

**Collective Memory, Symbols and Regimes in East Central Europe. A Comparative Perspective.**

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## ABSTRACT

The main aim of my paper is to examine the path-dependency of political transformations in East Central Europe and other Post-Soviet states with a special focus on Poland and the ECE states as defined by Piotr S. Wandycz (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia). The hypotheses I adopt states that the varying pace of reforms and consolidation of the democracy in the post-communist period can be explained with the help of Maurice's Halbwachs' notion of "collective memory" and Eric Voegelin's theory of "political symbols". I will also focus on some of the most recent developments in East Central Europe

## Introduction

East Central European states form the central part of the Intermedium<sup>1</sup>, a region that is placed between the Russia and Western Powers and two seas: the Baltic to north and the Black Sea to the south (See Friedman 2011, 122-141). The access to the region both from the West and from the East is not hindered by any major natural obstacle. This means that politically the ECE countries are extremely vulnerable to, sometimes violent, outside influence. Indigenous political developments can occur only when the powers to the East and the West becomes handicapped or reluctant to conquer the region due to adopting less expansionistic foreign policies.

Careful observation of the East Central European history points to the fact that the two decades between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II were critical for nation-state formation in that region. This was due to the collapse of the two imperial hegemons – the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Tsarist Russia. In 1938 with the Munich Conference Germany and the USSR, however, started to polarize the region again. The state formation experience was, nevertheless, extremely valuable. This became apparent during the second 20-year (1989 -2009) period of great "thawing," after the USSR weakened and ultimately collapsed and the EU stabilized the West in a peaceful alliance.

Post-Soviet both in ECE and outside of the region (e.g. Central Asia) states that did not develop their states between 1918 and 1939 had no previous symbolic tradition sustained by collective memory that they could lean on in the period between 1989 (the fall of Berlin Wall) and 2008 (war between Russia and Georgia). Thus, they did not all fully consolidate their democratic states even if they gained independence. The Russian Federation itself, on the other hand, remained

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<sup>1</sup> Some authors use the term "Intermarium" and "ECE" interchangeably, however, this paper adopts a narrow definition of ECE proposed by Piotr Wandycz (2011) and therefore treats the "Intermarium" as a larger region forming the immediate geopolitical surrounding of ECE.

faithful to its political tradition, which is inherently undemocratic. I therefore, propose a new theoretical framework for the interpretation of East Central European and Post-Soviet political history as divided into two distinctive periods: the state building (1918-1938) and the democratic consolidation (1989 - 2008). Both periods are tied to the weakening and subsequent strengthening of local hegemons. The recent reassertion of Russian military power and the economic crisis (which typically has an anti-democratic effect) marks the end of the democratic consolidation period (around 2008). It follows that those Post-Soviet states that did not consolidate their democracies by now are not likely to do so in the near future.

I further hypothesize that political communities that had a symbolic memory of previous stable, modern statehood emerged from the period of Sovietization better prepared for building and consolidating a modern, democratic state. This can be explained by the collective memory's ability to foster higher levels of social trust and greater acceptance for democratic institutions that are embedded in the political symbolisms recognized by a given community.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, the Post-Soviet states that were a part of the USSR in 1937 later continued to adopt the imperial methods of organizing politics, which placed them on the path to authoritarianism or at the very least seriously hampered their democracies. It is also no coincidence that in many cases new institutions made direct symbolic reference to the pre-war traditions. This experience is extremely valuable in the context of any comparisons between the political changes in ECE and the Arab Spring; especially given that many countries in the Middle East are symbolically artificial, post-colonial creations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with Pierre Manent's (2006) and Francis Fukuyama's (2014) concepts of democratization the traditions of a nation state facilitated the development of democracy.

<sup>3</sup> At the same time the political situation in ECE in the 1945-1989 period can be compared to the period of colonialism in Africa, South America or South-Eastern Asia (Compare Opello and Rosow, 2004).



### **Exceptionalism of the ECE Countries**

One of the problems with modern notions of democratization is that the East Central European countries that underwent a relatively rapid regime change after 1989 are often viewed as a part of the rule rather than an exception. This leads to concepts such as the end-of-history hypothesis (Fukuyama 1989) or the neoconservative ideas on spreading democracy (Podhoretz 2008). Indirectly, this also led Huntington to hint that after the third wave of democratization (1991) a similar fourth one, connected with the democratization of postcolonial regimes, is quite near. Other analysts pointed out that this purported fourth wave may well be as swift and unproblematic as the third one, and saw its coming in the form of the Arab Spring (Diamond 2011).

The problem with the theoretical model of global development thus construed is twofold. Firstly, as the latter part of my analysis will show it fails to account for the fact that even when compared with other Post-Soviet states the ECE countries as defined by Wandycz<sup>4</sup> (Poland Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary), were more likely to successfully democratize. Secondly, in the absence of independent pre-WWII statehood and republican experiments in the earlier period most of the purported fourth wave states failed to follow the ECE pattern.

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<sup>4</sup> Many scholars add more countries to the list, alternatively, the group defined by Wandycz (2001) can be called the core of ECE.

Therefore, the ECE states seem to display a certain type of political exceptionalism.

Elaborating on this issue Piotr S. Wandycz (2001, 6-8), an expert in the comparative history of the ECE describes the following unique, general developmental features of the region:

- 1) intuitional innovativeness coupled with socio-economic underdevelopment,
- 2) interrupted statehood,
- 3) distinction between citizenship and nationality,
- 4) interaction of local peoples with relatively large Jewish and German minorities.

The first three features are especially important from the point of view of transformation studies. To provide some historical background on institutional innovativeness, one of the core political entities that shaped the history of the region – the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth according to measurable data was at its time among the most democratic states on the globe. The number of voters possessing both active and passive voting rights in this state, in the seventeenth century, amounted to 10% or 12% of the adult male population and 25% in the case of Poles from the western regions (Yale 1995, 51). This makes for a more sizable political nation than in the ancient Athens (10%).<sup>5</sup> Any member of the voting gentry could be elected king and the title was not hereditary after 1573. Indeed the Polish-Lithuanian king resembled the Hamiltonian vision of the president for life more than any other monarch in Europe. Moreover, by the seventeenth century the state was already federal in nature and consisted of the Polish Kingdom and the Principality of Lithuania collectively called the Commonwealth or the Two-Nation Republic. Those political bodies had separate parliaments and treasuries but elected the same executive – i.e. the king.

The Polish-Lithuanian political nation was also the creator of the first European document forbidding the imprisonment without a trial. The *Neminem Captivabimus Nisi Iure Victum* law [We will

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<sup>5</sup> There was no property census, the voting rights were inherited as in ancient Athens and indeed many voters were landless although on average they were the more affluent part of the society.

not Imprison Anyone Without the Decision of the Court] was signed by the King in 1430 and it predated the English *Habermans Corpus Act* by almost 250 years (Davies 1982, 136).

A gentry parliament similar to Polish was also created in Hungary and the Czech estates up until the Thirty Years War also played a major role in the country's politics, including electing kings against the wishes of aristocrats and the Habsburgian Emperors (Wandycz 2001, 48-77). The Czech history can also be said to be intuitionally innovative since Jan Hus proposed a set of major Church reforms more than a hundred years before the Western Reformation and more than one hundred and fifty years before the Council of Trent introduced important reforms to the Catholic Church. At the same time the lack of socio-economic prerequisites for such advanced legal, religious and political institutions was also a part of the region's legacy. These weaknesses were especially visible in Hungary and Poland<sup>6</sup> and included lack of emancipation of peasants, growing social divisions, weak urban development and a feeble urban middle class. All those factors clearly prevented the ECE states from taking full advantage of the institutional innovations they started developing.

At the same time a sustained politico-economic development seems to correlate with a certain sequence, namely, developing a strong state with effective administration capable of furnishing the necessary social services before developing representative institutions (democratizing) (Fukuyama 2014, 29). Unfortunately, the ECE states suffer from inherent weakness that stems both from the afore mentioned interrupted statehood and, as in the case of Latin American and Africa, from semi-colonialism and dependent development (See Kieżun 2013). In the case of Hungary and Bohemia (the modern Czech and Slovak state) the interruption of statehood came relatively early. Hungary lost its independence after the battle of Mohács in 1526, Bohemia after the battle of White Mountain in 1620. The Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth underwent three

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<sup>6</sup> Bohemia, in contrast, remained very much a Western country up until the battle of White Mountain.



partitions in the eighteenth century (1772, 1793, 1795). The interruption of statehood, however, by no means meant that all the institutional traditions were completely lost. Indeed, this is what constitutes the developmental uniqueness of the region. Of course, the collective memory of old institutions becomes weaker but it, nevertheless, retains some influence through symbols, which have become a part of the national tradition albeit detached from formal citizenship. In this context, the mistake that is often still made when analyzing the phenomenon of ECE transformation is the assumption that an instructional tradition that is merely symbolic and not a part of the experience of any living generation becomes lost. To be sure it is weakened but not completely dissolved. Under favorable circumstances it can be partly reanimated.

Maurice Halbwachs, was one of the first scholars who notices the paramount importance of collective memory in similar processes. One of the concepts this paper entertains is that his findings concerning collective memories of religions, social classes and families are a theoretical framework that is especially useful for understanding the institutional traditions of nationalities without nation states. As Halbwachs notes:

A society does not proceed from one organizational structure to another through the conscious effort of its members, as if they built new institutions in order to reap actual advantages from their efforts. How could they know such advantages before these institutions had begun to function precisely in their own group? To be sure, later they will cling to these institutions for motives that might be called “rational” and that at any rate appear so in their eyes. But this happens only after they have experienced and believe they understand the benefits entailed. Before a society’s members have reached this point, new institutions can become imposed on them only if the same prestige adheres to them as to the old institutions; hence some time is needed before they become consolidated and these new institutions are somewhat masked by the old ones. It is only after this process has occurred that, through a series of imperceptible improvements, the true face of new institutions becomes clear. In this way the democratic regime of modern England was slowly elaborated under the shelter of institutions of the previous century. Otherwise a revolution tears off the mask (1992, 121).

Halbwachs makes here two insights that are pivotal in the context of democratization, state formation and the history of East Central Europe. Firstly, in the initial phase of forming new institutions there must be a connection between them and the collective memory of the society; this masks the novelty and makes it easier to accept it. Therefore, the “Xerox” model of modernization and democratization is inherently flawed. Political institutions need to be rooted in a memory of events, concepts, political bodies and actions that the society recognizes as important and beneficial. Secondly, such embedding is especially important in the case of democratic institutions. Halbwachs in his own way explains the Fukuyamian paradox according to which clientelism and graft results from democratization that precedes modern institutionalization. Moreover, in states like the USA or Italy where this was the case a deep reform becomes necessary (20014, 65). Democracy for Halbwachs as for Tocqueville (Compare Kuź 2016) is not merely a procedure but a type of social force that needs to be contained by an institutional design. In order to achieve that condition democracy needs to permeate old state institutions that are already in place and that are sturdy enough to receive an additional burden.

The ECE states with their interrupted statehood are especially important from the point of view of Halbwachs’ theory. This is because the development of those states was often facilitated by pure memory without the actual institutions or their remnants in place. Of course, if there are no living persons who had contact with the intuitions the memory becomes weakened and deformed. Halbwachs explains this in the following way:

Since the persons themselves and their actions – and the memory of those actions – constitute frameworks of social life, these frameworks disappear when the persons and families in question vanish. It is hence necessary to reconstruct other frameworks in the same manner and following the same lines, which however will not have exactly the same form or appearance. (1992, 124)

In other words, reconstructing institutions just based on the historical texts or other texts of culture is necessarily fallible and indeed requires the reconstruction of intuitions based on partial or “borrowed” memories. This is significantly different from a situation in which there is a living memory of the institutions. If Halbwachs’ observation is right then what we should observe in the case of East Central Europe are two periods. In the first period the reconstruction of statehood would be based on the “borrowed” memories and those states would be weaker and not necessarily democratic (apart from Czechoslovakia most ECE states eventually turned authoritarian in the 1918-1939 period). In the second period liberal democracy would be developed based on a living memory of the previously functioning state institutions. It also follows that those states that had no living memories of independent states and administrative institutions were not likely to effectively democratize following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Bloc.

Moreover, given that the last period of development of independent states in ECE occurred in 1918-1939, 1989 was a borderline case for obtaining any living memory, the last generations that actually remembered the older independent states were at time already quite old. It is also not a coincidence that the veterans of World War II, partisans, and resistance movement activists in the post-1989 period became extremely important living symbols for the new states, especially in Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic. As a matter of fact, some of them were also utilized in this manner already by the anti-Communist resistance in the early 80’s (Compare Janke 2014). The same process pertains to the members of the so called governments-in-exile and other exiled former politicians and military, who left their countries following the war.

## The importance of statehood in the 1918-1939

Post-Communist states follow a certain pattern according to which almost all countries, which were independent between 1918 and 1938 were able to generate enough public support for their institutions to create functional democracies after 1989.

Let us briefly describe this fascinating phenomenon. In his 2007 article Oleh Havrylyshyn (2007, 6) proposed the following typology of the efficiency of democratic and economic transformation in the Post-Soviet world :

- *Sustained Big-Bang* (fastest): Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia
- *Advance Start/ Steady Progress*: Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia
- *Aborted Big-Bang*: Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan, Russia
- *Gradual Reforms*: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Romania
- *Limited Reforms* (slowest): Belarus, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan<sup>7</sup>

The sustained “big-bang” and “steady progress” indicate very successful liberalizing reforms and swift democratization after 1989. All the other states on the list, with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, are essentially semi-authoritarian regimes. All the states listed in the first and second group were independent between 1918 and 1938 with a more or less democratic period. Four states (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) from the first group were a part of the already mentioned republican Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Czech Republic and Slovakia under the collective name of Czechoslovakia were actually one of the few full democracies that remained on the map of Europe up till the tragic events of 1938 and 1939. This consistent path dependency pattern refutes the neoconservative argumentation of Norman Podhoretz (2001), who suggested that democracy in

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<sup>7</sup> Havrylyshyn’s typology focuses only on clear cases of Post-Soviet transformation. He excludes several South Eastern European countries from his analysis, “because political instability meant that the start of their transition only took place in the late 1990s. Those countries include Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.” This work will be fateful to Havrylyshyn’s typology and follow him in excluding the said countries. However in the future and expanded analysis will encompass the said states.

East Central Europe was a *fiat* event enticed by the West and that this effect can be easily replicated in Iraq, Afghanistan and other North African or Middle Eastern States.

The pattern I observe also offers some criticism of the explanation of successful transformation offered by Levitsky and Way who assert that "in states with extensive ties to the West, post-Cold war international influence were so intense that they contributed to democratization even where domestic tradition were unfavorable" (2010, 38). Specifically they write about "economic linkage, intergovernmental linkage, technocratic linkage (education in the West), and social linkage (tourism etc.)" (ibid., 43). The leverage, on the other hand, is essentially the strength of the linkage when utilized to pressurize for democratic change.

At a certain point the authors, however, casually glance over a fascinating phenomenon called "the black knight effect" (ibid., 41). What is meant by this curious term is that according to some data the linkage and leverage of, for instance, Russia and China has a significant anti-democratic effect. This comes as no surprise to a student of history of political ideas. The notion of the so-called "close foreign lands" (Kucharzewski 1948, 225 ff.) is deeply embedded in Russian political culture; as the popular Russian saying states: "the Chicken is not a bird, and Poland is not a foreign country." Indeed, from Moscow's point of view not allowing its immediate neighbors to become Westernized is still viewed as a vital part of the country's defense strategy (Friedman 2010, 66). However, the question why Moscow failed to create a strong black knight effect among the Balts, Poles, Czechs, Hungarians and Eastern Germans, remains open.

A very immediate answer would be that Russia and Russians were not very popular among the members of the said national groups. Conversely, among the same communities, during the transformation of the late 80's the West was somewhat gullibly hailed as a symbol of all that is positive in politics. Nevertheless, this effect is not completely captured by Levitsky's and Way's

model that also contains other inconsistencies. Contrary to the claims of the two authors, in the 80s economic connections with the USSR were dominant among ECE Countries. The members of the intellectual elites, who were educated in the West before the WW II, were not very numerous and those who managed to get a Western education after the war usually permanently left their native countries. Moreover, the Western states at the initial stage of transformation did not actively try to become popular in the Soviet Block or to pressurize Russia. Still at the time, the West was perceived very positively and the USSR generally disliked.

The explanation of that phenomenon seems clear, albeit it may strike certain purists as not a very “politically correct” one. Russian statehood in the far-western parts of the Empire was, simply, never viewed as a civilizing force i.e. a force that provides social services of a higher-quality than what could be generated indigenously. This perception, however, changed slightly in Belarus and Eastern Ukraine and became completely different Central Asia, where the Russian state was historically viewed as a provider rather than a plunderer.

Elaborating on this general observation of the divergent results of “spreading Russianness” Steven Fish (2006), sheds some more light on the path dependency of the transformation in ECE. Describing the case of Bulgaria, Fish notices that in order to become democratic a freshly “independent” state needs to establish a national legislative relatively quickly. Secondly, he observes that it is easier to deal with this intuitional task, when other fundamental issues such as the territory and the national identity are already settled by an older tradition. He writes: “Bulgaria had what may be regarded as the advantage of continuity in its statehood, whereas, Russia grappled during the early Post-Communist years with redefining its territorial boundaries.” (2006, 192). In fact, Russia has always had trouble with defining its territory because its statehood since the sixteenth century has always been imperial in nature (Kucharzewski, 1945).

And an imperial statehood is, essentially, a unilateral attempt to overcome the state of international anarchy, it assumes constant expansion. This means that empires try to incorporate (sometimes vassalization is an initial phase of incorporation) as many neighboring polities as they possibly can, and they do so disregarding the will of the inhabitants of the incorporated regions as well as any cultural or ethnical differences.

A simple mental experiment should explain the phenomenon of selective democratization in the Post-Soviet world. On examining the map of Europe in 1937 a student of politics will easily notice many nation states in Central and Eastern parts of the continent: Baltic States, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, the Kingdom of Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs Croats and Slovenians. In contrast, Bielarus, Ukraine, Georgia and Central Asian States at that time were already Federal Social Republics, which *de facto* made them parts of a highly centralized Soviet state, a successor to the Russian Empire and an imperial entity in its own right. It is therefore clear why USSR did not manage to “digest” the nation states it swallowed after the WW II and why it, eventually, had to “spit them out.”

Moreover, in accordance with Pierre Manent's (2006) theory of nationalism, the tradition of a nation state facilitates the development of democracy. What is even more surprising, this seems to hold true even for those states that were ultimately subdivided into smaller units (Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of SCS ) as long as the federations or unitary states they once formed were at the time representative of the views of citizens and not superimposed by any of the major, external powers. This observation is, however, not tantamount to claiming that every nation state is determined to become a democracy. It merely implies that in favorable circumstances nation states will democratize much faster than empires. Without a doubt the states that were a part of the USSR in 1937 later continued to adopt the imperial methods of organizing politics and a miniaturized empire is, essentially, an authoritarianism.

## Symbols and Russian Influence

This paper has already hypothesized that what helps to conduct the transfer of institutional legitimization is collective memory. What remains to be explained, from the theoretical point of view, is what is the ontological status of collective memories, and how does the process of corruption that Halbwachs describes come into being? In this part of the analysis the concepts of Eric Voegelin are particularly useful.

This is because Eric Voegelin developed one of the most elaborate descriptions of the precise nature of the intelligible political objects that are passed (in a given society) from one generation to another or from the citizens to newcomer. In short, Voegelin, as John H. Hallowell puts it, became convinced “that it was societies and not ideas that were the real entities and that societies expressed themselves in history through a variety of complex symbols” (Hallowell 1975, p. vi). Words like *polis*, republic, revolution, progress, etc. were, therefore, meant to express some meaning on which the whole society agreed, even if its members differed about the concrete ideas they attached to those symbols.

In the *New Science of Politics* Voegelin describes the political symbols as those intelligible object through which the societies „interpret themselves as representatives of a transcendental order” (1987, 1). And in the *Authoritarian State* Voegelin observes that a symbol thus construed does not “mean something” but it “is something” (Voegelin 1999, 58). This is, indeed, an apt observation since as Halbwachs has already noticed symbols/collective memories only mean something once they are recognized as being representative of experience (Compere 1992, 36-50). Symbols under this wide but, nevertheless, functional definition can take on various forms, they can be objects like flags, or royal insignia but also events and, indeed, historical figures or living humans. The former names of states and their institutions would also constitute political symbols.



In ECE political symbols were especially important since they survived in the periods of absence of real political institutions. The oldest of them were transcendently rooted in the tradition of medieval, Christian philosophy, the more recent ones were increasingly a part of the quasi-religions of modernity (e.g. progressivism, nationalism, socialism). All of them, however, tended to reoccur in culture with a constantly shifting context and connotation. However, in spite of the shifts, the threat of symbolic recognition was more or less maintained. This paper, for brevity's sake, cannot present a comprehensive study of all the main symbols but just to name a few examples: the figure Jan Hus can be interpreted as the symbol of Czech reformation; the Crown of Saint Stephen can be seen as the symbol of Hungary as a stronghold on the outskirts of the Christian West; the text of Constitution of the Third of May (1791) may be treated as a symbol of the old Polish parliamentarism.

It would be, however, too idealistic to claim that symbols and their memories are not tainted by the power politics that is exercised by external forces, which at different periods take control over historical societies. For instance, in a large study of the post-colonial patterns of development James Mahoney (2010) notes that divergent paths of politico-economic development of South American countries are conditioned by the type of colonial rule that was exercised over them. In short, even a partial or interrupted period of a relatively liberal colonial rule (mercantilist and aristocratic Habsburgs versus the more liberal Spanish Bourbons) correlates with higher levels of post-colonial development.

A similar hypothesis can be made about the rule of law and the semi-colonial legacy of the East Central European states. Oddly enough, however, in the case of ECE the Habsburgian policies could be described as relatively liberal in comparison to Russian. This is because Russia is a country that never developed Western institutions of private property and the rule of law, or at the very least, did not seem to have them before 1990 and earlier underwent only a short phase of nineteenth

century experiments such as Stolypin's reforms. As Richard Pipes notes: "the peculiar features of Russian absolutism in its early form, which lasted from the fourteenth until the late eighteenth century, were marked by the virtual absence of the institution of private property, which in the West confronted royal power with effective limits to its authority" (Pipes 1990, 54). In other words, all land was nominally the property of the Tsar and later almost without an intermediary period became the property of the bureaucratic state. This distinctive feature of Russian politics is another factor that in accordance with Mahoney's framework can contribute to the development of ECE countries and it is also reflected in the economic nature of Russian communism as opposed to, for example, Scandinavian welfare socialism.

It can be, however, hypothesized that those countries that were exposed to the unique Russian concept of autocracy (*самодержавие*) already in the nineteenth century internalized this idea and the accompanying political symbols<sup>8</sup> far better than those that were under Russian control only in the post-war communist form. The post-communist countries that in the hundred years preceding the 1918-1939 period were under Russian rule in a semi-colonial dependence and did not gain independence in the interwar period would, therefore, in theory be least likely to democratize. Those that did not experience early Russian colonization or experienced it only to a limited extent and later managed to experience independent statehood in the 1918-1939 period would, in contrast, be far more likely to democratize after 1989.

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<sup>8</sup> They usually connected with the figure of a strong leader, collective responsibility and a concept of administration as oversight mechanism rather than a public service.

In summary, the hypotheses this paper entertains are the following:

**H1: Post-communist states that had been independent in the 1918-1939 period were far more likely to successfully democratize after 1989.**

**H2: States that were in their entirety a part of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century were not likely to successfully democratize.**

**H3: Other states (either a part of Russian Empire but independent in the 1918-1939 period or not independent in the 1918-1939 period and not a part of Russian Empire) experience intermediate levels of democratization.**

A preliminary comparative analysis that borrows from Havrylyshyn's typology can be summarized with the following table:

**Table 1. The comparison of Post-Communist countries' history and effect of democratization results.**

Havrylyshyn's classification	Country	Independent state in the 1918-1939 period or a member of independent federation <sup>9</sup>	Former Russian rule in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century over the whole country	The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index, classification and score (2015)
<i>Sustained Big-Bang</i>	Estonia	Yes	Yes	Flawed Democracy (7,85)
	Latvia	Yes	Yes	Flawed Democracy (7,37)
	Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Flawed Democracy (7,54)
	Czech Republic	Yes	No	Flawed Democracy (7,94)
	Poland	Yes	No (partial)	Flawed Democracy (7,09)
	Slovakia	Yes	No	Flawed Democracy (7,29)
<i>Advance Start/Steady Progress,</i>	Croatia	Yes	No	Flawed Democracy (6,93)
	Hungary	Yes	No	Flawed Democracy (6,84)
	Slovenia	Yes	No	Flawed Democracy (7,57)
<i>Aborted Big-Bang</i>	Albania	Yes	No	Hybrid Regime (5,91)
	Bulgaria	Yes	No	Flawed Democracy (7,14)
	Macedonia	No	No	Flawed Democracy (6,02)
	Kyrgyzstan	No	Yes	Hybrid Regime (5,33)
	Russia	Yes	Yes	Authoritarian (3,31)
<i>Gradual Reforms</i>	Azerbaijan	No	Yes	Authoritarian (2,71)
	Armenia	No	Yes	Hybrid Regime (4,33)
	Georgia	No	Yes	Hybrid Regime (5,88)
	Kazakhstan	No	Yes	Authoritarian (3,06)
	Ukraine	No	Yes	Hybrid Regime (5,70)
	Tajikistan	No	Yes	Authoritarian (1,95)
	Romania	Yes	No	Flawed Democracy (6,68)
<i>Limited Reforms</i>	Belarus	No	Yes	Authoritarian (3,62)
	Uzbekistan	No	Yes	Authoritarian (1,95)
	Turkmenistan	No	Yes	Authoritarian (1,83)

<sup>9</sup> The data for the second and third column come from general historical reference sources such as O' Brien (2010).

The data suggest that states that were not part of the Russian empire in their entirety and experienced independent statehood in the 1918-1939 period are now classified as flawed democracies with relatively high scores (on average 7.04, green color). In this group Albania is the only exception with a score of 5.33 that labels it as a hybrid regime. The states that did not create an independent state in the 1918 – 1939 period and were a part of the Russian empire have lower democracy scores and are all classified as authoritarian or hybrid regimes (average score of 3.6 red color). The third, in-between group, consists of the Baltic States that were a part of the Russian Empire but experienced a period of independent statehood between 1918 and 1939; Russia itself; and Macedonia that was neither a part of Russian Empire nor an independent state in the interwar period. Somewhat contrary to the hypothesis on the Russian influence (H2), in case of Baltic States the democracy scores are high (7.58 on average). The score for the whole group are, however, in the medium range (6.41, blue color) as expected in H3.

The above comparison is not a fully developed quantitative hypothesis test. To conduct such a test one would need to add more control variables and models, which is beyond of the current scope of this paper since it deals mainly the comparative political theory and institutional development. Moreover, adding control variables such as GDP or GNP, level of urbanization, level of education etc. would not necessarily expand the existing level of knowledge on the subject. This is because the hypothetical direction of causation between stable democracy and typical socio-economic variables is not well established and much debated. Nevertheless, to account for such factors and make their measurements more reliable indexes of democracy (Polity, Freedom House or the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index) include socio-economic variables pertaining to political culture and government performance.

However, even without a rigorous hypothesis test, already the preliminary comparison of means suggests that the independent statehood in the 1918-1939 period should emerge as the pivotal factor for the subsequent democratization. Being a part of the Russian Empire clearly has some adverse effects on democratization but the Baltic State's case shows that it is a less important factor.

### **Any backsliding?**

Democratic backsliding even among the ECE transformation leaders is something that has been observed as a potential danger already in 2007 (Rupnik 2007). More recently the criticism of populist (social-conservative) politics of Victor Orbán (the president of Hungary) and the conflict surrounding the changes to the bill on Constitutional Tribunal in Poland has created another wave of analyses considering the backsliding process.<sup>10</sup> Those concerns, however, seem at best premature. This paper does not allow enough room to discuss all the arguments pertaining to the above issue in detail. However, it seems prudent to adumbrate at least a few points.

Firstly, the tensions present ECE democracies suffer from are distinctively Western. They result from the insecurity of the middle class, the fear of mass migration, and criticism of globalization along with the current neoliberal economic model. Jarosław Kaczyński (Poland, majority party leader), Victor Orbán (Hungary, prime minister), Robert Fico (Slovakia, prime minister) and Miloš Zeman (Czech Republic, president) all center their politics around the same issues that are important for anti-establishment candidates both in Western Europe and in the USA.

Secondly, the fact that the new social-conservative candidates won the elections in ECE when the global anti-establishment wave was still lower than today actually makes them more

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<sup>10</sup> See Zalan (2016) for a line of argumentation representative of many other press and think-tank analyses.

moderate and better trained in the art of statecraft in comparison with to the new generation of Western populists. For instance, unlike the Brexit supporters from Great Britain all of the ECE social-conservatives want to preserve the integrity of EU; similarly unlike Donald Trump or Marine LePain of the French National Front they have no intention of backing Wladimir Putin's belligerent and authoritarian policies. Finally, unlike Fauke Petry from German AfD the current leaders of ECE have no intention of combating the migration crisis by shooting refugees who illegally cross the borders of their countries. Naturally, one may say that the radicalism of the new Western socially-conservative politicians will prevent them from ever winning elections. However, the support they are gaining and the crisis of leadership among the liberal elites means that even if the new "populists" loose, some of their policies will with all probability become a part of mainstream politics for a prolonged period of time.

A third argument against claim that ECE suffers from major democratic backsliding not observed elsewhere is the fact that the politicians in ECE often reach for strong reformist tactics not to accumulate dictatorial power but to combat graft, poverty and favoritism. And, as a matter of fact, the levels of corruption and standards of governance in the region have slightly declined after the EU accession (See Mungiu-Pippidi 2016 and Kuź 2015). This is mainly due to the fact that the corrupt political and business elites have found a new easy source of graft in the form of EU structural funds (See Wedel 2009) and the ECE states were not sufficiently strong (See Wolek 2012) to combat this problem

In such a situation, in accordance with Fukuyama's developmental observations, reforms and strong ant-corruption methods are often the only solution. However, as during the reforms

proposed by Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Delano Roosevelt or Woodrow Willson<sup>11</sup> anti-corruption, anti-poverty and anti-trust measures often mean that the executive will place itself on the collision course with the judiciary, which by definition strives to preserve the legal status quo. This dynamic was visible especially in the court-packing conflict and the war on organized crime during FDR's presidency. In short, such conflicts are to be expected in a democracy that is being reformed. They are dangerous for the whole political system only when they spark political violence: massive repressions or a revolution that in accordance with Halbwachs' model destroys the institutions rather than changes them. Apparently, the tensions between the three branches of government in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic lead to demonstrations organized by new social movements but spark no political violence on either side. This confirms the relatively good quality of the core ECE states' democracy, especially when it is compared with the manner in which similar conflicts are handled in Belarus, Ukraine or the Central Asian states.

In conclusion, even if moderate democratic backsliding is experienced among ECE's fast-reformers it is proportional to the general global backsliding of democracy even among the full democracies. Secondly, the conflicts between the three branches of government in ECE states at this point still resemble reformist tensions rather than a prelude to an authoritarian takeover.

### **Conclusions**

The main conclusion of the above findings is the observation that political development in ECE falsifies the claim that democratization is a relatively fast process than can be easily jumpstarted from the outside. Moreover, the political development in ECE as compared to other post-communist countries suggests that democratization needs to be rooted in indigenous symbolic experience and collective memories.

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<sup>11</sup> Fukuyama includes USA (along with Italy and Greece) as an example of an early democratizer with a weak state, who needed drastic reforms to combat graft in Progressive and New Deal Era (2014, 65.).



Moreover, the Huntingtonian (2006, 32-91) hypothesis that a strong state is a necessary prerequisite for an effective democratization finds some confirmation in the ECE context. The uniqueness of the ECE, however, consists in the fact that its history suggest that even in the absence of existing political institutions a collective memory of such institutions, can provide a surprisingly sturdy support for democratization. This effect is, however, stronger when the collective memory in question stems from the experience of the still living members of the society, hence the importance of the 1918-1939 period for the post-1989 democratization.

Nevertheless, in accordance with Fukuyama's hypothesis even the relatively effective democratizers need to undergo further reforms if they democratized in the absence of the strong rule of law and effective administration. This is because democratization with a weak institutional background may easily lead to an increased graft and cronyism.

Those reforms naturally create a danger of democracy backsliding, as do all major reforms in democratic states. Moreover, the ECE states are all affected by the current global crisis of the post-war liberal consensus. The crisis leads to serious threats to democracy both in the region and in the West. Disturbingly, some of the currently proposed "Western" solutions to those threats only create further perils to liberal democracies. Typical examples include limiting privacy to combat terrorism, raising walls with barbed wire to prevent mass migration or increasing redistribution to prevent the disappearance of middle class.

However, this paper suggests that whatever the general global trend for the development of democracy will be, the patterns described above will, at least for some time, prevail. In other words, it is unlikely that democracy in ECE will suffer more backsliding than it is already suffering in the West. And if the current tensions within ECE states' governments are overcome the region may

actually embark on path of further democratic consolidation and improving the quality of administration and public services.

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