

## Plausible Theory, Unexpected Results: The Rapid Democratic Consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe

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In 1990, when the system in Eastern Europe had only just begun to change, an essay appeared entitled »The Necessity and Impossibility of Simultaneous Economic and Political Reform.« Its author was none other than Jon Elster (1990); this brilliant theoretician needed only to glance at the unfolding events to reach the simple conclusion: impossible! The need to achieve effective economic and political reforms simultaneously made successful »holistic reforms« (Wiesenthal 1993) preposterous. Impossibility, necessity, and simultaneity – their interdependence became embodied in a theorem that rapidly gained currency in the social sciences as »the dilemma of simultaneity« (Offe 1991). Few authors analyzing regime changes in Eastern Europe have failed to refer to the »dilemma,« discussing it affirmatively<sup>1</sup> and seeking its confirmation in the empirical facts. Its theoretical elegance was captivating; its suggestiveness difficult to overlook. What, then, was the essence of the theorem?

According to the theorem's preamble, the transformation of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and in the successor states of Central Asia differed categorically from all regime changes in the first and second waves of democratization; the main difference lay in the fact that two, perhaps three transformation processes were occurring simultaneously: political (from dictatorship to democracy), economic (from a command economy to a market economy), and, in some instances, governmental (founding or refounding of nation-states). The postcommunist regime changes were transformation processes that in Western Europe had, as a rule, taken place in evolutionary and consecutive fashion over centuries. In Eastern Europe they were now fusing into a political project to be deliberately conceived and quickly carried out by politicians. There were neither historical precedents nor a benevolent victorious occupation power that could »externally« impose a solution to basic territorial, constitutional, and economic issues, as had been the case with Germany and Japan in the second wave of democratization.

1. The author of these lines is certainly included in this (Merkel 1994, 1996).

But the dilemma theorem also holds that mere aggregation of the three problems – building states and nations, democratizing, and restructuring economies – comes nowhere near explaining the essence of the dilemma posed by postcommunist transformation. Rather the dilemma is said to lie in the fact that all three spheres are highly interdependent, though each pursues its own developmental logic. Interdependence and the inherent logic of each sphere could, by virtue of simultaneity, cause interference or even »mutually obstructive effects« (Offe 1991: 283) between the three »catch-up modernization processes« (Habermas 1990: 177), perhaps bringing about a dilemma. The compelling conclusion is the likelihood that the consolidation of democracy is more precarious and much more attenuated in Eastern Europe (as in the entire postcommunist area) than it was with the capitalist regime changes in Southern Europe or Latin America.

By the end of the decade, however, most transformation researchers agreed that many of Eastern Europe's new democracies had been consolidated. In 2004 and 2006, ten countries culminated their consolidation with membership of the European Union (EU). Schmitter and Schneider (2004) even stated that the main Eastern European countries and the Baltic States had consolidated their democracies more quickly than had countries in Latin America or Southern Europe. Has theory failed? Have social scientists once again shown that their strengths lie in *ex post* explanation rather than in prediction? I examine these questions in five steps:

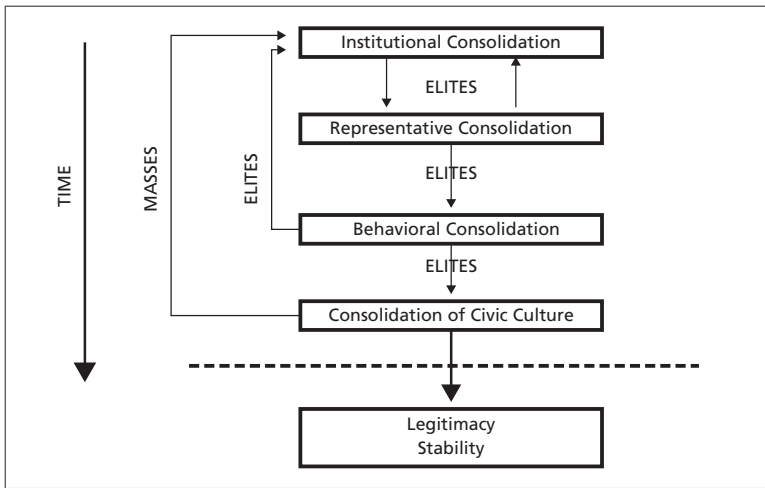
1. Which explanatory model of democratic consolidation has proven itself especially robust?
2. How consolidated are Eastern European democracies?
3. What can be said about the quality of these democracies?
4. Is the weakness of forecasting the »dilemma« theoretically explicable?
5. A structural remedy for the theorem

## **The Multilevel Model of Democratic Consolidation**

The term *democratic consolidation* is controversial in transformation research. Minimalist assumptions (Przeworski 1991: 26) compete with more demanding concepts (Linz/Stepan 1996; Merkel 1998). Transformation researchers have also disagreed on which political and social institutions must be stabilized before they can speak of a consolidated democracy.

There is disagreement on both the time horizon for and the quickest paths to consolidation (see Figure 1). Pridham (1995: 168) therefore distinguishes between »negative« and »positive« consolidation; to him, democracies are negatively consolidated if the absence of relevant political or social actors pursuing their interests and goals outside democratic institutions is due to the lack of an attractive alternative to democracy. A political system is positively consolidated only when the elite has come to regard the entire system as legitimate and without alternative, *and* when the citizenry's patterns of attitudes, values, and behavior have come to reflect a stable belief in the legitimacy of the democracy. Such a concept of consolidation posits much longer time horizons for the stabilization of a postauthoritarian democracy than for negative democratic consolidation, which is based only on elites.

Figure 1:  
Multilevel Model of Democratic Consolidation



I adopt this concept of positive consolidation and differentiate it into four analytical levels at which the entire political system's chances of consolidation are decided.<sup>2</sup> The four analytical levels simultaneously

2. In so doing, I build on ideas developed by Linz and Stepan (1996). See also Merkel (1998).

reflect a frequently observable chronological gradation of democratic consolidation in the sense that it usually occurs first at level 1 and generally takes longest at level 4. Additionally, logic and empirical findings suggest that one consider the four levels as the basic elements of a hitherto insufficiently elaborated sequence theory of democratic consolidation.

Level 1 is *constitutional consolidation*. It refers to the key political, constitutionally established institutions, such as the head of state, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, and the electoral system. Collectively, they form the macrolevel, the level of structures. Of the four levels mentioned above, constitutional consolidation is ordinarily completed first, and it affects the second, third, and fourth levels through components of norms and penalties that facilitate or constrict action and thereby shape structures.

Level 2 is *representative consolidation*. It concerns the territorial and functional representation of interests. In other words, it is primarily about parties and interest groups, or the mesolevel of collective actors. At level 2, the actor constellations and what those actors do help determine both how the norms and structures established at level 1 are consolidated, and whether the joint configuration of levels 1 and 2 positively or negatively affect the behavior of the actors at level 3 in terms of democratic consolidation.

Level 3 is *behavioral consolidation*. It is where the »informal« actors operate – the potentially political ones, such as the armed forces, major land owners, capital, business, and radical movements and groups. They make up a second mesolevel, that of informal political actors. Success with consolidation at levels 1 and 2 is crucial in deciding whether the informal political actors with potential veto power will pursue their interests inside, outside, or against democratic norms and institutions; if the first three levels have been consolidated, they become seminal for the emergence of the civil society that stabilizes a democracy.

Level 4 is the *democratic consolidation of the political culture*. Consolidation of the democratic political system concludes with the emergence of a citizenship culture as the sociocultural substructure of democracy. As researchers of political culture know from the second wave of democratization (Italy, Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, and Japan after 1945), this process can take decades and can be sealed only by a generational change. The culture of citizenship constitutes the microlevel, the citizens.

Immunizing effects emanate from a consolidated democratic civil structure to levels 1 through 3 if their stability (levels 1 and 2) or integration (level 3) is jeopardized by external crises, for example, economic or foreign-policy related. Not until all four levels have been consolidated can one speak of a largely crisis-proof democracy.

Democratic consolidation is not an irreversible final condition but rather a relatively stable equilibrium of a democratic system's defining components. Even a »maximally« consolidated democratic system is not completely impervious to tendencies towards deconsolidation, but a democracy consolidated at all four levels possesses vast reserves of resistance to destabilizing exogenous shocks, such as the abovementioned economic or foreign-policy crises. A process of deconsolidation would have to persist for relatively long periods and erode all four levels before trends toward autocratization could destroy the democratic system. In that sense, a concept of democratic consolidation that encompasses people's political attitudes and values has a greater forecasting potential than minimalist concepts that understand this form of legitimation as the suspiciously tautological baggage of transformation research based on systems theory.

### **Degrees of Consolidation in Eastern Europe<sup>3</sup>**

Of all international rankings and ratings of democracy, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) provides the most reliable, transparent, and differentiated data.<sup>4</sup> Because they are also highly compatible with the four levels of the consolidation model, I refer to them in the empirical part of my analysis.

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3. In this section and the next (»The Democratic Quality of the Political Regimes in Eastern Europe«), I draw on the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) of 2006, which conveys the state of affairs by late 2005. The data are gathered in 119 countries at two-year intervals and are based on experts' subjective appraisals, which are reviewed in a four-step process involving experts from the source country, monitoring by German experts on that country, regional coordinators, and specialists on interregional calibration (see Bertelsmann Stiftung 2005).

4. I am grateful to Heiko Giebler for his assistance with the graphical presentation of the data.

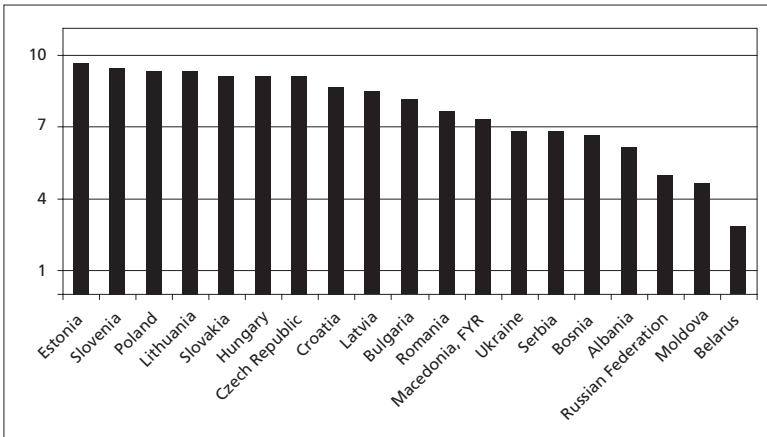
## Level 1: Constitutional Consolidation

The degree to which the crucial constitutional institutions are consolidated (level 1) is ascertainable through three key criteria:

1. Institutional efficiency: The political institutions must permit swift, appropriate policy decisions and produce political stability.
2. Institutional transparency: The political decisions must be democratically legitimated, attributable, and reviewable.
3. Institutional inclusion: The institutions must promote political and social integration and participation.

The BTI captures these three criteria by means of questions about the performance and acceptance of the constitutional institutions and indicators that measure horizontal accountability, the de facto guarantee of rights to freedom, and the prosecution of malfeasance. Figure 2 shows the picture of Eastern Europe that emerges.

Figure 2:  
Constitutional Consolidation of Eastern European Countries



A comparison of the degrees to which the constitutional institutions are consolidated<sup>5</sup> indicates that Estonia and Slovenia lead Eastern Europe in this respect, followed closely by Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, the Czech

5. The BTI scale ranges from 1 (lowest rating) to 10 (highest rating).

Republic, Slovakia, and Croatia. The most important political institutions can be seen as consolidated in those countries. These institutions are not unreservedly consolidated in countries of the second group – Latvia, Bulgaria, and Romania. In countries of the third group – which includes Macedonia, Ukraine, Serbia-Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina – BTI experts note visible shortcomings. In the fourth group (Albania, Russia, and Moldova), democratic institutions are still only slightly consolidated. In Belarus, authoritarianism has reduced them to a distorted shell of what they were intended to be.

## Level 2: Representative Consolidation

Four groups are recognizable at the level of representative consolidation, too (see Figure 3). Postulated according to the sequence of democratic consolidation, the ratings for representative consolidation average perceptibly lower than those for constitutional institutions. The first group consists of Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Croatia, and Estonia. The structures in Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania are less consolidated than those in the countries of group 1. The representation of interests cannot be regarded as consolidated in Macedonia, Ukraine, Latvia, Serbia-Montenegro, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Russia, Moldova, and Belarus, intermediary structures, as well as interest representation, are unstable and authoritarian.

## Level 3: Behavioral Consolidation and Veto Actors

From the outset of democratization in Eastern Europe, the danger of veto actors was less in this region than in the other transformation regions of the third wave (Linz/Stepan 1996). In nine countries there were no signs of any potential for thwarting democratization (see Figure 4). In Macedonia and Bulgaria, such potential is low. In Serbia-Montenegro, Russia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania, ambitions to veto efforts to democratize exist in the executive verticals, among oligarchs, or in organized crime interwoven with the machinery of government. In Belarus, Alexandr Lukashenko and his presidential vertical rule as an omnipotent actor, vetoing every effort at democratization. In Eastern Europe, the military as a classic veto actor does not threaten democracy in the same way as in Latin America or Southeast Asia.

Figure 3:  
Representative Consolidation of Eastern European Countries

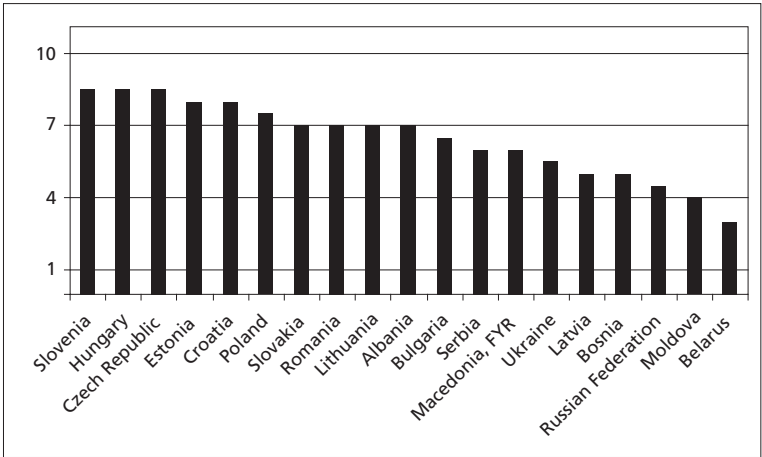
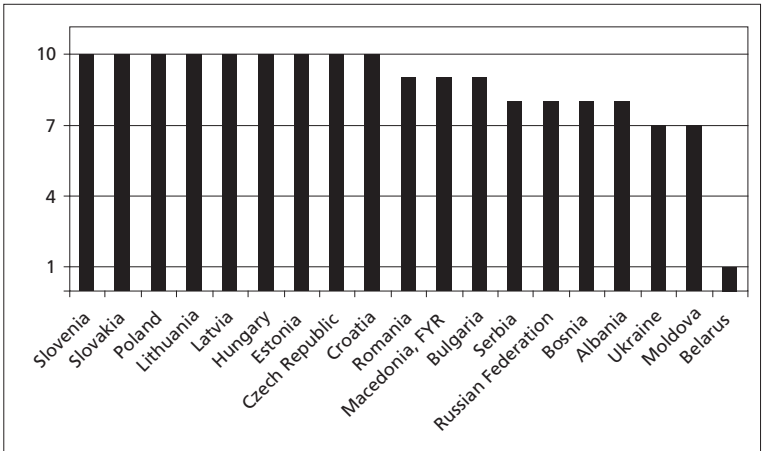


Figure 4:  
Behavioral Consolidation of Eastern European Countries



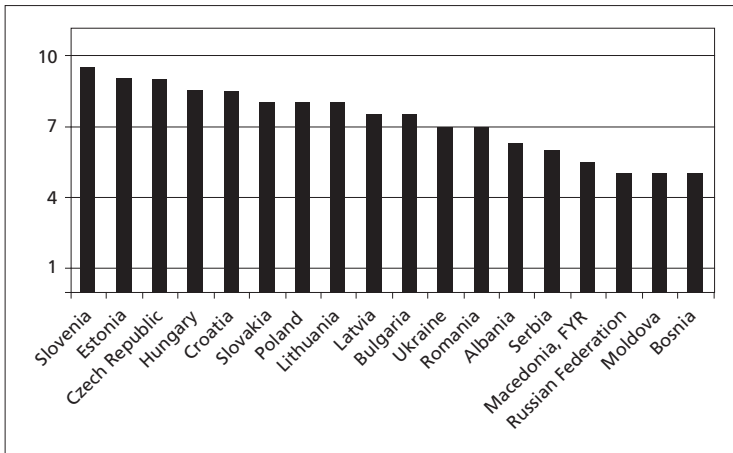


## Level 4: Democratic Consolidation of the Political Culture

The highly generalized BTI of political culture shows a group of Eastern European countries (from Slovenia through Lithuania) that are almost equally compatible with democracy, with incremental differences (see Figure 5). In a second group of countries (Latvia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Romania), civic culture must be considered underdeveloped. »Strong democrats« are conspicuously underrepresented; »weak democrats« over-represented. Nevertheless, »autocrats« account for only about 10 percent of the populations in these countries. Clear majorities of the populations endorse democracy, albeit with less consent to individual democratic institutions than in Western Europe. The semiauthoritarian political culture in Russia, Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina is commensurate with the low democratic standard of their political elites.

Figure 5:

### Consolidation of Democratic Political Culture in Eastern European Countries



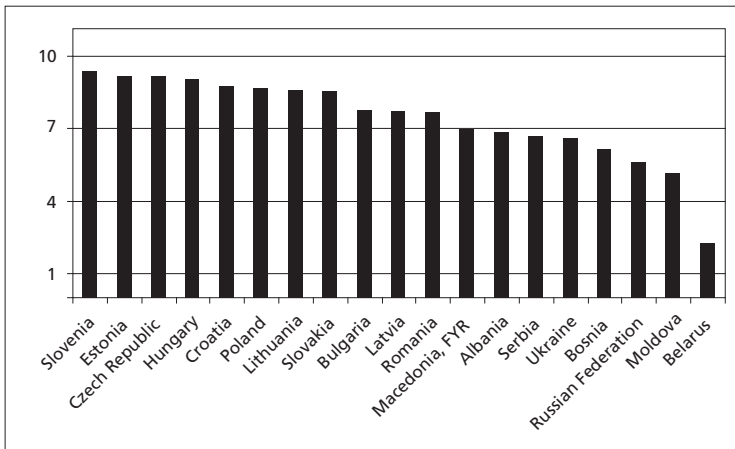
## Conclusion

Aggregating the indices for each of the four consolidation levels, one finds four groups of countries (see Figure 6). The first group – Slovenia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, Poland, and Lithuania

ania – must be regarded as consolidated. The second group consists of Bulgaria, Latvia, and Romania, which may be capable of advancing to the »first division« in the coming years. EU membership is likely to facilitate this process. Macedonia, Albania, Ukraine, Serbia-Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina belong to the third group, that of unconsolidated electoral democracies. Russia and Moldova are categorized as semiauthoritarian regimes with passably democratic elections. Belarus has reverted to autocracy under Lukashenko, if indeed it ever crossed the threshold to democracy.

Figure 6:

Overall Consolidation of Democratic Political Culture in Eastern Europe



### The Democratic Quality of the Political Regimes in Eastern Europe

The degree of democratic consolidation and the quality of democratic regimes are not the same thing, though the two concepts do overlap in major respects.

Below I will therefore use the so-called *Status Index* of the BTI which measures the quality of democracy over a wider range than the indicators for the four levels of consolidation considered above. The highest possible value is 10, the lowest – theoretically – is 0. If the numerical index

values are divided into the four types of regimes »constitutional democracy,« »defective democracy,« »strongly defective democracy,« and »autocratic regime,« the following picture results.

The constitutional democracies form by far the largest group. Belarus alone is an openly autocratic regime, while Russia and Moldavia are strongly defective democracies that just approach this regime type.

Table 1:  
The Democratic Quality of Political Regimes in Eastern Europe

	<i>Constitutional democracies</i>	<i>Defective democracies</i>	<i>Strongly defective democracies</i>	<i>Autocratic systems</i>
<i>Democratic quality of the political regime</i>	10.0– >8.0	8.0– >6.0	6.0– >4.0	< =4.0
<i>Countries</i>	Slovenia (9.55) Czech Rep. (9.45) Estonia (9.4) Hungary (9.4) Lithuania (9.25) Poland (9.2) Slovakia (9.2) Croatia (9.1) Bulgaria (8.45) Latvia (8.3) Romania (8.2)	Macedonia (7.55) Serbia-Montenegro (7.4) Albania (7.25) Ukraine (7.1) Bosnia-Herzegovina (6.8)	Russia (5.7) Moldavia (5.4)	Belarus (3.97)

*Note:* The country classification is carried out with regard to the Status Index »democracy« of the BTI; 10 represents the best, 1 the worst possible value.

*Source:* Bertelsmann Foundation (2005).

Assessed according to the BTI's five criteria – governance, political participation, rule of law, stability of democratic institutions, and political and social integration – the »region« of Eastern Europe obviously has better ratings than all other regions of the world outside pre-1990 OECD states swept by the third wave of democratization (see Figure 7).

Figure 7:

Democratic Quality Compared: Eastern Europe and all States in the Sample

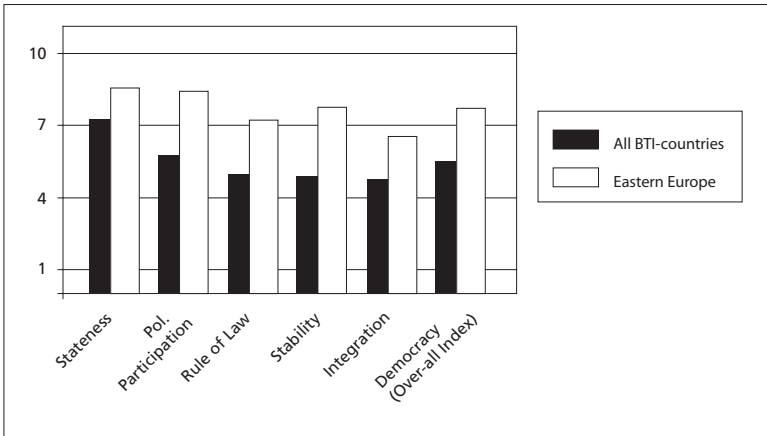


Figure 7 shows that the democratic quality of the political regimes is, on average, higher in Eastern Europe than in all other transformation regions except Spain, Portugal, and Greece.<sup>6</sup> Taken together, Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic do not discernibly differ in quality from those three Southern European states. Examination of the five dimensions of democracy, however, reveals a weakness that characterizes all new democracies: The rule of law is wanting; in particular, the difference between political participation and the quality of the rule of law demonstrates that the latter is less developed than the former. Although that gap is much more pronounced in the other transformation regions represented in the BTI, it is quite apparent in Eastern Europe and has not vanished, even in Central and Eastern Europe.

The situation is similar with political and social integration (see Figure 7). The potential for differentiation is limited with the BTI data, though. They have been collected and used for autocratic and transformation regimes, not for measuring the quality of consolidated democracies; the latter task would require indicators that adequately ascertain the qual-

6. »All countries« refers to the 119 states covered by the BTI 2006. Old OECD countries and countries with fewer than 3 million inhabitants are not included (with a few exceptions, such as Slovenia).

itative differences between consolidated democracies.<sup>7</sup> In some countries of Central and Eastern Europe it would then become apparent that low voter participation rates, a disconnect between political parties and society, volatility, polarization, and intransigence between the ruling party and the opposition limit the quality of the new democracies. All these distinctions indisputably indicate subtle qualitative differences between democracies, but lie far beyond the threshold beyond which one can speak of democracy's deconsolidation.

Above all, the rule of law differs considerably from one Eastern European country to another; whereas Slovenia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Estonia, and the Czech Republic are nearly on a par with Western Europe in this dimension, Macedonia, Serbia-Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina must be ranked as defective democracies. Russia under Vladimir Putin has come to straddle the line between a highly defective democracy and an overtly authoritarian regime. Belarus, however, crossed this frontier as early as 1995.

Recent research on hybrid regimes and defective democracies has shown that a lack of the rule of law, combined with horizontal accountability, is the entry gate for the creeping reauthoritarianization of the entire democratic system (Merkel/Puhle et al. 2003 and 2006). A defective rule of law and a barely functioning system of horizontal checks and balances often »infect« the other parts of the democratic regime, ultimately debasing even fair democratic elections as no longer meaningful.

## The Poverty of Theory

Of the 18 countries studied, seven of those in Eastern Europe have experienced an extraordinarily rapid consolidation of their young democracies; in terms of quality and stability, they no longer differ much from those of Western Europe.<sup>8</sup> Four countries – Croatia, Latvia, Bulgaria, and

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7. Such an index is being developed in a research project I am directing (»Democracy Barometer«) for the OECD states within the research network of the Swiss National Centers of Competence in Research (NCCR). The barometer will permit differentiation and more discriminating detection of variance between the individual dimensions of democracy and the countries than is presently possible.

8. They certainly need not fear comparison with Berlusconi's Italy, the United States under G. W. Bush, and Austria, while it allows itself to be co-governed by a xenophobic, racist political party.

Romania – are well on the way to consolidation, though it is certain that their problems with corruption, organized crime, and the weakness of the judiciary cannot be overcome quickly. There are six countries whose democracies have been unable to consolidate. In three of them – Albania, Russia, and Belarus – democratic consolidation is unlikely in the foreseeable future. Even a sympathetic interpretation credits the dilemma of simultaneity with having forecast a good deal less than 50 percent of the outcomes, an accuracy rate probably below that of random guesswork. Has the theorem therefore failed? With the advantage of hindsight, one must concede the point. My thesis is that the theory failed not despite its theoretical elegance, but precisely because of it. Structures, cultures, commerce, tradition, history, and paths are rendered invisible as impure theoretical variables under the umbrella of an implicit assumption that all things are equal. Subsuming states such as the Czech Republic, Albania, and Russia, whose economic, cultural, and historical backgrounds are highly dissimilar, under a single dilemma was a misjudgment of the degree to which the potential for democratization differs between them.

Of course, the behavior of the elites plays a major role in democratization. Elite settlement and convergence not infrequently pave the way for the first important successes in institutionalizing democratic processes. The decision in favor of parliamentary systems of government in the Baltic and Central and Eastern Europe advanced consolidation rapidly. Action theories and decision-making theories provide indispensable *partial* explanations of the course taken by changes of system. But it can say little about how those decisions become institutionalized in the infinitely complex environments of real regime change and about which at kinds of configurations and regimes they coalesce into. In particular, this theoretical murkiness has engulfed three variables that explain much of the rapid success with consolidation, especially in Central and Eastern Europe: modernity, governance, and external actors. They are primarily variables that modernization theory and systems theory, as well as structuralism have placed at the center of their explanations of democratization.

## Modernity

Overshadowed by the massive problems of postcommunist transformation, the fact that the level of modernization in most of the countries in the western part of Eastern Europe was higher than it had been in Southern Europe in the 1970s, or in Latin America in the 1980s remained hidden

to theoreticians. Above all, their forecasts seldom systematically included a crucial factor of modernization: the level of education. It has been known for some time in modernization-centered research on democratization that the level of education is the decisive predictor for sustainable democratization. The level of education was higher, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, than in the other transformation countries of the third wave. The fact that cognitive resources were evenly distributed in communist Europe enhanced their democratizing thrust. Modernity also encompasses postcommunist society's potential for the development of civil society. This aspect, too, is underappreciated in the historically oblivious tabula-rasa form of argumentation. Moreover, communist modernization left relatively narrow socioeconomic inequalities, on the whole. This factor, too, was a considerable comparative advantage that postcommunist Europe had over Asia and Latin America as far as democratization was concerned. Lacking organizational resources, the losers from the economic reforms did not block continued economic transformation, contrary to expectations based on the dilemma of simultaneity; opposition came instead from the winners of the first phase of reform. The extremely inequalitarian distribution of economic and cognitive resources represents a constant destructive potential for democracy, especially in Latin America. The attendant problem of low-intensity citizenship therefore barely arose in Central and Eastern Europe. The, by regional comparison, high level of cultural and social modernization there first reinforced the aspiration for democracy and then stabilized the solid acceptance of its norms, institutions, procedures, and outcomes in the Baltic countries and in Central and Eastern Europe.

## Governance

Governance is understood in this context in two senses. First, it refers to the integrity of a »Staatsvolk«, national territory, and state power; second, to the administrative capability of the state bureaucracy. In this regard, two groups of Eastern European countries must generally be differentiated: Those that had no problems with the Jellinek trinity (Jellinek 1905) of a functioning state, and those – namely, Russia, former Yugoslavia, Albania, and, in a milder way, Ukraine – that had special problems and could not solve them peacefully. With the exception of Slovenia, which solved the problem quickly in 1991, this second group consists of the countries with the lowest degree of democratic consolidation. Croatia

was engaged the longest in the ethnic civil war in the Balkans, an involvement that largely explains that country's belated consolidation. The Baltic countries and the Czech Republic (1992) resolved their territorial and demos-related problem quickly and peacefully.<sup>9</sup> These countries, and Slovakia a few years later, are today among the consolidated democracies. Albania long had problems establishing the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of force, a fact still manifested in a special weakness of the state. Serbia-Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo are nowhere near solving the problem of affiliation with a demos. Irredentism, nationalism, and ethnopopulism jeopardize these fragile electoral democracies. In Russia, the secessionist proclivities in Chechnya and the entire Caucasus have surely contributed to a reauthoritarianization of the political regime. Where the »state of the state« has remained precarious, it has played a significant part in preventing democratic consolidation.

The success and failure of democratic consolidation in Eastern Europe has been influenced far more by the problem of governance than by possible interference through simultaneous political and economic transformation. Linz and Stepan (1996: 28) have succinctly formulated just how essential a functioning state is: »Without a state, there can be no citizenship; without citizenship, there can be no democracy.«

But in those countries that did not experience governance problems, the communist regime left a passably functioning state, comparatively extensive public resources, and an understanding of the necessary functions of government. This efficiency certainly has not been able to measure up to that of the Scandinavian or other Western European states, but it has been far superior to the deficient governance encountered in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Southern and Southeastern Asia. Autocracies fixated on the state bequeath a more positive legacy for democratization than do dictatorships with weak state structures. Converting an omnipotent leviathan is obviously simpler than developing a functioning political system out of failed or fragile states. This problem has not yet been sufficiently considered in transformation research.

## External Actors

Action-theory transitologists have focused on the actors within the process of democratization. The same observation applies to the dilemma of

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9. Latvia is a minor exception with regard to the demos-related problem.



simultaneity; external actors have been largely ignored. Nonetheless, both the history of success with the second wave of democratization and the EU's aid to Portugal, Spain, and Greece in the 1970s could have made observers aware of how external support and multilateral integration into regional democratic alliances can foster and accelerate a country's democratic consolidation. The European Community (EC) had communicated to the accession countries a clearly formulated link: membership in exchange for a functioning democracy; the incentive of being admitted to the EC, with all the associated economic advantages and increase in prosperity, triggered a push-and-pull effect on the efforts of the three countries to consolidate their democracies.

In the early 1990s the same situation arose for the new democracies in Northeastern, Central, and Eastern Europe. Through the Copenhagen Criteria (1993), the European Union (EU) formally spelled out the link between democracy and membership, stipulating that only consolidated democracies with market economies were to be admitted to the EU. Most of the nine democracies of Central and Eastern Europe raced each other to meet the conditions for entry. The adaptation of standards and institutions to the »*acquis communautaire*« in the 1990s gave a great impetus to the young democracies with hopes of admission, but had these states not already met the preconditions – modernity and efficient government – they would not have been invited to join the EU. The interdependent triad of modernity, governance, and EU accession resolved the dilemma of simultaneity. The young democracies of Northeastern, Central and Eastern Europe were consolidated more rapidly than Spain and Portugal, not to mention countries in Latin America, Asia, or Africa.

The young democracies of Northeastern, Central and Eastern Europe are consolidated. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Baltic States have attained a degree of democratic stability that makes swift deconsolidation improbable. The polarized domestic quarrels in Hungary in 2006, the difficult coalition formation in the Czech Republic that lasted for months (2006/2007), and even the illiberal and chauvinistic lapses of the Kaczynski government in Poland show that the democracies in these countries are sufficiently robust to prevent such domestic crises from worsening. But these and other developments are a sign that the quality of Central and Eastern European democracies is still distinguishable from that of Sweden, Finland, the UK, or Germany. These differences in quality lie above the consolidation threshold that these countries passed in the 1990s, however.

What remains of »the dilemma of simultaneity«? The assumption of dilemmatic interferences between the politically governed introduction of capitalism and the building of democratic institutions at the core of the hypothesis did not pass its final empirical examination. It can be considered »exhausted.« Explanatory power is maintained by the side argument of the theorem that refers to the problem of governance and democracy. It should be moved to the cleared blank space and so to the center of future transformation research. Here lie the actual path dependencies and dead hands of decision-making processes in the course of transformation. By »bringing the state back in« the explanatory power of action theory is not devalued but, on the contrary, its full analytical potential is unfolded since political conduct is analytically bound to institutional contexts in this way and not only to game-theoretical strategic calculi. In this framework transformation research remains protected against the too actor-centered approaches of the 1980s and 1990s. Without an appropriate synthesis of elements of action theory, structural theory, and cultural theory only partial truths may be discovered in regime and transformation research. They have their justification, but should not be sold as the whole.

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