

A stylized map of Europe composed of a grid of dots. The dots are mostly light gray, with several red dots highlighting specific countries: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania.

Transformation Experiences in Central and Eastern Europe

The Case of Poland in Comparative Perspective

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- Poland's history of medieval freedoms and outside rule, coupled with its idiosyncratic experience of socialism – more liberal and less authoritarian than in other Warsaw Bloc countries – prepared the ground both for the Solidarity movement and for the later transition to democracy.
- The election of 2015 – won by the conservative Law and Justice party (PiS) – has been a turning point for the country. Despite the lack of a mandate, the PiS has proceeded on a path towards illiberal democracy, replacing elites, taking over the media and attacking the constitutional order.
- Various political and sociological theories can explain the results of the election and imply further hypotheses to be tested. It remains to be seen what path the PiS will take in the future – how far towards authoritarianism the government will go and whether this will lead to a mobilization of the populace.



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Introduction

In this paper I argue the following: Polish transformation and democratic consolidation has strong idiosyncratic features derived from deep historical phenomena, from the nature of Polish socialism as actually experienced and also from the very transition itself, in particular the country's first-comer status as the first Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries to transition to democracy and its prolonged, overlapping phases of transition/consolidation. Poland's quarter-of-a-century experience with democracy and a market economy has turned out to be an unquestioned success, both absolutely and in comparison to other countries of the region. And yet, in 2015 a conservative-nationalistic camp won the election and began implementing non-democratic policies. The result of this election may have been unexpected; however the consequences of the new policies being implemented by the Law and Justice Party (PiS) are threatening the very pillars of democracy.

Theoretical and Historical Legacies

Scholars writing about democratic transitions and consolidations of democracy typically face a serious problem of how far back in time to go in order to make sure the lengthy historical context and proper historical legacies are taken into consideration. This case is no exception to this rule, especially if we want (and we do) to explain the Polish developments of the last quarter of a century by factors falling into the category of causal depth (Kitschelt 2001).

Our examination of the important determinants of the Polish transformation can be divided roughly into three parts. In the first, a general review of the Polish historical legacy is provided. The second concentrates on the crucial events affecting all of East Central Europe and the ultimate dismantling of the Soviet bloc. Part three interprets one of the most significant phases of the Polish transformation: the 1989–1990 period that ended with the election of Lech Wałęsa, in the country's first fully free electoral contest, after the collapse of communism.

Medieval Freedoms and Outsider Rule

In the period between the beginning of the 16th century and the interwar (1918–1939) developments, many in-

novative – by world standards – institutions and political solutions were tried. In 1505 the *Nihil Novi* statute was enacted, ruling that no taxation and ultimately no legislation could be approved by the king without parliamentary consent. The *liberum veto* principle held that any single deputy could veto not only the bill under consideration but also all legislation passed earlier by the legislature.

This tradition, coupled with the imperative mandate of the elected gentry and with the election of Polish kings by the *szlachta* assembled in a convocation, or *Sejm*, contributed in the long term to extraordinary freedoms for the gentry, a weakening of the central (monarch's) power, and to the decentralisation and regional autonomy of aristocratic families. Ultimately these developments led, however, to the Partitions of Poland under the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Hapsburg Austria, beginning in 1772. The resurrection of the Polish state in 1918 and one of the most important events in European history – the 1920 defeat of the Bolsheviks at the battle of Warsaw, which stopped their drive towards Western Europe – were the most significant events for Poland at the beginning of the 20th century. The short-lived democracy of the interwar period from 1918 to 1926, followed by nearly ten years of »soft authoritarianism« or – if you will – the »delegative democracy« of the time, became a »tough authoritarianism« under the constitution of 1935. It goes without saying that World War II had and continues to have a significant impact on the contemporary historical and political consciousness of the Polish people (see Tazbir 1973; Gieysztor 1979; Davies 1981, 1996; Jasienica 1985; Lukowski & Zawadzki 2001; Sanford 2002).

The long-lasting historical legacies of medieval golden freedoms had been strengthened even more in the period of the Partitions and Nazi occupation, then followed by Soviet domination. For the last two centuries, with the short exception of the interwar period, outsiders ruled Poland. As a consequence, one of the major components of the political socialisation of Poles was disobedience to political authority. This phenomenon has had lasting effects.

These consequences of Poland's history appear more as obstacles rather than assets for constructing a contemporary liberal democratic state. This is partly true; on the other hand, however, had it not been for this disobedience to power, suspicion of political elites and readiness to go against what »real politics« would involve, to place

such value upon all forms of freedom – then the »Solidarity« phenomenon would probably not have occurred and the transformation which began in 1988/89 would have been inconceivable (Ash 1983; Ost 1990; Huntington 1991; Staniszkis 1984, 1991; Kubik 1994).

Idiosyncrasies of Polish socialism: 1945–1989

Several peculiarities of Polish communism are worth mentioning. First, I do share the opinion of Linz and Stepan (1996) that the totalitarian phase in post-war Poland was either missing altogether or its manifestations were marginal and short-lived. Briefly, by regional standards, Polish communism was fairly liberal.

Another distinctive Polish phenomenon was the role played by the Catholic Church. The most important consequence of its formal recognition and legal operation was the very existence of an institutionally recognised alternative to the authoritarian ideology, and consequently the survival of an inter-paradigmatic dialogue at the macro level and an obstacle to the unconstrained spread of the socialist orthodoxy.

Furthermore, the post-World-War-II period in Poland was marked, in contrast to the other Eastern Bloc countries, by a structural anomaly: the existence of private ownership, mainly (though not exclusively) in agriculture, resulting in a relatively independent alternative economy, a nascent culture of entrepreneurship and a widespread spirit of self-reliance.

Finally, unlike any of the other countries of the region, Poland enjoyed a certain political liberalism – the relative freedom of the media, science and culture, etc. This was especially true from the early 1970s (Ramet 1991).

Polish civil society of the 1970s and 1980s was fairly well organised. Virtually all spheres of societal activity were covered by grass-roots, informal institutions of the »alternative, second« society, »shadow economy«, etc. (Ramet 1991; Staniszkis 1991). Precisely this trait (a lack of formal legitimacy yet strong social basis) proved to be the source of its viability and para-political power, crucial in times of authoritarian backlashes (i. e. under martial law).

These Polish idiosyncrasies were good preparation for the birth of the Solidarity movement. The election of a

Polish Pope and subsequently his spiritually inspired but ultimately politically consequential visits, especially the 1979 one, strengthened the anti-regime forces. By that time, Poland had been successful in organising a functional opposition, rather than the scattered groups of dissidents which emerged in some, though not even all, countries of the Soviet bloc.

And still another phenomenon needs to be emphasised. The 16 months of Solidarity's official existence marks an unprecedented period for Poland and for communism in general. The experience gained by Solidarity leaders during this period proved important later. It was the experience of a non-violent movement that started off as a classical trade union concerned with job-related and redistributive issues, was later forced to become a national movement fighting for civil and political rights and ultimately played the role of a national liberation force aimed at dismantling ties to the Soviet Bloc. The conviction that debate and negotiations were possible without the use of violence became an important directive.

The Round Table Talks and June 1989 Elections

There are elegant game theory interpretations of the Polish events of 1989 (Colomer 1991), which analyse the bargaining process between the old regime's representatives and the democratic contenders (Elster 1996) at the Polish Round Table Talks – a series of negotiations between the Polish government and the Solidarity trade union and other opposition groups in February-April 1989. What is missing in such analyses – and what in my view have been much more powerful factors in the immediate outcomes of the Round Table Talks, their more lasting institutional consequences (cf. Lijphart 1992) and ultimately the current democratic backlash – are the following: (i) the very existence of an external veto player – Moscow, resulting in specific choices, mostly concerning electoral rules, determined by the high level of uncertainty of the game and (ii) the political actors who were not present at the Round Table.

Let me address the above issues briefly:

- (i) Information about the bargaining at the Round Table and at its so-called »sub-tables« and their outcomes reached Moscow almost instantaneously. In a nutshell, the level of uncertainty in early 1989 was

very high. Following the classic ideas of Rokkan and Lijphart (1992), one can easily point to the reason that Polish elites had to embark on a fairly complicated political system with many »veto points« – a bicameral parliament (one chamber fully democratically elected, the other »compartmentalised«), a semi-presidential system with a strong prime-ministerial executive and fairly strong judicial review institutions. The contract, to put it simply, was fairly vague and very path-dependent. Semi-free elections coupled with a complicated political system; no new constitution but rather a thoroughly changed old communist one; an important role played by the Constitutional Court in interpreting the many contradictions that would inevitably arise – all of these contributed to what might be called an environment of fluid deliberation and a context of a temporary nature. Indeed, it took Poland almost eight years until the final constitution was approved in 1997.

- (ii) As it ultimately turned out, Polish post-authoritarian politics turned out to be determined more by the clash between those opposition forces who were present at the Round Table and those who – for many different reasons – were absent. Among those who were absent at the time, both at the Round Table and among the figures imprisoned during the period of martial law, was Jarosław Kaczyński, at the time a fairly negligible figure. It is this division that later proved to be consequential for the future of Polish politics.

Partial Conclusions

There seem to be several aspects of Poland's historical legacy that proved conducive to democratic transformation – starting from medieval freedoms, through rule by outsiders during the Partition as well as during the communist experience, to the idiosyncrasies both of Polish socialism as actually practised and the transition itself. Let me reiterate at this point the importance of Poland's status as a »first-comer« in the transition and as a consequence the country's prolonged period of transition to consolidation. To be sure, analytically it is worth distinguishing the three distinct phases of the process as described by Samuel Huntington (1991) – (i) the »mode of the authoritarian exit«; (ii) embarking on a particular »political institutional infrastructure«; and (iii) specific

traits of »consolidation«. Poland – unlike the other CEE countries – manifested a very prolonged period for each of these phases and a certain level of overlap between them. And again, for the long-term historical perspective (say, in a century from now) the Polish starting point of the transformation is going to be set at 1980 – the establishment of the first »Solidarity« trade union. This, followed by the authoritarian backlash of the imposition of martial law (barely two years) and the consequent re-opening of negotiations between the communist government and Solidarity are events likely to be considered as a single decade of turbulence. Moreover, the main actors of the drama from 1980 and those who created the transition are the same: Solidarity and its leader, Lech Wałęsa, on the one side and the communists, headed by general Jaruzelski, on the other.

Furthermore, Polish transition in the economic domain was marked by a dramatic success right from the beginning – Poland was the first among Eastern European countries to overcome the deep recession of the early transition, as already in 1992 it was enjoying GDP growth (2.4% that year). Looking at the entire period between 1989 and 2015, Poland shows the highest GDP growth among all post-communist countries, amounting to 220–230 per cent of its 1989 volume. Moreover, the impressive GDP growth as of 2015 was accompanied by a relatively moderate level of inequality (a GINI coefficient of .29 as compared to .36 in 2002) and single-digit unemployment amounting to between 7–9 per cent, depending on how it is counted. There are numerous other positive Human Development Indices that document the extraordinary encouraging developments of Poland during the last quarter of a century, starting with an increased life expectancy for both sexes, significantly lower infant mortality, an educational boom and the like (Czapinski, Panek 2015; EUROSTAT 2016).

Still, other phenomena exist that point to less positive developments: the low social capital, public apathy, electoral passivity, etc. indicate that contemporary Poles are far from being active participatory citizens. High numbers of immigrants to the West, a high youth unemployment rate and insecure, unstable jobs for the young describe the flip side of the coin. More macro-economic phenomena – from the purely demographic to the of the poor condition of the pension system – pose a real challenge for the future.

The Turning Point – the October 2015 Parliamentary Elections

My main argument on the »supply side revolution« that took place in Poland in the fall of 2015 – presented in detail elsewhere (Markowski 2016a; 2016b) – is based on the fact that hardly any evidence existed in the fall of 2015 of a social »demand« for radical change. In what follows in this section I will show data confirming this state of affairs, with public opinion polls carried out as late as in October, November and even December 2015 – that is, up to two months after the election.

The 2015 parliamentary election had a number of specific features. Above all, it wasn't primarily about the economy: indeed, evaluations of Poland's economic performance seem not to have been relevant to the decisions made by voters. Some 80 per cent of Poles were satisfied with their jobs and lives in general as well as with their household situation (CBOS 2015; 2016) but remained dissatisfied from a political perspective, distrusting elites, parties and parliamentarians, and expressing a preoccupation with alleged threats to Poland and the Polish way of life emanating from wider global forces (Markowski, Tworzecki 2016). The actions of the then opposition party, PiS, are described in detail elsewhere (Markowski 2016b) and can be briefly summarised as an effective campaign aimed at persuading Poles that the »country is in ruins«, that Poland is at best a semi-sovereign entity (a »Russian-German condominium«) and that traitors, among them Tusk and Komorowski, had deliberately conspired with Putin to bring about the death of President Kaczyński at Smolensk. The PiS also benefited from offering a number of irresponsibly costly but widely popular pledges (for details see Markowski 2016b).

Finally, the Catholic Church also played an important role, conveying clear partisan preferences. According to a poll conducted after the 2011 election, of those respondents who reported that parish priests had openly indicated the party for which a Catholic should vote, 9 out of 10 said that the party in question was PiS. In the 2015 election, the political interference of the Church was even more overt.

Free and Fair Elections with Unfair Consequences

The pervasive media opinion on the landslide victory of the PiS and the allegedly massive support for radical change

in Poland is unsubstantiated, once one pays rudimentary attention to the details of the electoral results. The Polish October 2015 parliamentary election resulted in the victory of a single party, Law and Justice (PiS). This was due not so much to a significant shift in the preferences of voters, but was rather the result of a very high number of wasted votes – votes cast for parties that did not achieve the minimum five per cent threshold for representation (almost 17 per cent of active voters). The senior coalition partner in the 2011–2015 government, Civic Platform (PO), lost a significant share of the vote, but if one considers the newly established party Nowoczesna (Modern) as a direct heir of the liberal policy platform almost identical to that of the early (i. e. 2001) PO, then the centre-liberal camp together obtained 32 per cent of the vote.

The turnout in this election was low - in line with Polish tradition, in which on average always around half of eligible voters participate in parliamentary elections. In 2015 just short of 51 per cent of the electorate voted, which means that the 5.7 million citizens who voted for the PiS constitute 18.6 per cent of eligible voters. Let us recall that the PiS electoral committee actually constituted a three-party coalition; while PiS was clearly the dominant entity, the minor parties PR and SP commanded approximately 2–3 per cent support each, which means that in terms of absolute numbers they added about 700,000–750,000 votes to the PiS electoral success, which is a significant contribution to the overall 5.7 million votes the PiS list was capable of attracting.

As a consequence, the 2015 election can hardly be called a landslide victory of PiS and is far from reshaping the face of Polish party politics. Its results generally confirm the presence of a divide that has been in place over the course of the last decade between two roughly equal nationalist-populist and centrist-liberal camps. What is new is the absence of the left in the parliament (for details why, see Markowski 2016b).

An attempt has been undertaken (Markowski, Stanley 2016) to depict and explain Polish party politics with the theory of cleavage politics, in particular to answer the main question in this tradition, that is: whether the voter-party relationship has become »frozen«. The analyses show that the entire post-1989 period in Poland can be divided into at least three phases, the latest of which begins after the 2005 election, unveiling features of (weak, yet visible) »freezing«, i. e. party system stability meas-

ured by voter loyalty across time. And even if the overall instability of the party system increased between 2011 and 2015, still the two major rival blocks retain both their ideological and programmatic position, as well as the size of their followers' support.

On the Unexpected Post-electoral Developments: An Attempt at Tentative Explanation

It should be emphasised at this point that the October 25 parliamentary election in Poland was free and fair, with no indication of any fraud or procedural misconduct. As a consequence, the PiS had the legitimacy to govern and to implement all public policies as they wished. Instead, immediately after their victory the ruling PiS embarked on an unprecedented attack on both internal and external political actors who did not share their policy preferences. The tone of Polish politics rapidly became nationalist, anti-European in general and anti-German in particular, and served to alienate Poland's most important global partners. Domestically, the radical turn consisted in a campaign to persuade Poles that their country was »in ruins« after the PO-PSL government, marked by the use of insulting and divisive rhetoric by major PiS figures – including the president – about political opponents, dubbing them »traitors«, »gangsters« and »cro-nies«. Those protesting against the government's violations of the Constitution were referred to as »the worst sort of Poles« and »genetically prone to treason«.

Unfortunately, the actions of the new government were not restricted only to symbolic divisions and linguistic vulgarity. In the first few months after the election, the PiS already made significant steps towards turning back democratic progress in Poland: (i) it effectively paralysed the Constitutional Tribunal, and in doing so clearly breached the Polish Constitution of 1997 on several counts (for details see: Opinion of the Venice Commission, published on 11th March 2016); (ii) it assumed direct control of the public media, turning it into a state media with a distinctly »nationalist-megalomaniac« narrative and one-sided, partisan news coverage, resulting in a dramatic decline in viewing figures, estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands;¹ and (iii) it assumed direct control over the appointment and dismissal of civil servants.

1. <http://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/wiadomosci/televizja/wyniki-ogladalnosci>, accessed on March 28, 2016.

These three attacks on the pillars of democracy and on the legally binding constitutional order are only the most prominent among many other attempts to change political realities in Poland. And again, let me emphasise that there were no reasons and no expectations for such a profound revolutionary change (Markowski, Kotnarowski 2016; Markowski, Tworzecki 2016).

Cultural Revolution, *Estado Novo*? Where Are We Heading and Why?

Nine months into the new political reality in Poland is a bit too early to satisfy the expectations of social scientists to explain the phenomenon of what the PiS is doing.

I am hesitant to jump into generalisations after only a few months of the new government in power, but obviously a sketchy picture can be painted. To be sure, in my view the new PiS government actions indicate that they themselves do not have an overarching blueprint and a positive plan, but are rather opting for »radical change«, even if its justification is obscure and ambiguous.

Radical Changes

First of all, Kaczyński's objective is discontinuity – discontinuity in all domains. Historically, his mindset is a *fin de siècle* one – borders, industry, nation, enemies, nationalisation and the like dominate his imagination and linguistic repertoire. His distaste for the liberal world is well documented.

Second, Kaczyński's aim is to rewrite the contemporary history of Poland, from the First Solidarity (1980–1981) and his negligible status at the time, to the reconstruction of the reality surrounding the period of late 1980s and the Round Table of 1989 accords – the latter being labelled by PiS and its leaders as »treason« of the elites and the formation of an anti-national alliance of communists and liberals. Generally, the new historical narrative claims that the entire 27 years of democratic Poland has been a period of civilisational disaster – a lack of sovereignty, semi-independent status and loss of »Polishness« at the expense of decadent Western liberal values.

Third, it is hardly necessary to emphasise that in order to achieve this and to justify the radical changes, cer-

tain historical confabulations are necessary. On the one hand, we are witnessing a tremendous boom of national megalomania and religious fervour. On the other, Lech Wałęsa and most prominent figures of the »Solidarity« movement proper², such as Mazowiecki, Geremek, Kuroń, Michnik or Frasnyniuk, are being downgraded to the status of servants (if not slaves) to the cosmopolitan-liberal global camp.

Fourth, a full-blown replacement of elites, and the consequent redistribution of social prestige, is another priority of the PiS government. It starts with the judiciary, public administration and the media, but moves rapidly towards business (the management of state-treasury-owned enterprises being the focal point), education (including first attempts at limiting university and academic autonomy)³ and – obviously – the police and special forces. The analyses of this particular aspect of the radical change envisaged by the PiS points to the theory of open vs closed access to the social order (North et al. 2013). In a nutshell, the replacement of the elites is the first step towards a withdrawal from open, meritocratic recruitment based on competence and skills and a reliance on closed access via particular criteria – loyalty, ascribed status traits (e.g. religiosity), »patriotism«, national sensitivity and the like.

Fifth, we definitely live in an era of increased influence for semi-democratic to openly despotic regimes, the latter gaining economic importance in the globalised world. The brown-grey area which is neither full democracy nor despotism is alarmingly well represented. Such systems are being creatively described with a fair selection of new terminology – »soft authoritarianism«, »illiberal democracies«, etc. Some of these regimes are openly »modern«, claim democratic principles and persuade their people to be more »effective« than those in democracies, allowing for faster growth and development, while skilfully criticising the actual and invented shortcomings of democracies, in particular their elitism and the alleged sluggishness of their decision-making. One of the first fundamental objectives to be accomplished is to attain total control over the media and en-

gage in deliberate misinformation of the citizenry as to the actual state of affairs. These new autocrats make effective use of the democratic vocabulary. They pay lip-service to the key principles of liberal democracy, yet they are very much interested in running elections as mechanisms to legitimise de facto non-democratic rule.

The PiS's Poland, half a year after the election, seems to be on a definite path to becoming an illiberal democracy.

The Portuguese or the Hungarian Blueprint

Today the answer to the question of »why« and »to what aim« is difficult; more time should be allowed to determine the precise nature of the ultimate new social and political order conceived (if at all) by the PiS. If I were, however, to search for well-established historical examples of the PiS regime blueprint to be installed I would opt for two. First, even if unconscious, the end product of the PiS's activities might be – perhaps slightly more populist and democratic than the original, but still – a version of the *Estado Novo* (Schmitter 1975), the corporatist authoritarian regime, that ruled Portugal under António de Oliveira Salazar. Most of Salazar's inventions are close to Kaczyński's heart: restrained modernisation, nationalism, conservatism in the socio-cultural domain, Catholicism and above all a clear drive towards corporatist solutions at the expense of civil society and civil freedoms. If one adds the strong hierarchical, organic and integralist orientation of the *Estado Novo* and, moreover, the key idea that desirable, yet national, modernisation has to be controlled by »decent« Catholic-rural-people's forces, the above paints a mosaic similar to the future end-product of the PiS's Poland.

Second, the Prime Minister of Hungary, Victor Orbán, has always been the role model for Kaczyński, at least since 2010. And again, a significant number of the latter's policy ideas are simply emulated from the policies of Orbán's party, Fidesz. The question remains open as to whether the Poland of the PiS will end up with the same level of illiberalism and sheer corruption that Orbán's regime has managed to achieve after 6 years in power (Magyar 2016). There are several differences between, and different reasons for, the Polish and the Hungarian cases – the most important one being that Kaczyński's regime has no constitutional majority, and all its illiberal moves as well as clear violations of the ef-

2. These days in Poland it is necessary to use the adjective »proper« for »Solidarity« movements as acknowledged by the whole world, as opposed to the current Solidarity trade union, whose leadership is politically dependent on PiS.

3. The first hints at the PiS's willingness to »review« scholarly degrees and titles were mentioned in April 2016. The practical side of the proposal is unclear, yet the threat is fairly serious.

fective 1997 Constitution provisions have no justification in the electoral mandate PiS received. The fundamental distinction, however, lies in the economic development and modernisation of the two countries in the quarter of a century after 1989. The dynamics of change – a very important experience of Homo Politicus – taught Poles that economic and civilisational miracles can happen and that, even if they were critical of the PO/PSL government of 2007–2015, nevertheless the psychological imprint of a country that has changed dramatically and caught up with the Hungarian GDP per capita is part of the Poles' political experience. Last, but not least, the Polish parliamentary as well as extra-parliamentary opposition seems to be in much better shape than the Hungarian opposition of 2010. Hundreds of thousands of Poles on the streets – demonstrating either against such circumstances as the violations of the Constitution and the paralysis of the Constitutional Court or in favour of, for example, the European Union and the Polish presence in it – reveal the vibrancy of Polish civil society, at least so far.

The first year of the PiS's rule underlines the cancer-like growth of irregularities, from an unaccountable leader whose decisions are executed without any legal/formal grounding to the seemingly sham ultralegalism of their activities, now forms part of the daily experiences of Poles. The question is whether this will lead society to adjust to this state of affairs or whether it will mobilise societal resistance.

Theoretical Explanations

Finally, the little that might serve as an explanation of the marginal victory of the nationalist camp in Poland in the fall of 2015, can be examined through the lens of two theories:

(a) The century-long narrative of William Ogburn's »cultural lag theory« ought to be the starting point (Ogburn 1922). His enduring intellectual legacy is the theory of social change and disorganisation. If one is ready – as I most certainly am – to translate this language of social modernisation into political terms, and to define democratic institutional infrastructure (electoral rules, the logic of bicameralism, the prerogatives of the Constitutional Court and the like) as politico-technological inventions that arose in CEE

countries via the process of diffusion (another important phase in the chain of Ogburn's theory) from the West, then one can submit the following. Apparently, the effort at familiarising the public of the new democracies with these – de facto – technocratic innovations has been relatively unsuccessful in socialisation terms. Briefly, the essence and the logic of the institutional opportunity structure of democracy have apparently failed to become »nested« in the public mindset and political culture at large. In other words, the mechanical and the psychological effects (Duverger 1954) of institutional functioning have become temporally detached from one another. In David Easton's (1965) parlance, the *diffuse political support* for liberal democracies has apparently not been deeply embedded and still remains contextually determined.

(b) The other theoretical opportunity to explain what has happened in Poland derives from simple »relative deprivation« accounts, as in the proposals of Gurr or Davies, which concentrate on the juxtaposition of objective developments vis-à-vis the growing expectations of the public. This applies to the Hungarian case much better than the Polish, yet only if we focus on socio-economic issues alone.

Had the space allowed I would have discussed here another accompanying phenomenon which is the so-called »accountability neurosis« among post-communist democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. Briefly, the new democratic citizens of CEE countries are – *en masse* – unprepared for a realistic assessment of the accomplishments of government.⁴ Democratic theory is convincingly serious about the necessity of government's *responsiveness* to citizens' preferences as the absolute requisite of qualitative democracy, yet empirical democratic theory insists that this requisite has to be »matched« by the *responsible* citizen (Soroka, Wlezién 2012). The logic and mechanism of this relationship is fairly obvious: if citizens use non-meritocratic, non-rational or otherwise non-empirical criteria for evaluating the deeds of the incumbents, then there is little incentive on the side of politicians to behave both responsibly and responsively.

4. Apart from limited skills for adequate (or fair, if you will) evaluation of government's accomplishments by citizens, an additional problem stems from the unconstrained overbidding practiced by parties during electoral campaigns, leading to substantial »promise inflation«, usually of objectively unattainable promises.

Instead of Conclusions: Potential Hypotheses to Be Tested in the Near Future

This section provides a brief enumeration of the hypotheses I will be testing soon.

- 1) Revisiting the legacies: Since it is those countries which were the first-comers and (allegedly) successfully democratised ones (HU & PL) which now see democracy under threat, perhaps their historical legacies (nationalism, religion, ethnic homogeneity) were conducive to the transformation phase, but do not work effectively for maintaining their democracies in the long run.
- 2) Are we faced in Hungary and Poland with problems typical of unconsolidated democracies (naively and too early declared consolidated) or is it a phenomenon of a backlash of fully consolidated democracy?
- 3) The Huntingtonian problem (1991): In both Poland and Hungary a prolonged and overlapping period of exit/institution-building/consolidation has taken place with no clear *critical point (juncture)* where the new began and the old vanished. Anti-liberal forces use this as an indication of treason at the Round Tables and as a manifestation of trading horses – a »rotten compromise« that allegedly allowed the apparatchiks of the old regime together with unethical cosmopolitan forces to strike corrupt deals at the expense of the rank and file.
- 4) In Poland, alas not in Hungary, there has been too much mobilisation at the expense of institutionalisation (Huntington 1968).
- 5) Contemporary problems with democracy are entangled with problems of (this model of) capitalism to the extent that one cannot discuss one without the other. Democracy – as the common wisdom goes – has, in conjunction with the market, the likes of which have been unseen previously in human history, become beset with inequalities, unresponsive government, and problems with accountability.
- 6) This phenomenon is coupled with another, namely that of »executive dominance« among the allegedly autonomous and equal separated powers. This phenomenon occurs in stable democracies (New Zealand, UK and elsewhere) as well, but plays a destructive role in fragile, new democracies.
- 7) The aforementioned »cultural lag theory« (Ogburn 1922), can be (ought to be) contextualised and explained by a phenomenon similar to the development of first- and second-generation immigrants. It is the second generation of immigrants that revolt against the new society and the reality they are placed in, in contrast to their parents, who prove typically very loyal and conformist vis-à-vis the new habitat. A similar mechanism can be observed when the second generation of new democrats enters the political arena – they seem to be less cognizant of the ancient regime's shortcomings and less predisposed to find comparisons with the past either meaningful or helpful.
- 8) Finally, the current crisis of liberal democracies is not so much derived from the crisis of liberalism itself (as a broad ideology), but rather from the crisis of individualism, in particular its competitive foundations at the expense of solidarity mechanisms.
- 9) Winners vs Losers. Losers of the transformation differ from the winners in two fundamental ways: (a) they perceive their lot as collective and not individual, and (b) they attribute (they blame) this lot on »external« forces, not themselves. The reverse is – most of the time – true for winners: they consider their success to be their own and they present (what Rotter calls) an »internal locus of control«. As a consequence, losers face a situation that is intellectually easier and behaviourally more conducive to mobilisation. Since their lot is perceived as collective and there is someone out there to be blamed for it (and moreover there are potent institutions – church, opposition parties – keen to do so) their readiness to blame the government and the state for their lot, as well as the attribution mechanism at hand, is understandable from the psychological point of view. In the Polish 2015 elections this did not contribute to the landslide change, yet it certainly helped the winning party enlarge its electoral support by 2–3 per cent.



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