980	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Bulgaria	3.5	2.4	2.2	3.7	4.9	6.1	7.1	10.0	10.3
Czechoslovakia ^a	4.9	4.0	3.6	3.8	4.5	5.8	6.1	7.8	7.6
East Germany	14.1	13.1	12.4	14.0	17.0	20.4	19.5	21.2	---
Hungary	9.1	8.2	8.8	11.8	15.1	17.7	18.0	20.7	21.0
Poland ^b	25.0	26.4	26.8	29.3	33.5	39.2	38.5	39.7	49.0
Romania ^c	9.4	8.8	7.1	6.6	6.4	5.1	2.2	.4	3.5
Yugoslavia ^d	17.4	---	18.8	19.2	18.7	18.2	2.1	16.0	16.5

Source: *CIA Handbook of Economic Statistics*, (Washington, DC: September 1990), 48.

^aCzechoslovakia's debt had grown to \$8.38 billion by January, 1991.

^bBy 1991 the Polish debt was estimated at \$48.5 billion. In March 1991, Western governments agreed to forgive 50% of \$33 billion in governmental debt.

^cIn the Spring of 1989, Romania claimed to have eliminated its hard currency debt.

^dFor 1987-1990, Yugoslav figures are from *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs* (Hoover Institution Press, 1987-1990). Yugoslavia's 1990 debt, estimated at \$16.5 billion, is a newspaper estimate not based on end of year data.

East Central European societies have high levels of education, skilled labor that with proper incentives can be productive, and products that in fact could compete if they were given access to markets and marketing assistance. Even members of Bulgaria's Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), who with financial and technical assistance from our National Endowment for Democracy defeated the former Bulgarian Communist Party (PSP) in the October, 1991 parliamentary elections, emphasize that economic investment is more important for consolidating Bulgarian democracy than such political assistance (National Public Radio 12 October 1991).

Western Europe is considered an economic miracle. However, that miracle was the product of major American investment under the Marshall Plan. A lot of money -- \$15-17 billion at that time (equivalent to perhaps \$100 billion today)¹² -- flowed from the U.S. into Western Europe under that plan. In contrast, about the same amount of money flowed out of Eastern Europe into the Soviet Union to pay for reconstruction of Soviet war damage. Thus, when we say that East Central European economies are basket cases compared to those of Western Europe, that judgement reflects what has been a very uneven playing field since the start of the postwar era.

One possible approach to this problem would be to expand the Helsinki process under "Basket II" in order to put together a political/economic develop-

ment plan to bring the economic level of post-communist East Central Europe up sufficiently to prevent the danger that a permanent poverty curtain might replace the ideological *Iron Curtain* that Winston Churchill so eloquently warned of in 1946.

The twenty-four industrial nations of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, which already is taking the lead in assisting the economic recovery of East Central Europe, undoubtedly would spearhead such a plan. However, strong, explicit support from Washington is important. The Bush administration's vision of a New World Order was translated into the *Desert Shield/Storm* coalition in a matter of weeks. Similar commitment to coalition-building to keep East Central Europe on the road to democracy and the market would seem reasonable, especially if the major part of the needed funds came from those countries in the neighborhood whose own prosperity was a direct result of the Marshall Plan.

In 1992, any such economic recovery plan inevitably would have to include Soviet successor states in the emerging Commonwealth of Independent States. Indeed, even before the December, 1991 Russian revolution, there was talk of a Marshall Plan or of debt forgiveness to revive the struggling Soviet economy (*New York Times* 15 October 1981) and of a worldwide effort to help Soviet citizens to survive the Winter. However, short of inclusion in a comprehensive plan for the economic recovery of all East Central Europe, such assistance at best would be a bandaid.

Moreover, there is danger that, as all eyes turn toward the political drama of Soviet disintegration, the need to consolidate stable democracies in East Central Europe will be put aside until the window of opportunity slams shut. Those who forget the history of the cauldron of nationalism in this part of Europe do so at the peril of us all. World War I started in Sarajevo, Munich dismembered Czechoslovakia, and Great Britain and France were drawn into World War II via Poland, where current fears of being squeezed between Germany and Ukraine have led some Poles to feel nostalgia for the "feeling of security" they knew under martial law.¹³

Another, less controversial option might be a moratorium on debt-servicing. A three-to-five year moratorium would allow emerging democratic politicians in post-communist East Central Europe and Soviet successor states to legitimize themselves by engaging in credit-claiming activity of the sort that Fiorina (1977) and Mayhew (1974) say typifies American congressional behavior. In light of the 1991 Polish election results, it is clear that stabilizing Polish currency and forgiving a portion of Poland's debt was a good start that did not go far enough to earn esteem for democratic politicians.

From a comparative perspective, it is helpful to consider the implications for post-communist economies of the ongoing debate about tax cuts versus lowering interest rates to jump-start the U.S. economy. This brings us to *contradiction number five*: if consumers do not have money to buy, there is no domestic market,

no matter how efficiently workers work and managers manage. It is generally assumed that functioning democracies require market economies and a middle class. As it stands, there is increasing evidence that the middle class in East Central Europe may be the victim of IMF prescriptions for achieving post-communist market economies. Moreover, as Kowalik (1991, 45) points out, recession "generates defensive strategies rather than entrepreneurship" -- the tendency is to hunker down and defend one's standard of living, rather than take financial risks. This is hardly the best time, then, to increase privatization, which many East Central Europeans already see as "stealing the national wealth" (Kowalik 1991, 48), and thus could undermine an essential component of reform.

To sum up, the above analysis essentially elaborates the working hypothesis that contradictions between political aspirations and economic imperatives in East Central Europe may reroute the democratic transition process away from multiparty democracy and toward authoritarian solutions, military rule, or civil war instead. These same contradictions are also present in Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. How many populist politicians in the wings will fan nationalist passions like those that led to the waste of lives and economic devastation in the former Yugoslavia, where human rights, a promising economic reform, and democracy in Serbia and Croatia alike have joined the human casualties of war?

It is not a trade-off between American homelessness and joblessness and post-communist recovery. Assisting post-communist democracies and market economies is an insurance policy; an investment in our own security and economy. If Americans do not want the arms industry to become the industry of preference in post-communist economies, we have to help them convert to consumer industries with competitive products. For those who worry about conventional weapons, consider the prospect of a nuclear yard-sale to raise foreign currency in the former Soviet Union.

This is not to say that outsiders have the answers or can eliminate the pain and insecurity of political transformation. Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians, Rumanians, Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Slovenes, Croats, and Macedonians are the keys to their own futures. As are the Serbs, who, when the death and destruction stop, will have to be brought back into Europe if the affliction of ethnic violence is not to be a perpetual security problem for their neighbors.¹⁴

But East Central Europe and Soviet successor states need the same kind of assistance that produced a prosperous Western Europe that, in turn, has substantially benefitted the American economy. If Americans want shares in the common European home that may be the outcome of EC integration in 1992, post-communist East Central Europe is the place to do business (Fartounov 1991). As for the former Soviet Union, its territories already are seen as "capitalism's new frontier" by pioneering entrepreneurs (*New York Times* 27 December 1991). If such American investment takes place without U.S. participation in a genuine economic recovery program, there may be real danger of a backlash against perceived "colonialism."

Notwithstanding the deficit, 1992 is the year of decision. The United States can move forward with Europe, or be left behind. Politicians who worry that they can not afford to finance post-communist democracy in an election year are correct that such spending must be balanced by commitment to problem-solving at home. However, political leadership in the White House and Congress alike must calculate that cost against the price of national security, should the transition to democracies stall in a Europe where the threat is not communism, but chaos.

NOTES

¹For example, in Romania the same miners who had beaten demonstrators protesting President Ion Iliescu's lack of democratic credentials (after he had won election) refused to make the sacrifices required for transition to a market economy, and rioted in Bucharest, demanding the resignation of the President and of reform-minded Prime Minister Petre Roman. Iliescu managed to buy time with promises; the Prime Minister resigned. On French television, Roman denounced what he called "a Communist *coup*," and accused the miners of demanding "the dissolution of all democratic institutions in this country" (*New York Times* 27 September 1991).

²This analysis starts with the assumption that Linz is right when he concludes that these questions "should be at the core of interest of students of transitions" (1990, 153).

³Revised from Remington (1991).

⁴By 1987, Marxism-Leninism Institute Director Georgi L. Smirnov let it be understood in Moscow that the events of 1968 were being re-examined (*New York Times* 5 November 1987). Two years later, at the December, 1989 Warsaw Pact meeting in Moscow, the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia was declared "illegal."

⁵This was stated during the Soviet President's 1988 visit to Yugoslavia (*Pravda* 18 March 1988; *New York Times* 19 March 1988). However, doubts continued in East and West alike until Gorbachev spoke to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, following the Polish elections of June, 1989 (*The Economist* 15 July 1989, 53).

⁶See the *New York Times*' coverage of demonstrations during Gorbachev's trip to the GDR ostensibly to celebrate the 40th anniversary of its revolution, October 7-9, 1989.

⁷See Imre Pozgay's speech, reprinted in *Frankfurter Rundschau* 13 January 1989.

⁸For the complicated story of that miscalculation by Jaruzelski, backed by Gorbachev and opposed to some extent by the Polish United Workers' Party, see Gati (1990, 161ff).

⁹The "Brezhnev Doctrine" put forward to justify the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 asserted Moscow's right to intervene within the Socialist Commonwealth, militarily, if necessary, to save socialism or if events in one socialist country threatened socialism in the neighborhood. It was tantamount to asserting 'limited sovereignty' within the Socialist Commonwealth, often referred to by participants as the "family of socialist nations."

¹⁰The ineluctability of these events is best documented by the statement of Prime Minister Ante Markovic in *Vreme* (Belgrade) 23 September 1991. On the split in the presidency, see *New York Times* (5 October 1991).

¹¹See "A Survey of Business in Eastern Europe," *The Economist* 21-27 September 1991, 64ff. Valter Komarek (1992), former Deputy Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia and now Director of the Forecasting Institute of the Academy of Sciences in Prague, bluntly

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asserts that crash capitalism is failing in Czechoslovakia and Poland, raising the question of the consequences of IMF advice for Soviet successor states.

¹²According to representatives of the 24 industrialized nations in the OECD, an estimated \$45 billion has been pledged to post-communist East Central Europe, of which a little more than 20 percent actually has been disbursed (*New York Times* 22 December 1991).

¹³According to reports of OBOD, the official Polish polling agency, 53 percent of Poles surveyed on the 10th anniversary of martial law said that it was "justified" (*New York Times* 22 December 1991).

¹⁴The Hungarian economy already is staggering under an estimated 40,000 refugees, and there have been military actions across the border. President Alija Izetbegovic has appealed to Turkey for assistance if the civil war comes to the multiethnic territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bulgaria has recognized Macedonia and may not stand aside if the war spreads in that direction. Much hangs on the fragile ceasefire agreement that UN Special Envoy Cyrus Vance has negotiated, and on whether or not the 13,000 UN peacekeeping forces that the Security Council has agreed to send (*New York Times* 14 February 1992) can secure the disputed Croatian border territories sufficiently to prevent other former Yugoslav republics from being drawn into the vortex of violence.

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