The Legacy of Communism in CEE
Written by Billy Marsh

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What kind of legacy did forty years of communist rule leave in Central and Eastern Europe?

In addressing the legacy left by communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), we must first appreciate the definition of both 'Communism' and 'Post-Communism'. Within this discussion we will cover both of these definitions whilst analysing the social, political and economic effects of the Communist legacy.

For the sake of clarity, we will take Central and Eastern Europe as the following seven countries: CzechRepublic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Bulgariaand Romaniain concordance with Richard Rose's definition (Rose, 1998:282). East Germanywill also be cited as an example due to its unique *telos* as opposed to the other CEE states. 'Communism' is, or was, the ideology of 'Marxism-Leninism' used by Josef Stalin combining the theoretical elements of Marxism with the 'concrete answers' of Leninism (Holmes, 1997:4-5). It was an economic doctrine based around a centrally planned economy and seen as the 'higher phase' of socialism (ibid pp 10). 'Post-Communism' however is less easy to define due to debates as to whether it is indeed 'something real' or just some kind of 'intellectual inertia' (Nodia, 2000: 270). It can be best understood as a rejection of the Communist system (Holmes, 1997:13) by CEE states after five to seven decades of oppression (Mudde, 2007: 226).

Since 1989, each CEE state has undergone a dramatic transition from their time under Communist rule. Due to this, it has been strongly argued that Post-Communist Europe has become a 'rich testing ground' for comparative theorising in that scholars have been able to investigate 'a condensed version of Europe' with 'the greatest variety in the smallest space' (Batt, 2007:1-2).

Each state has taken a different path towards democratisation and they have as a result radically changed their image as a nation. Regardless of the end point, all states faced three identical challenges to their democratic transition; a 'Triple Transition' of 'nationhood', 'Europeanisation', 'constitution-making'; 'Democratisation' and the 'normal politics of allocation'; and 'Capitalism' (Offe, 1991: 871; Outhwaite, 2011:6; Nodia, 2000:272 Schöpfiln, 2009). Capitalism, although popular in Western democracies, may not have been the most sought after objective but it soon became the *fait accompli* of the transitional states (Outhwaite, 2011:6).
Pittman (1997: 32) includes a fourth challenge in the form of the legacy left by the Communist regime, for the purposes of this argument we will most certainly include this fourth element in considering a 'Quadruple Transition'.

Social Transition

It would be most disingenuous if we were to explore the legacy of Communist rule without understanding how it came about and what it meant to those under it. The Soviet Union, being on the 'winning side' in World War II, was able to create 'political space' through its liberation of states such asPoland from Nazi rule. This allowed the creation of an 'Iron Curtain', surrounding Soviet 'territory', in turn enabling the creation of Communist states by 1948-49; states under its hegemony had reforms imposed on them from above which mirrored that which was occurring in theSoviet Union (Batt, 2007:13-14; Pittaway, 2007: 20).

The system was however, not just a 'power-political' system but one which was an ideological language, functioning through a system of coercion imposed from above (Schöpfiln, 2009); essentially, the Communist ideology 'guided

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all political, economic and social activity' (Guerra, 2011 emphasis added). We must also consider the nature of the 'revolutions' (if that is a fair way to term them (Nodia, 1996:19-20)), the profound effects of *Glasnost* (openness and transparency) and *Perestroika* (restructuring politics and economics) in enabling periods of relatively peaceful negotiations (Balcerowicz, 1994:77; Offe, 1991:873). Owing to the nature of these negotiations, one would assume that the resulting shift in power would be rather straight-forward. It would be logical to assume that in Romania there would have been unease due to the bloody disposal of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu after years of economic decline and oppression (Maxfield, 2008:14) but the peaceful 'overthrow' in other states should surely equate to a simple, linear democratisation.

The breakdown of Communist rule however left states, citizens and future lawmakers in a position whereby they could never experience a 'clean state' due to the 'baggage' left over from the past (Holmes, 1997: 15). The mere fact of Communism being an 'unnatural' doctrine (in that it opposes human nature and individuality) (Nodia, 1996:25) meant that movement away from it would never be a simple task. As a result, Civil Society has faced somewhat of a 'moral vacuum' whereby citizens were 'free' but left feeling as though they had little institutional stability and there was nothing they could do about it, a somewhat 'ironic freedom' (Rose, 1998:279) which rendered Civil Society 'flat'.

The 'shockwaves' generated by *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* did allow for some popular dissent and political mobilisation (Tismăneanu, 2009:279) to gather momentum such as Poland's *Solidarnosc* (Solidarity) movement and Charter 77 in the Czech Republic. Romanian citizens however could do little to express their views due to Ceaușescu's belief that Gorbachev's reforms were intrinsically 'treasonous to socialism' (ibid pp 282). Indeed, in Poland, the church was also able to alleviate some of this apparent lack of societal cohesion whilst good leadership and removal of the Soviet 'protective shield' in the Czech Republic (and East Germany) did the same (Holmes, 1997: 19; Tismăneanu, 2004:281). In Romania the resulting 'power vacuum' was instantly occupied by second-tier Communists from the old regime who under the moniker 'New Salvation Front' went on to win the first elections in May 1990 with roughly 85% of the vote by exploiting the very speed and violence of the Ceaușescu overthrow in claiming the narrative of democratisation (Maxfield, 2008:14-15, 31; Tismăneanu, 2004:282).

In dealing with the past, each state has adopted a different approach to how they deal with reality. Methods range from the outright banning of Communist parties (later lifted), erasing public images and erecting new monuments in honour of democracy, opening secret police files, lustration and restitution (Appel, 2005:381-383; Nodia, 2000: 281). We will focus on the ideas of lustration and restitution in that they have been implemented to varying degrees across the region.

Lustration is the 'process of screening groups of people for previous acts of collaboration under the Communist regime' (Appel, 2005:383). The CzechRepublicfor example passed laws in 1991 that prohibited members of certain groups (secret police (StB)) from entering high public office for five years. In the year 2000, the law was extended indefinitely.
In East Germany, 13,500 teachers working in the Saxony region lost their jobs whilst Czech law also prohibits entry into academia, most of the academic staff in Universities were replaced post-1989 (ibid pp 383:385). A list of Czech secret police collaborators is also available online in a searchable database (Svazky.cz).

Restitution on the other hand, is a programme which seeks to return 'illegally confiscated property' to misappropriated owners and heirs. Once more, different states have adopted different policies: in East Germany, owing to its unique past, citizens could claim 'stolen' land from both the Communist and Nazi regimes (yet followed different procedures). The Hungarian government however introduced a voucher system which allowed citizens to trade coupons for land or enterprise undergoing privatisation (ibid pp 389:392). Regardless of the system pursued, the underlying interests of the restitution system have been described as a subconscious part of the privatisation process whilst lustration measures are untrustworthy due to the nature of secret police file compilation (ibid pp 394:397).
This air of insecurity has created deep divides in the functioning of society and may have done more harm than good in 'outing' ex-collaborators yet surely in a free and fair society; people deserve to know if their next door neighbour was part of the *ancien régime*?

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A good measurement of societal transition is to analyse how 'free' citizens are, or more explicitly, how 'free' citizens perceive themselves to be. Most accounts of 'Civil Society' in the CEE states are however subject to criticisms, some of which deny its very existence (Mudde, 2007: 214). For the purpose of our argument we will maintain that it does indeed exist and in using data compiled by 'Freedom House' (Walker, 2011), we will draw our own conclusions based on data which charts changes in social sentiments.

Table 1.0: *Freedom House scores for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe, 2000-2011 (1= Highest, 7= Lowest).*

State	1997	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Bulgaria			4.00	3.75	3.75	3.50	3.25							

3.25

3.00

2.75

2.75

2.50

2.50

2.50

2.50

2.50

Czech Republic

1.50

1.50

1.50

1.50

1.75

1.50

1.50

1.50

1.50

1.50

1.25

1.50

1.75

1.75

Hungary

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.50

1.50

1.75

1.75

2.00

Poland

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.25

1.50

1.25

1.50

1.50

1.50

Romania

	3.75
	3.75
	3.00
	3.00
	3.00
	2.75
	2.50
	2.25
	2.25
	2.25
	2.25
	2.50
	2.50
	2.50

Slovakia

	3.25
	3.00
	2.25
	2.00
	1.75
	1.50
	1.25
	1.25
	1.25
	1.50
	1.50

	1.75
	1.75
	1.75

Slovenia

	2.00
	2.00
	1.75
	1.75
	1.50
	1.50
	1.50
	1.75
	1.75
	2.00
	2.00
	2.00
	2.00
	2.00

Source: Walker (2011:14); Mudde (2007: 215)

Table 1.0 highlights a significant change in attitude in Hungary since 1997 (60% decrease), it is highlighted due to its lower estimation of Civil Society in comparison with the continuity of all other states (percentage changes refer to difference between 1997 and 2011 levels, regardless of peaks and troughs in-between). Hungary's slip in standards has been attributed to events in 2010 whereby the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán used his government's 2/3 majority to force through measures viewed as a 'clear challenge' to the democratic accountability of Hungary, as a result, only Bulgaria and Romania now score lower than Hungary (Walker, 2011:7).

Conversely, the significant increases in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia (37.5%, 33% and 46% respectively) highlight a greater affinity towards Civil Society in two states (Bulgaria and Romania) which have yet to fully consolidate their democratic system (Table 1.1).
However, it has been argued that statistics such as this may not bear much relevance to the current situation in the CEE states as it is held that ideological issues are more likely to predominate in early transitional periods and that class emerges much later (Outhwaite, 2011:14), effectively, states may 'formally' be a democracy but do not exactly 'feel' like one (Nodia, 2000:275).

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The concept of 'losers'/'us' and 'winners'/'them' may now perhaps be dwindling out in post-communist discourse but some sentiments will remain and should, in theory, bolster the notion of civil society, extend the growth of new social movements and ultimately push democratisation forward.

Political Transition

'*If you haven't been to the dentist for forty, or in the worst case, seventy years, the necessary treatment will be extensive and expensive*' (Outhwaite, 2011:9).

Outhwaite's summation above rather aptly sums up the nature of political transitions in the post-communist CEE states. Many of the states had not experienced political or social freedoms in such a great amount of time that the concepts would have indeed felt alien and even skipped generations. The above quote also symbolises the difficulty of movement from the communist system towards one more resonant with a liberal democracy; it has been understandably difficult to introduce institutions synonymous with democracy and the rule of law in states whereby the public perceive institutions as mere façades (Schöpfiln, 2009).

Even more daunting was the general consensus across political parties in the former 'Soviet satellites' that politics should be contested around the legacy of the specific country's Communist past; this factor created a common pattern of defeat shortly followed by recovery for the 'Left' parties over those occupying the 'Centre-Right' (Maxfield, 2008:31).

For the purpose of illustration, we shall look at the Freedom House (2011) data on democratic consolidation:

Table 1.1: *Freedom House 'Democracy Scores' (1 = Highest, 7 = Lowest).*

2011 Rankings by Regime Type

Agg. Score

Consolidated Democracies

1.00 – 2.99

Slovenia

1.93

Czech Republic

2.18

Poland

2.21

Slovakia

2.54

Hungary

2.61

Semi-Consolidated Democracies

3.00 – 3.99

Bulgaria

3.07

Romania

3.43

Source: Walker (2011:21)
Note: 'Agg. Score' represents the aggregate average score for all 8 criteria (below) specified by Freedom House on a sliding scale from 1 (Highest/Most desirable) to 7 (Lowest/Least desirable). Criteria examined: Electoral Process, Civil Society, Independent Media, National Democratic Governance, Local Democratic Governance, Judicial Framework and Independence and Corruption.

Bulgaria and Romania, now over two decades after the collapse of Communism appear to be heading towards 'consolidated democracy' yet still lag considerably behind contemporaries such as Slovenia or the Czech Republic. The nature of their transitions is documented as being somewhat more tumultuous than others under the rule of Alexander Lukashenko (Bulgaria) and Ion Iliescu (Romania) and has been referred to previously, as no doubt it will in the further development of this argument.

Although, with regards to Table 1.1, what was meant by the introduction of 'Democracy' was 'primarily social and political freedom' and not a predetermined set of 'particular political arrangements'. Constitutions needed rewriting and some states have evidently stayed the same, just minus the denaturing effects of Communism (Outhwaite, 2011:8), hence the situation in Romania (Table 1.1). As with the issue of 'Civil Society' and the 'moral vacuum' (Holmes, 1997:19; Tismăneanu, 2004:285), the installation of democracy upon people with minimal experience exemplified the intellectual deficit, the 'idiotisation' (Nodia, 1996:26) or 'psychological leftovers' (Guerra, 2011), of the CEE states (Schöpfiln, 2009) built under Communism.

One way of resolving the issue of the internal 'democratic deficit' was ascension to the European Union (EU) and other International Organisations (IOs) such as NATO. Such moves required the CEE states to behave in a certain manner with regards to their democratisation; the most explicit requirement was the acceptance of the ever evolving EU *Acquis Communitaire*.

This 'Return to Europe' allowed for the creation of new structures which had great effects on the development of government and governance, it has however been argued that this process 'Europeanised' the elites and left the public feeling excluded (Guerra, 2011). Ultimately, the EU represents liberal democracy and capitalist, market economies at the international level, the epitome of modern, enlightened and rational states; surely the desire of democratised individuals. A more cynical way of exploring the necessity to join NATO would be that the CEE states, so used to foreign domination, felt liberalised in displaying anti-Russian sentiment through ascension (Nodia, 2000:279).

Regarding public exclusion from EU discourse (Guerra *op cit)*, European Commission (2002:52-57) data (Table 1.2) illustrates a slightly conflicting image.

Table 1.2: *2001 European Commission (2002) data on 'Trust of the European Union', 'Support for membership' and How people would vote in a membership referendum.*

State

Trust in EU

Support for Membership

'Yes' in Referendum

Bulgaria

72

74

80

Czech Republic

54

46

54

Hungary

72

60

70

Poland

55

51

54

Romania

74

80

85

Slovakia

64

58

66

Slovenia

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55

41

56

Average

63.71

58.57

66.43

Source: European Commission (2002:52-57)
Note: All answers indicate '%'. In using pre-ascension data we are able to assess attitudes before the full Europeanisation and complete acceptance of the *acquis*.

This data shows great affinity for the idea of joining the EU amongst the public, especially in the case of Romaniaand Bulgaria. Interestingly, Table 1.1 shows that these two states are the least 'consolidated' democracies in the CEE caucus and consistently have the lowest scores for Civil Society (Table 1.0). One would deduce that these two states are perhaps looking abroad to fix the problems they are experiencing at home.

With regards to the argument put forward by Guerra (2011), the public in more democratic societies seem to have less affinity towards the EU and a greater sense of Civil Society.
We should investigate whether there is indeed a relationship between the presence of 'Civil Society' and support for EU membership in CEE states.

Figure 1.0: *Relationship between 'Civil Society' and support for EU Membership.*

Sources: Freedom House (2011); European Commission (2002)

Figure 1.0 shows that there is a positive correlation ($R^2 = 0.62$) between a lower sense of Civil Society and greater support for joining the EU and further supports the theory that less democratic states seek the protection of the EU to solve their domestic issues. Slovenia appears anomalous in the respect that Civil Society is reasonably well received whilst in 2001, support for EU membership was at a rather low level. Bilateral ties with Italy and perceived costs/benefits of ascension have been offered as an explanation of this.
One unanswered question however is why; in the 4 years since joining the EU (2007) have sentiments towards Civil Society not improved to Polish or Czech standards inRomania and/orBulgaria?

Economic Transition

In 1987, CEE cities were said to be 'drab and dour', Communism had ceased to be an 'effective economic system' by the end of Stalin's rule and post-revolution, the 'Communist heartlands' became the ideal testing grounds for neo-liberal economic policies (Ornstein, 2009:2-4). Economic reform and democratisation are said to go together like 'horse and carriage' (Outhwaite, 2011:15), spare the colloquial nature of this statement and it is indeed a logical assumption. However, it must be noted that while democracy (the carriage) needs a market economy (the horse), a market economy does not need a functioning democracy (Nodia, 1996:24 emphasis added; Offe, 1991:875).

This ideal is congruent with Western thought that in establishing an 'economy-led transformation', the result would be democracy. In spite of this, establishing a democracy via implementation of market economy lead to inevitable issues such as corruption to creep in with the public perceiving the 'new' capitalist class as no better than the old

nomenklatura of the Communist era with politics being perceived as a 'bad' or 'dirty' business; indeed, 'cosy' relations between the political and business elites have done little to quell these concerns (Schöpfiln, 2009; Guerra, 2011; Walker,2007:7).

In effectively 'forcing through' free and fair elections and EU membership, states have become locked in a somewhat asymmetrical transition whereby democracy comes first with capitalism following on sooner or later (Balcerowicz, 1994:76). In the instance of economic policy and development, Balcerowicz (1994) quite clearly establishes 3 fields of analysis: Macroeconomic stabilisation, microeconomic liberalisation and fundamental institutional restructuring whereby old state-based restrictions on the economy are removed and new institutions are developed such as a stock exchange alongside policy reforms such as new tax codes and privatisation of state enterprise (ibid pp 80).

The abolition of private property from the Communist era was an explicit example of the 'perverse modernisation' agenda pursued in that it effectively killed off the human capacity for autonomy; killing the soul of modernity (Nodia, 1996:24-25). In re-introducing the notion of private property and the market economy, the citizens of the CEE states were not only given the pre-conditions for a functioning democracy but the empowerment of individuality.

Legacy
'*The communist past is everybody's history*' (Schöpfiln, 2011)

There is no culture or society that can escape the 1989 revolutions; they marked a distinct caesura, a historical cleavage in International Relations (Tismăneanu, 2009:271). Societies rendered impotent and economies off the rails, they needed to modernise on a never before seen scale. The states that emerged, 'the lands in between' (Batt, 2007:7), had to deal with a unique set of circumstances, each being geographically located in Europe but politically worlds apart.

Take the case of East Germany; in the space of fifty years, its citizens first had to come to terms with their Nazi past and then Communism whilst Czechoslovakia divorced and left agrarian Slovakia and the industrialised Czech Republic to fight the changing environment as new, independent states (Appel, 2005:383; Nodia, 2000:278).

The latest Freedom House report (Walker, 2011) on *'Nations in Transit'* notes that elections are indeed free and fair, Civil society is able to actively participate in policy discussions and all of the new EU states are on the whole, performing well (ibid p 7), a clear indication that democracy and European values have managed to permeate beneath the layers of mistrust and anxiety.

We have examined exactly what Communism was and have attempted to answer what 'Post-Communism' is and in doing so have merely joined the debate. The true legacy of the Communist past is a victory for the West and the spread of liberal democratic values at warp speed with little regard to the cost to those that have been required to embrace it.

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