

Democratic and Capitalist Transitions in Eastern Europe

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Volume 55

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Democratic and Capitalist Transitions in Eastern Europe

Lessons for the Social Sciences

edited by

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SPRINGER-SCIENCE+BUSINESS MEDIA, B.V.

A C.I.P. Catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 978-94-010-5813-1

ISBN 978-94-011-4162-8 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-94-011-4162-8

Printed on acid-free paper

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Originally published by Kluwer Academic Publishers in 2000

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2000

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is devoted to the ongoing transitions or transformations in Eastern Europe since the political upheavals of 1989. One of the major historical specificities of these transformations resides in the simultaneous processes of political transition to what one hopes will be democracy, and of economic transition towards, in principle, market economy. For social sciences, with hindsight, this simultaneity was a source of a considerable number of obstacles, confusions and errors. Here lies one of the central issues of this volume as well as a main aspect of its originality: if the social sciences are to meet the challenge of understanding East European transitions, with particular regard to the simultaneity of economic and political transitions, it is necessary to re-examine the methodological principles and the models of explanation of the main approaches, or "paradigms", competing within this field of research, most notably the "strategic" approach of classical transitology, and the path dependence approach, with its more avant-garde flavor. The present volume aims at fulfilling a twofold objective: on the one hand to conduct an in-depth critical appraisal of these approaches, and on the other to provide the reader with a number of new substantial insights on East European transformations; in particular on the questions of what "democratic consolidations" actually consist of, as well as the political economy, in a strict sense, of these transitions, focusing on the precise characterization of the market economies, or capitalisms, which have emerged from these processes. Thus, both intellectual ambition, and the analyses and discussions presented, exceed widely the empirical fields of East European transformations and of transitology; as a result, the book should usefully contribute to destabilize routine ways of thinking of scholars and students far beyond the circles of specialists of these questions.

This publication results from an exciting experience, rare enough in the social sciences to be worth mentioning, of an open debate, without complacency, constantly fair and attentive to opposed arguments, and above all particularly fruitful, between scholars coming from different disciplines, originating from a variety of countries, and representing different research traditions or "paradigms". It is the outcome, or at least one of the outcomes, of a close collaboration endeavour during several years, from 1994 to 1998, within the scope of the Scientific Network of the European Science Foundation on "Social Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe", an undertaking which I had the burden, and the pleasure, of co-chairing (with Wladyslaw Adamski, of the Polish Academy of Sciences). The work accomplished within the Network is impressive: more than 90 papers were presented and discussed during five meetings attended by many of the best scholars in research fields interested in East European "transitions", with a strong implication of scholars from East Europe (authors of nearly 40 papers); a number of papers have already been published in several journals. As none of this would have been possible without its support, the editor of the present book thanks the European

Science Foundation, and above all, faithful to his aversion to reify collective beings, extends special thanks to Dr. John Smith, who supported the project with rigor and unflinching warmth, as well as his assistants who took on the administrative tasks, in particular Geneviève Schauinger. Of course, the success of the enterprise also owes a great deal to the members of the Coordination Committee of the Network: I dare hope that a collective expression of my gratitude will not seem in any way to diminish my indebtedness to each of them.

The present volume is more directly the result of the fifth and last meeting of the Network held in Paris in May 1998 (nine papers were taken for publication in this volume; two other chapters originate in the meeting held in Budapest in December 1999, whose local organizer was Bela Greskovits). Nearly all of the authors of the chapters accepted to go "back to the drawing board"; it is therefore a collection of considerably reworked essays that is published here. I am grateful to all of the contributors for their commitment, and for having put up with the whims of the editor. Concerning the intellectual conception of this volume, I benefited throughout the preparation of the book from the advice, the criticisms and insightful comments of several remarkable scholars, who I have grown to consider as friends, especially Bela Greskovits, John Higley and Herman Van der Wusten. On several thorny issues, the advice of Guy Hermet was particularly invaluable.

The publication of this volume would have been impossible without the incredibly patient and skilful help of Caroline Baudinière, and without the translations realized generously and with competence by Vinca Vumans. Many other persons need to be mentioned for their aid throughout, among others, for his careful assistance in correcting, Jay Rowell, and for several editing tasks, Sarah Royai and Karima Ghembaza, as well as the members of my research institute at the University Paris X-Nanterre, the Laboratoire d'Analyse des Systèmes Politiques, who never failed to express their constant encouragements. Finally, at Kluwer, Petra van Steenbergem followed the different stages of this publication with utmost professionalism and kindness, but also with benevolent indulgence. I owe all of them the warmest of thanks.

Michel Dobry

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHEN TRANSITOLOGY MEETS SIMULTANEOUS TRANSITIONS

MICHEL DOBRY

This book deals with the transformations or "transitions" that countries of Central and Eastern Europe have undergone since the political upheavals and breakdowns of 1989. To explore that abundant set of varied and complex processes it has adopted a particular point of view consisting in questioning also the way in which social sciences have approached these transformations, have interpreted them and how, in return, they have felt their impact and had to modify their questions and their modes of explanation.

Undoubtedly, over the past few years, much has been written and said about the challenges these events constituted for their various actors; to many authors, these challenges, frequently taking the form of complex practical "dilemmas", appeared to grow bigger and multiply with each passing day. How can existing systems be transformed without provoking new and colossal conflicts, both destabilizing and disruptive in nature? How can representative democracies be established, most often in the absence of democratic traditions or cultures, or even of social structure favorable or conducive to democratic politics? How should industry, agriculture, and the public sectors, which are, on the whole, technologically backward and organizationally obsolete, be modernized while, at the same time, fulfilling the material expectations produced by the perspective of changing to a market economy? How should these high expectations - and their subsequent disappointments - be handled in the face of the orientations, the values or simply the interests and habits produced by the *anciens régimes*? Or, on a different level, how can the "desire" to identify with the rest of Europe - and the "desire" to become a part of Europe - be asserted, while segments of western society repeatedly expresses their reticence, resistance, or out-right rejection of overly intimate connections with Central and Eastern Europe, etc.? These are but a few illustrations of the "dilemmas" facing the actors, at least as they are presented by those scholars who were perhaps the least reticent to attribute to all of the social actors, without any further ceremony, perceptions or problems that were sometimes perhaps their own.

At first glance, what happened in Central and Eastern Europe appeared as well to constitute a number of truly exciting challenges for social sciences, a rare opportunity to test, evaluate, perfect or modify the "paradigms" through which in our different research fields we have been interpreting not only the societies in which these changes took place, but also the common features of all "modern" social and political systems, and particularly those features that are thought to constitute

precisely the "modernity" of these systems. Owing to opportunities for doing well structured and controllable observations, these processes soon appeared to offer a chance to approach "quasi experimental" conditions, rarely accessible to specialists of social sciences. Actually, the awaited impact, maybe naïvely hoped for, of the transitions in Central and Eastern Europe on the social sciences, has no doubt not lived up to the high expectations, at least for the time being (perhaps one cannot reasonably anticipate such an automatic connection between this type of event and the logic of knowledge production).

Nevertheless, this observation applies only to a very global viewpoint; concerning the research fields of what a number of specialists today call "transitology" - understood here in a wide sense - the impact is far from being negligible. This is not at all surprising, and is related to the salient historical particularities of the transformations in Central and Eastern Europe. First of all, contrary to transitions occurred during previous waves of democratization, particularly in Southern Europe and Latin America, the recent transformations have not been limited to simple political breakthroughs, but have heavily affected all social relations, all differentiated social spheres, sectors or fields of the societies involved; in short, their overall "architecture". In that sense, for social scientists with a propensity for classification games, it may be said that these were authentic "social revolutions". More particularly, these processes were faced with what, in debates about transitology, soon received the uncertain label - as they imply heavy teleological and/or developmental presuppositions - the "dilemma of simultaneity"²: political and economic transition was forced upon the actors of these processes, more or less simultaneously; these processes had an additional historical originality, even if not developed everywhere in the same ways, that of constituting *political passages to market economy*³; an unprecedented undertaking on that scale and at that pace - with the possible exception, albeit in appreciably smaller dimensions, and in the very different configuration of the world economy, of Japan in the previous century.

The scope of the debate

In this respect, the impact of the transformations in Central and Eastern Europe has taken on a first aspect: many sociologists and political scientists have been driven to make incursions into empirical fields that economists usually stake out as being within their exclusive domain of competence. All in all, these incursions proved full of promise, in the sense that they constituted one of the best means to understand for what reasons processes and results of the transformations of Central and East European economies did not match either the views of the promoters of the neo-liberal "shock therapy" programs or the perspectives of some of their adversaries who anticipated a total breakdown of these economies as a result of the radical and extremely rapid character of the announced or implemented reforms. However, it is only fair to remark that the fruitfulness of these incursions is largely due to affinities that sociologists and political scientists involved felt to the different approaches in economics which take into account institutions in the functioning of actual economic systems, and in particular in economies orientated by the market. In other words, it would be more accurate to speak

here of exchange, and borrowing in debates between these disciplines, all the more so, as we shall see a little further on, as the analysis of the Central and East European transformations has also contributed to introduce into political science and sociology theoretical systematizations first formulated in economics.

In addition to this opening up to the objects and theories of economics, the pseudo-"dilemma" of simultaneity produced, by a kind of feedback, another series of effects on transitology and the related research domains. Contrary to most expectations and predictions in the wake of the 1989 upheavals - affirmations that the "dilemmas", "problems" or "challenges" of the transitions in Central and Eastern Europe ought to have been dealt with and resolved one after the other in sequence, in the manner of the more or less idealized trajectories of Great Britain or Spain (trajectories significantly enough promoted, far beyond the circles of scholars, as a "model" of transition), and above all, contrary to the assumption that superposing a radical economic transformation upon a transition to democracy would make the whole edifice thoroughly unworkable, unstable or dangerous - it must be stated clearly out that the two processes, in their "simultaneity", are not necessarily incompatible. This is one of the main findings stressed upon in several chapters of this book. In some cases, such as Poland and Hungary, it seems that the two processes are at work together and even that their progress is to some extent interdependent; in this respect the Russian case represents apparently an interesting "negative" case, as the weakness of institutionalization of democracy, its uncertain capacity to channel political confrontations, can usefully be put into connection with the chaotic character of the capitalism that has established itself there (on this issue, see particularly the chapters of Lane and Bruszt). In examining the East European transitions we are enabled to verify something else, no less important for the analysis of political processes in their relations with economic "performances": social losses and dislocations linked to economic recessions and crises, and frustrations and dissatisfactions that they are often associated with, are neither automatically transformed into open revolts or protest mobilizations, nor do they necessarily produce the crisis or breakdown of the new, supposedly fragile, democratic institutions⁴; politics has, once more, its own social logic.

However, the impact of the East European transformations on transitology can above all be observed in the changing structure of the debates within it, i.e. the paradigmatic cleavages shaping the debate. It became banal to affirm that, for about fifteen years, the analysis of democratization processes had completely left behind determinist or "structural" perspectives, seeking instead to analyse transition processes in terms of calculations, rational choices or the know-how of political actors. This picture no longer reflects the present day debates in the research fields concerned with the Central and East European transitions. There seems to be within this space of studies, a polarization between two different approaches. The first consists in "importing" onto the empirical field of questions, analytical schemas and substantive hypotheses formulated in connection with processes taking place in areas - or in "contexts" - *a priori* very dissimilar, i.e. the transitions in Latin America and in Southern Europe. This approach is what we could call *classical transitology*, characterized precisely by the *strategic* orientation mentioned above, placing the

accent on the actors' choices in transition periods, their tactical dilemmas, their propensity or reluctance to compromise with other political actors or social forces. The second approach, that of "*path dependence*", took shape, on the contrary, by applying it to the analyses of Central and East European transitions, and was defined, at least in principle, in opposition to the teleological bias attributed to classical transitology. While the first approach insisted rather on actors' calculations and decisions in the short run, the "path dependence" approach focuses on the particular historical legacies of each society considered; more precisely, in its best known version, it tries to ascribe a determining causal force to different paths of extrication from communist systems (see Stark, 1992, or Stark and Bruszt, 1998). According to this approach, the transformations undergone by these societies, particularly - but not at all exclusively - in their economies, are first of all results of re-combinations and re-shaping of institutional and organizational resources inherited, in splintered and dispersed ways, from the *anciens régimes*. The paths taken and the outcomes they have led to, tend for that reason to be different for each of these societies. This fact prompts the scholar to accept the idea of multiple forms of capitalism, as well, though it is less developed in these analyses, the idea of multiples forms of democracy. It is hardly surprising that this approach appealed to many specialists of the cultural areas involved, who were less that enthralled, at least for some of them, with a sudden intrusion in their research domains of "non-specialists", who were in their view the scholars linked to classical transitology.

Did transitology fail?

On reading the first systematizations of "path dependence" approaches dealing with Central and East European transitions, as well as many other studies of that period, the failure of the classical transitology with regard to that particular empirical field is presented as blatant. This judgement needs to be considered with care. Let us start by discarding what could at first glance seem to represent the simplest problem: it would be unfair and no doubt absurd to reproach transitologists - were they alone in this case? - of not having foreseen, anticipated or announced the 1989 upheavals and their immediate results⁵. However, this response passes perhaps too quickly over a less visible and more relevant aspect of the criticism: why did so many scholars, particularly among transitologists, postulate so frequently the very opposite, the extreme solidity, or sometimes even the *invulnerability* of these systems, or in any case the very strong "improbability" of what actually took place? Are we absolutely sure that this kind of prediction has really nothing to do with the very "substance" of the conceptualizations, or at least some of them, of classical transitology?

More decisive for the question under scrutiny is the ambition of the research program of transitology, and this ambition is extremely ambiguous. Difficulties appear as soon as we ask ourselves how the student of transitology defines the "*enigma*" that has to be solved; this enigma will have strong chance to coincide, without much hesitation, concern, or *a fortiori* methodological doubt expressed, with the will to *explain the outcome* of the transition. And after all, what is more "natural"

than to attribute the outcome to the historical trajectory a society had followed until that point? Things get worse when, instead of being satisfied with a simple conceptualization or construction of the historical "intrigue", the "transitologist" gives in to the temptation to make either generalizations or theoretical edifices. Here lies the rather strange horizon of the undertaking⁶: if one wishes to construct a "theory of transitions", the easy and "natural" steps will consist in seeking a *sequence of stages or a historical trajectory* assumed to be typical of transition processes; that is to say a law of historical development leading to a final state, or, in other words, a *law of history*, and this is what a number of scholars have attempted to explore in various ways, and often without admitting it (for an exception, see O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). In all evidence, the quest has been to no avail.

Once again I am not sure that we can speak here of a "failure" of classical transitology, for, in order to do so, one would have to firmly believe that it is possible for the social sciences to identify such laws of history, which, in spite of the temptations that can be spotted in certain transitology works, would not be very wise (on the other hand, I believe, to paraphrase Paul Veyne (1971), that if the laws of history remain outside of our reach, we are sometimes quite able to identify the interplay of laws *in* history). Yet that leads us to raise the question about what, in the absence of this kind of ambition, could constitute the core research program in transitology, at which point one is obliged to admit that it is far from easy to identify, in that program, a plausible alternative "enigma" (indeed, a decisive element of the enigma mentioned has outlived: explaining the outcome).

Certainly it is not only the vagueness of the notion of "transition" which comes into play, although this cannot be ignored: this is largely due to the fact that we are primarily confronted with, like it or not, a *concept having originated in practice* (particularly in political practice), a concept forged for other purposes, than that of knowledge. The intrinsically teleological character of the idea of "transition to democracy" is tightly linked to this (it is surely somewhat analogous, though in less sophisticated forms, with various former uses of the "transition to socialism"). But the vagueness of the notion of transition has another, lesser known aspect: that notion surreptitiously carries with it, as if smuggled, a *unifying and homogenizing effect vis-à-vis* the multiple processes designated by the notion; it could be only termed heady optimism to believe that this aspect of the concept of "transition" could be without serious consequences for the research endeavour. In light of these difficulties, the insistence of the "path dependence" approach on internal diversity, complexity or heterogeneity of the transformations taking place in Central and Eastern Europe is without any doubt beneficial.

However, at this point a precaution is necessary: this presentation, based on explicit claims of the opposition between classical transitology and the "path dependence" approach, is actually partly misleading; it tends to obscure the reality of the relations between the two perspectives, their exchanges and reciprocal enrichment, but also the transformation of their problematics brought about by their confrontation. This is especially the case of the treatment by classical transitology of the issue of legacies from the past of societies experiencing transitions, that is not

ignored in by it, and it has also to be noted that in light of the "failure" mentioned above - that of the impossibility of identifying a typical historical trajectory that accounts for all observed transitions - many proponents of classical transitology quickly moved toward the search of multiple trajectories corresponding to the plurality of transition outcomes, which, nevertheless, continues to confront them with difficulties not fundamentally different from those related to the search for a unique trajectory. But these difficulties, as we can already imagine, are also shared by the "path dependence" approach, at least in its analyses of transitions. It perhaps becomes gradually clear by now that the dramatization of the opposition between the two approaches is, moreover, far from reflecting - and this is equally important - the blind spots shared by both perspectives, and especially their uncontrolled elements, presuppositions, deadlocks and difficulties, beginning with the (not always so tacit) adhesion to the sterilizing polarization between "action" and "structure" (and its variants, the opposition between "subjectivist", "strategic", or "interactionist" perspectives on the one hand, and "objectivist", "structuralist", or "determinist" approaches on the other hand) against which the most innovative, and solid, components of contemporary social sciences have precisely been constituted (on that point, see in particular Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990). We shall see further on one of the manifestations of the deadlocks which acceptance of this polarity leads to.

A case against methodological exceptionalism

It is by starting primarily with the difficulties that appear through the confrontation of the two approaches that a reorientation of the discussion can be achieved. I will limit myself to presenting only a few aspects of such a reorientation, those inscribed in the idea of a methodological "normalization" of the research fields related to transitology.

The first dimension of such a normalization is very restricted: it relates to some traditional features of the research carried out by specialists of Central and East European societies: it is necessary to break with the powerful research traditions that isolate the analyses of communist authoritarian systems, and now, of postcommunist systems, from "ordinary" paradigms and debates in political science and sociology. The frequent presupposition - and argument - of "*exceptionalism*" (which constituted, as is known, one of the decisive weak points of the "theories" of totalitarianism when applied to the authoritarian systems in Central and Eastern Europe, by forming the basis of their postulates about the fundamental impossibility of any internal dynamic of breakdown within these systems) can today take new guises, especially those of a temptation, nearly a professional propensity of a number of specialists in area studies, to link everything to the supposedly *immutable, weighty, and inescapable cultural specificity*, attributed to each one of these societies (chances are that "eternal Russia" and the intricacies of the "Slavic soul" still have a bright future). Of course, this line of argumentation must not be confused, though this frequently occurs, with the omnipresence, in transitology debates, of the diversity of "contexts", and of the weight of the past. It remains that, if it goes without saying for most students of transitology that the contexts and the societies' past weigh on transition processes and

trajectories, that they matter, all tendencies in transitology, without exception - the "path dependence" approach included - face serious difficulties in explaining precisely *how* these contexts and legacies from the past matter (see from this point of view the chapter by Bunce).

The second dimension of this methodological normalization is entirely different: it concerns the hard core of studies in the field of transitology and probably touches one of its basic postulates. A large number of authors involved take it for granted that "normal social science methodologies" - that is to say those concerned with "structures" - cannot be applied to the processes of transition; the transitions, according to them, can therefore be explained only in terms of choices and decisions of actors. We shall see further on in this book how this postulate, which is one of the outgrowths of the academic opposition between action and structure mentioned above, represents a counter-productive illusion or a real hindrance in this research field. The point that it is important for me to emphasize in this "Introduction" is that the transitions in Central and Eastern Europe have prompted many scholars to exhibit to what extent it is possible, and even indispensable, to pay attention to social and political "structures", precisely for the analysis of these transitions *and* of the choices of their actors.

This is easily corroborated - and it is an excellent example - by the considerable importance attributed in the analyses of transitions to a structural factor sometimes called the "elite link" (see in particular the pioneering work by Higley and Burton, 1989, and, for the East European transitions, Higley, Pakulski and Wesolowski, 1998). The diversity of relationships established between differentiated elites - that is diversity of *configurations of relationships between elites* - seems in fact to command to a large extent the political aspects, but also, and this is probably still more unexpected, many economic aspects of the transitions in Central and Eastern Europe. With regard to the latter, what is at stake is the gestation of capitalist economy inside these societies; more exactly, the *plural* and *diversified* character currently covered in Central and Eastern Europe by the notion of market economy is visibly related in some way or other to configurations of mutual support and collusive exchanges, or, on the contrary, confrontations and ruptures, that crystallized during the first years of the transitions between heterogeneous segments of elite groups. In this respect, the different types of conversions, individual as well as collective, of the former communist elites obviously are not the least important component of these processes; put differently, what is important is not so much the problem - quite questionable, for tainted by a kind of pedestrian essentialism - of *reproduction*, and rates of reproduction of the "nomenklaturas" of these countries, as that of the *structure of relationships* between differentiated elites within which members of the old dominant groups have been carrying out their activity and constructing their - new - social identities.

Turning now to the political dimension of transitions, we shall first rapidly remark that the same "structural" factor, the relations between "strategic" elites, throws a crucial light on the political upheavals of 1989 themselves. In several of these countries - East Germany, Czechoslovakia and undoubtedly also Romania* -