Post-Communist Transformation and the Problem of Weak States. Reconceptualizing the Legacy of Communism

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2001

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Post-Communist Transformation and the Problem of Weak States
Reconceptualizing the Legacy of Communism

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Abstract

In the transformation processes in post-communist East Central Europe and in the processes of integration with the West, the legacy of dysfunctional state structures and state-society relations is an important factor both in the transformation processes themselves and in the processes of integration. Inadequate political and economic reforms have led to policy failure, with implications for the rule of law, the development of democratic institutions, and the economic performance of the countries. This paper addresses the question of how the legacy of communist-era state structures and state-society relations has influenced the transformation of these post-communist countries. It argues that the legacy of the communist-era state has contributed to the slow pace of transformation and the persistence of economic and political problems. The paper also examines the role of civil society in the transformation process and the ways in which it has interacted with the state. Finally, it discusses the challenges and opportunities for future transformation in post-communist East Central Europe.
Introduction

As emphasized by several authors, government shortcomings are functional and, as
were the problems and successes of old-style states are vital for understanding how
and why governments function. The question of how we should understand the
differences between the economies and their state structures is important. The
differences between the former and the latter are clear. The former communist
countries have inherited dysfunctional states, which have turned out to be one of
the gravest problems in the transformation processes and in the processes of
integration with the West. In spite of the reunification, the states of the
eastern countries have developed in different ways. The question of how we should
understand the differences between the countries is important. The question of how
the states in East Central Europe (ECE) have developed and will do this in order to
understand the sources of today's government failures is important. In this paper I
will analyze the states in ECE and the state-society relations. The questions are
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the states of the eastern countries have developed and will do this in order to
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One reason why the importance of state transformation in post-communist countries has been underestimated is due to the transition discourse that has happened earlier in a historical institutional perspective, where path dependence is emphasized (cf. Steinmo et al., 1992). Instead, the argument is that state transformation and the role of institutional change depend on what has happened earlier in the functioning of state institutions, and the extent to which they are characterized by ‘stickiness’. Path dependence implies that current institutional change is driven by the historical context in which institutions have been formed, and that institutions do not develop as an efficient response to changes in the environment, but rather evolve over time in a manner that is determined by historical inertia.

The second assumption is based on the view that the importance of the state or the public administration has generally been underestimated in the analysis of post-communist transformation. In the context of the specific circumstances affecting the democratization process in the former Eastern Bloc countries, the so-called ‘destatization’ has emphasized the importance of the state’s role in promoting economic and social development. However, this has also led to a misperception of the state’s role in promoting economic and social development. The legacy of these cognitive maps seems to be the problem of the all-powerful state and the ideological ‘other’ representing totalitarianism and state repression. As aptly put by Stephen Holmes: “Destatization is not the solution, it is the problem” (1997:32). After the fall of the communist regime, the prevailing discourse has been largely focused on reducing the size of the state and empowering political parties and groups in the economic and civil society. Arguments in favor of building a strong post-communist administrative apparatus did not fit well into this. However, during the last few years observers have started to recognize the great need for state transformation. The consequences of compartmentalizing the former Eastern Bloc countries, in particular, are long-term problems and under different regime types (see Linz & Stepan, 1996). The aim of this paper is to analyze the state and its relations to society in a long-term perspective and under different regime types (in particular, the former Eastern Bloc countries).

In analyzing the legacies of communism, the former Eastern Bloc countries have generally been classified in terms of totalitarian post-communist transitions. The aim of this paper is to analyze the state and its relations to society in a long-term perspective and under different regime types (in particular, the former Eastern Bloc countries).

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Post-Communist Transformation and the Problem of Weak States

Conceiving state structures

In studying the state we have to analyze both the internal workings of the state apparatus and state-society relations. How the state conducts domestic and international policies, and how it is perceived by its citizens and other actors, matters.

Legalism has to do with the style, and étatization with the scope, of political authority. All states, independent of political regime, might be classified according to the presence of these two variables. The concepts can also be used in analysis of pre-modern governing systems that predated the development of the modern state. This paper focuses on the ECE countries, although often being more general in scope. ECE is used as a generic term for the Eastern Bloc excluding the Soviet Union, that is East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

2 Conceptualizing state structures

The degree of legality is vital for the functioning of the state and for the authority structures.

Legalism has to do with whether the state conducts its policies in a rule-governed or an arbitrary way, that is to say with the style of political authority. Legalism is a core concept in political sociology, although often implicitly. Legalism is the standard expression in political sociology for the degree of rule-governedness or lawfulness of the state. Legalism is closely related to the idea of the rule of law, i.e. a Rechtsstaat, which has been a central part of the Western cultural tradition. Impersonality, equality, and predictability are important common characteristics (Blomkvist, 1988:188). A state in a democratic society and the rule of law has through history developed hand in hand with political democracy.

The degree of étatization is another core concept in political sociology, and here researchers often draw parallels with the concept of modernization. The degree of étatization is the scope of state action and the capacity of the state to act. Research in political sociology has traditionally been interested in explaining the differences in étatization between states, with a focus on factors such as political regime, economic development, and culture. The concept of étatization is closely related to the idea of the state as an independent actor, and the state's capacity to act independently of other actors.

The importance of both legality and étatization lies in their influence on the authority structures of the state. A high degree of legality, for example, can lead to increased accountability, whereas a high degree of étatization can lead to increased capacity.

In studying the state we have to analyze both the internal workings of the state apparatus and state-society relations. How the state conducts domestic and international policies, and how it is perceived by its citizens and other actors, matters. The concepts of legality and étatization are crucial for understanding the state's functioning and its authority over society.
The concept of étatization refers to the penetration of the social and economic systems by political authority, including the scope and intrusiveness of political authority. In an ideal type manner, we have that a nationalization can simplify competitive power by dominating the polity. Étatization is often associated with a more extensive government role. However, extensive étatization could be upheld by other means than rule-breaking authority. Unlike totalitarian regimes, authoritarian ones leave the economic and sometimes also the social sector without major interference (Lundqvist, 2001:14). Democratic regimes vary quite a lot, in both conceptual and empirical terms. State intervention in democracies is, however, not a simple political-left-right issue. The "New Right" political movements in the West have for example often been strongly against state intervention in the economic sector, while at the same time advocating state intervention in order to uphold traditional moral values in society (Dunleavy & O'Leary, 1987:7).

Why then is the tradition of étatization important to understand how the state functions today in ECE? And what is the connection between the degree of étatization and government performance? Some studies have shown that the communist systems allowed state capacity to be strong and a degree of trust is required between actors in society. Of course, étatization cannot be explained away by reference to the communist past alone. The capacity of the state in society is a question of the power to achieve things, to carry out actual change. There is a commonly observed difference between power over and power to. There is a potential danger in equating the capacity of the state with the actual power to make decisions. Power over is the power to act independently of others, whereas power to is the capacity to act in concert with others. Power over refers to the ability of the state to act autonomously, whereas power to refers to the ability of the state to act in concert with others. The concept of power to is important in understanding how the state functions in society, both in the former communist regimes that have chosen the paths of democratization and marketization and in other post-communist societies. It is important to understand how the state functions in society, as this can affect the ability of the state to carry out its policies.
were devastating for the presence of cooperative relations between the state and society and for the level of trust (Rose, 1994; Smolar, 1996).

We now turn to the analysis of the communist state. The political systems all over communist Europe were constructed after the model of the Soviet Union. This model was shaped by the particular historical development of the Russian state and the experience of the Russian Revolution, which had a profound impact on the development of the Soviet State and its institutions. Consequently, the development of the Soviet state must be analyzed as a first step in understanding the communist systems.

Marxist-Leninism was a reinterpretation of Marxism by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in order to adjust it to Russian conditions (Gerner, 1991:25). The fundamental purpose of the Leninist state was to seize power and to build a socialist society. The Leninist state was to be handled 'by the book' or in terms of political expediency expressed in an always changing party line" (Janos, 1996:6).

As we all know, the Bolshevik strategies and the Comintern failed to create a communist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries. Lenin's death in 1924 brought with it a fierce debate over the goals and means of state socialism. The debate in 1924 would help lay the groundwork for the subsequent development of state socialism under Stalin and the development of the modern Russian state.

The principle of "democratic centralism" was already formulated under Lenin. It came to be characterized by extreme centralization with strict hierarchical authority chains. In the "ideal type" Stalinist system, horizontal relationships between institutions were eliminated and vertical structures with narrow specialization dominated. Just as characteristic was the fusion between the state and the ruling Communist party, which took its shape as a consequence of the political leadership's attempt to exercise total control (1982:10).

State structures were not only hierarchically centralized but also deliberately disordered. The separation and insulation of different state institutions became a principal control strategy. The result was a highly complex organization of the state.

In the post-Stalin years, the goals of the regime became more incremental. The state was no longer a single-party autocracy. The state apparatus was reformed to handle conflicts of interest and to achieve a more pragmatic approach. The state was no longer an all-powerful state that repressed all autonomous initiatives in society in order to mobilize for the state. Instead, the state became a more pragmatic and complex organization, a force for social cohesion and economic development. The state apparatus was reformed to achieve a more pragmatic and complex approach to the problems of the society. The state was no longer an all-powerful state that repressed all autonomous initiatives in society in order to mobilize for the state. Instead, the state became a more pragmatic and complex organization, a force for social cohesion and economic development.

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3 The Communist State
Due to these changes, the relationship between superiors and subordinates became more reciprocal (Janos, 2000: ch. 6). Behind the facade of the all-powerful state, the reach of political administration and courts, and there were no procedures for uphold the rule of law. Socialist legality produced only quasi-legal states and not western-type rule of law (Janos, 1996). In spite of this, the changes created some autonomy for subordinates and the people at large.

It was now that the so-called "third worldization" of the communist state set in, as officials started to use their new-found discretionary power to enrich themselves at the expense of the people. The party's effort to achieve a monopoly of power created a highly inefficient state. The weakness of the state in this sense could be observed in the development of considerable informal networks between state institutions, in the massive shortages of consumer goods, and the spread of rent-seeking behavior among party-state officials.

The State in ECE

But what about the socialist countries of East Central Europe? The features of the Soviet State were present to different degrees in the two camps of the post-Stalin communist states. Professionals, administrators, and clerks retained their power, while the more radical elements of the new leadership were more cautious. The strongly centralized state was implemented at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s throughout ECE. Khrushchev's destalinization in the mid-1950s allowed differences between the countries to come to the surface. The spread of the socio-political cleavage along economic lines was observed. The spread of informal networks between state institutions, in the massive shortages of consumer goods, and the spread of rent-seeking behavior among party-state officials could be observed in the development of considerable informal networks between state institutions in the Eastern European region. Still, the leadership was in need of a facade of legitimacy for their policies. This was claimed through "goal-rationality" instead of legal-rationality, meaning not that the system was governed by law, but rather by the goal of achieving a particular objective.

Table 1. Variations in post-Stalin communist states

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<th>Étatization</th>
<th>Limited</th>
<th>Extensive</th>
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<td>Quasi-legal</td>
<td>Alb, Rom</td>
<td>Alg, GDR, (Bul)</td>
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The State in ECE
In Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia the scope and intrusiveness of political authority was narrowed down in the destalinization period. In these countries – although only explicitly stated in Hungary – the imperatives of economic and party discipline became more prominent. The effects of the reforms of the ‘Sixties’ and the economic drive for modernization were felt in all these countries. In Hungary there was a general acceptance of the need for an economic drive and the existence of civil society groups was generally tolerated.

Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany remained faithful to the Soviet Union and to a large extent followed the same development as the imperial center. Political authority remained high and controlled by the harshest regime of the three towards adversaries and the strictest discipline inside the party. The experience of the’hawks’ in Bulgaria and the purges against intellectuals and people that somehow differed from the centrally dictated norms (Nelson, 1995:205-213).

Romania and Albania both chose to distance themselves from the Soviet Union and pursued an independent foreign policy. The major difference between these two countries was that the Romanian regime became more preoccupied with internal affairs and the economic drive for modernization became more important. The communist party was more involved by the state, while the bureaucracy and the economy were more autonomous. This was also the case in Bulgaria, where the regime became highly personalized. Linz and Stephan have named the Ceausescu regime sultanistic, alluding to these conditions. “Ceausescu’s policies and personal style made it clear that he was unbound by rational-legal constraints […] and his rule was highly personalistic and arbitrary” (1996:349). The rule of Ceausescu has been described as a kind of anti-capitalist authoritarianism, where the medium of power had to be self-sufficient. The power of the state was based on the personal charisma of the leader and on the loyalty of the people. They were given the task to guide their people towards the ultimate goal and in this stood above the law.

In the rest of the countries a kind of gradual reform developed according to the principles of socialist legality. As established above, this was a far cry from fully fledged rule of law. There were generally no institutionalized procedures for the implementation of the legal system. The legal system was thus largely a means of controlling the movement of people and resources, rather than a means of protecting human rights. The legal system was thus largely a means of controlling the movement of people and resources, rather than a means of protecting human rights.
Post-Communist Transformation and the Problem of Weak States

4  State structures in a long term perspective

Before turning to the post-communist development in the region we will briefly look into the longer traditions of state building in the region. This kind of brief retrospect by necessity becomes sketchy and highly simplified. With this in mind we still need to resort to these simplifications due to the limited scope of this paper.

With a historical perspective, the historical development of the state, the economy and society can be divided into two main periods: the period of central planning and the period of market economy. In the first period, the state was the central planner and determiner of economic and social policies. The state owned all means of production and controlled all aspects of the economy. In the second period, the state became more market-oriented and the economy operated under the principles of supply and demand. The state's role was to regulate and control the market, but not to plan it directly.
In the countries of western Christianity a legal state gradually developed where law and contract regulated the relationship between kings and estates and, to a certain degree, between lords and vassals. The further to the east, the weaker the civil societies and the more intrusive and arbitrary the states (Janos, 2000:116). Looking at the cross-national differences in ECE under communism these historical paths seem indeed to have been important. In Romania and Albania the maintained totalitarian state structures with resemblance to the western legal state and the scope of political authority was somewhat restricted.

It is obvious, however, that to fully understand the different development paths in the communist satellite countries, elite choices are of importance. One of the most evident examples of this is the post-Stalin difference between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Despite the fact that the Czech lands were some of the most developed parts of the Habsburg Empire and probably the most successful of the interwar East European countries, elite choices were made in Hungary to develop a unique variant with strong nationalistic sentiments.
After the fall of the communist regimes the countries are still engaged in complex reform efforts, not least in terms of adaptation to the European Union. In spite of dramatic transformation since 1989, the economic, political, and social changes that occurred were often dramatic and disruptive. The challenge for the new governments was to manage the transition to a market economy and democratic politics, while also addressing the needs of society.

Turning to the question of state restructuring, authors who have tried to estimate the degree of success in creating modern, democratic public administrations since 1989 have concluded that

(Continues on next page)
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...successful than the other former quasi-legal regimes, but still not to the same extent as Romania, or Albania for that matter. This goes well with my previous analysis of Bulgaria as a quasi-legal communist regime but with a tradition of paternalism and arbitrariness.

We will now look more thoroughly into the question of the functioning of the state and reform capacity in post-communism. As established before, in the concrete analysis of the state and the policy process we have to look both at attributes and organization of the state and linkages between state and society.

Attributes and Organization of the State

In the countries with the least favorable starting points like Romania, impediments and resistance to change have proved formidable. High personalization of exchange relations, vested interest, systematic rule-breaking and bureaucratic inertia have blocked any real change. The state apparatus is highly fragmented and the lack of institutionalized procedures and rules inhibits coordination, and strategic planning. This has enormous effects not only on the efficiency of policy making but also on transparency and accountability of government.

Another much testified problem of the post-communist period is a lack of vision, common purpose, knowledge, and skills among officials. There is a lack of accountability and self-control. The incentive to join the European community is strong in most CEE countries, but there are differences in how the “Return to Europe” is translated into the national context. Some countries where the “Return to Europe” is more readily translated into the indigenous context than in Romania and Bulgaria where historical memories fit less easily into the new discourse. There is evidence that the incentive to join the European community is higher in those countries where the lack of institutionalized procedures and rules is higher, and the lack of knowledge and skills among officials is higher. This is reflected in the more chronic and persistent rent-seeking behavior in the countries with less experience and a less institutionalized approach to dealing with the problems of transition. Higher economic growth and increased aid have helped to make the period of transition smoother in the countries with the least favorable starting points. The Romanian economy has experienced an average annual growth rate of 4.2% in the last three years, and the government has managed to reduce the budget deficit to 3% of GDP. The country has also made significant progress in reducing inflation, which has fallen to 2.5% in 2017.

In conclusion, the post-communist period has been marked by a number of challenges, including economic transition, political instability, and social unrest. However, there have also been signs of progress, particularly in the areas of economic growth, fiscal discipline, and political stability. The future will depend on the ability of the governments to address these challenges and to build a strong and stable society.
Concluding remarks

The degree of legitimacy of political authority is essential for understanding the relationship between state and society. Without a minimum level of legitimacy, citizens do not feel obliged to respect the rule of law or to participate in political processes. When governments fail and economic decline create vicious circles in terms of obedience and trust in the new regimes, the legitimacy of political authority must be re-established. This requires a strong public administration that is capable of carrying out comprehensive reforms and developing mature democratic systems. Administrative reforms are vital for all other transformation efforts and therefore should have a high priority on the agendas of policymakers.

The paper focused on analyzing the historical development of states in Eastern Europe and the antecedents of present-day states in order to further our understanding of the political struggles, strategies, and responses of different actors. The analysis provided in this paper, however, shows that the problems of post-communist societies are not just confined to the economic sector. The paper emphasized the importance of placing these kinds of studies within a historical framework and the significance of the institutional legacy.

Finally, some words about the methodology of this paper. The aim was to analyze the historical development of states in Eastern Europe and the antecedents of present-day states in order to further our understanding of the historical processes and the political struggles, strategies, and responses of different actors. The analysis provided in this paper, however, shows the importance of placing these kinds of studies within a historical framework and the significance of the institutional legacy.
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The state constitutes the apparatus of government independent of level (municipalities, the nation-state etc) and is in this paper used interchangeably with the public administration. State strength has to do with freedom of action (from specific societal forces) and capacity for action (efficiency in policy-making) (c.f. Weiss, 1998).

The all too common neglect of state factors in post-communist transitions is of course also affected by the fact that the state is still left out in many influential social science schools. There is a tendency to assume that all states are alike which makes the state uninteresting in comparative research (Dunleavy & O'Leary, 1993).

The idea of a dichotomy between civil society and the state is of course not new and can be traced back to antiquity and was taken up by the first liberal thinkers.

As proven by history highly étatized and arbitrary states can be very efficient at mobilizing for short term specific tasks, like massive militarization. Stalin's totalitarian system was, as put forward by Janos... kept for six decades. This is an important explanation of the subsequent enormous inefficiencies in the Soviet system.

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