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Post-Communist Transformation and the Problem of Weak States

Reconceptualizing the Legacy of Communism and the Problem of Weak States

Post-Communist Transformation

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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 a problem. In all post-communist countries efficiency and economic policy-making has been hampered by bureaucratic inertia, weak state-society relations, and weak economic performance. High penetration of exchange relations, systematic rule-breaking, and bureaucratic inertia have inhibited efficiency and economic policy-making. It is concluded that ad-hoc administrative reforms, weak state-society relations, and bureaucratic inertia have inhibited efficiency and economic policy-making.

In need of exchange relations and economic performance reforms and resistance to change have led to the emergence of dysfunctional state structures and state-society relations. In countries with a legacy of authoritarianism, management policies are characterized by a lack of legitimacy and accountability. In countries with a legacy of democratic traditions, the social and economic systems are characterized by political authority. The scope and influence of political authority, interaction in law, and the penetration of exchange relations, systematic rule-breaking, bureaucratic inertia, and weak state-society relations have inhibited efficient and accountable policy-making.

It is concluded that administrative reforms are important to have a thorough understanding of the various conditions for reform in different post-communist countries.
As emphasized by several authors, government shortcomings are the order of the day in modern societies. Governments in the West systematically fail to carry out policies as intended despite ... rhetoric and actual change (Nunberg, 2000). The former communist countries have inherited dysfunctional and weak 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 fall of communism we have come to realize that the former communist states started the reform process with inherently different legacies. Countries like Poland and Hungary were in 1989 endowed with less dysfunctional state structures than for example Romania and Albania where totalitarian features were in place until the very last days of the regimes. In this paper I will analyze how the states in East Central Europe (ECE) have developed and what role the historical legacies, the degree of economic liberalism, and the current institutional setup have played in the development of the different countries affecting the conditions for reform today in order to make sound policy recommendations.

My analysis rests on two assumptions: firstly, that the historical development and the antecedents of today's states are vital for understanding how the states in ECE and the state-society relations are functioning, and, secondly, that the process of transformation requires an understanding of the legacy in the different former communist states and how the effects were carried forward and differences between the countries and the extent to which society and the state have been transformed. Since the fall of communism we have come to realize that the former communist states started the reform process with inherently different legacies. Countries like Poland and Hungary were in 1989 endowed with less dysfunctional state structures than for example Romania and Albania where totalitarian features were in place until the very last days of the regimes. In this paper I will analyze how the states in East Central Europe (ECE) have developed and what role the historical legacies, the degree of economic liberalism, and the current institutional setup have played in the development of the different countries affecting the conditions for reform today in order to make sound policy recommendations.

My analysis rests on two assumptions: firstly, that the historical development and the antecedents of today's states are vital for understanding how the states in ECE and the state-society relations are functioning, and, secondly, that the process of transformation requires an understanding of the legacy in the different former communist states and how the effects were carried forward and differences between the countries and the extent to which society and the state have been transformed. Since the fall of communism we have come to realize that the former communist states started the reform process with inherently different legacies. Countries like Poland and Hungary were in 1989 endowed with less dysfunctional state structures than for example Romania and Albania where totalitarian features were in place until the very last days of the regimes. In this paper I will analyze how the states in East Central Europe (ECE) have developed and what role the historical legacies, the degree of economic liberalism, and the current institutional setup have played in the development of the different countries affecting the conditions for reform today in order to make sound policy recommendations.
One reason why the importance of state transformation in post-communist countries has been underestimated is due to the transition discourse. In the struggle against the communist regimes, a discourse developed that emphasized “civil society versus the state” (Linz & Stepan, 1996: 9). As practically all political opposition was repressed, civil society groups played a decisive part in the resistance against the communist regimes. The all-powerful Soviet State was seen as the ideological “other” representing totalitarianism and state repression. The legacy of these cognitive maps seems to be the norm. Desocialization is not the solution; it is the problem. After the fall of the Eastern Bloc, 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. Arguably, this discourse is not well informed by history. However, the last few years have shown that, in the wake of the collapse of the state and the subsequent problems of state transformation, the consequences have been far more complex than expected.

In analyzing the legacies of communism, the former Eastern Bloc countries have generally been classified in terms of totalitarian, post-totalitarian, sultanistic, authoritarian and other regime types (see Linz & Stepan, 1996). The aim of this paper is to analyze the state and its relations to society in long-term perspective and under different regime types in particular countries. To facilitate this comparison, I will develop two concepts for state transformation processes as the inherited post-communist state is supposedly weaker (Nunberg, 1996).
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Classification during different times in history. 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, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia. The concluding parts of the paper deal with the post-communist development and cross-national differences.

2 Conceptualizing state structures

In studying the state we have to analyze both the internal workings of the state apparatus and state-society relations. In the first instance, we are concerned with both legality and étatization, which I will explain in turn.

Legality 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. In a rule-governed state, actions are ordered by rules, that is laws or administrative regulations (typically formal). For a state to be rule-governed, rules do not have to regulate every instance of administrative action, but bureaucrats have to follow the rules in most instances. Action is governed by something other than rules, like the whims of the ruler, family or friendship relations, political connections or money (Blomkvist, 1988:185). The concept of legality is of course related to Weber’s legal-rationality—where administrative action is ordered by the systematic application of the law—and to the idea of legal positivism. These are concepts that have been a part of the Western political tradition ever since the eighteenth century. The concept of legality is vital for the functioning of the state and for state-society relations. When considering the internal workings of the state, it is important to distinguish between the internal and external structures of the state. The former are the state’s apparatus and the latter are the state’s institutions. The internal structures are those that make up the state apparatus, such as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The external structures are those that interact with the state, such as businesses, citizens, and other governments.

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In the context of the Eastern Bloc, the state apparatus was characterized by a high degree of legality, as the actions of the state were governed by laws and regulations. However, the external structures of the state were characterized by a lack of legality, as the state had limited accountability and was subject to the influence of powerful outside interests. The result was a state that was both rule-governed and arbitrary in its actions.

In contrast, in Western democracies, the state apparatus is characterized by a high degree of legality, as the actions of the state are governed by laws and regulations. The external structures of the state are also characterized by a high degree of legality, as the state has a high degree of accountability and is subject to the influence of powerful outside interests. The result is a state that is both rule-governed and arbitrary in its actions.

In conclusion, the paper has shown that the state apparatus and external structures of the state are important factors in understanding the functioning of the state. The state apparatus is characterized by a high degree of legality, while the external structures are characterized by a lack of legality. This has important implications for the functioning of the state and for state-society relations.
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Post-communist transformation includes the process of change in the former communist countries since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. The transformation has been marked by significant political, economic, and social changes, leading to the establishment of new political systems and market economies. However, not all countries have successfully transitioned into stable and prosperous democracies. Many scholars argue that the communist systems in society, many states have shown that the communist systems in society produce a set of problems and challenges. These problems include a lack of transparency and accountability, the concentration of power in the hands of a small elite, and the suppression of political opposition. In this essay, I will discuss the concept of state capacity and its importance in understanding how the state functions today in the Eastern Caribbean. I will also examine the relationship between state capacity and democracy, and how different regimes have different capacities to govern.

State capacity refers to the ability of the state to implement policies and programs that are necessary for the well-being of the population. This includes the ability to provide public services, enforce laws, and manage the economy. State capacity is important because it affects the ability of the state to address the needs of the population and to promote social and economic development. In order to understand state capacity, it is important to consider the role of the state in society.

In a democratic society, the state is accountable to the citizens and is constrained by the rule of law. This allows the state to be responsive to the needs of the population and to promote social and economic development. In contrast, in authoritarian regimes, the state is not accountable to the citizens and is not bound by the rule of law. This allows the state to be more efficient in implementing policies and programs, but it also allows the state to suppress political opposition and to maintain power.

In conclusion, state capacity is an important factor in understanding how the state functions today in the Eastern Caribbean. It is important for policymakers to consider state capacity when designing policies and programs, and to take steps to strengthen state capacity in order to promote social and economic development.


The Communist State

3

The Communist State

The Communist State was a manifestation of Marxism-Leninism. Under the leadership of Marx and Engels, the Communist Party was created. The Party's aim was to create a classless society and to establish a socialist state. The Party's ideology was based on the principles of class struggle and the need for a revolutionary transformation of society.

The Communist State was characterized by centralization of power in the hands of a single authority. The party held absolute power over all aspects of society, including the economy, politics, and culture. The state was seen as a tool for the implementation of the party's policies and the suppression of opposition.

The Communist State was also characterized by the use of terror and repression to maintain control. Political opponents were often imprisoned or executed, and the media was controlled to spread propaganda and control information.

The Communist State's failure was due to a combination of factors, including a lack of economic planning, corruption, and the inability to adapt to changing circumstances. The state's focus on central planning and state control ultimately led to economic stagnation and social friction.

In the context of post-communist transformation, the legacy of the Communist State is a reminder of the importance of democratic governance and the need for transparency and accountability in state institutions. The transition to a market economy and the movement towards liberal democracy have been challenging processes, but they are essential for the future stability and prosperity of the region.

References

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 up-holding 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 so-called “third worldization” of the state was characterized by a process of “administrative privatization” of the communist 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.

Table 1. Variations in post-Stalin communist states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quasi-legal</th>
<th>Arbitrary</th>
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<td>Alb, Rom</td>
<td>Pol, Hun, Yugo</td>
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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 all of them. 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 into the open once the pressure from Moscow was somewhat relaxed. It gradually became apparent that the communist countries could choose different roads within the common communist mold. The differences between the countries were emphasized in the 1960s when the reform movement in the Soviet Union was in progress, and the countries were once more faced with the question of what kind of society they were to become. The countries of East Central Europe were consequently divided into two main categories: the communist countries and the reformist countries. The former were characterized by a high degree of political and social control, while the latter were characterized by a low degree of political and social control. The former were characterized by a high degree of political and social control, while the latter were characterized by a low degree of political and social control.
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 absolute power of the leadership in a large measure was extended to the possibility of gaining access to wealth, position, and power. This led to a kind of quasi-legality throughout the region. The existence of civil society groups was generally tolerated, even if they were not explicitly stated. In Albania, the situation was different, where the regime was more repressive in Albania, and to a lesser degree in Bulgaria, where the political pressure was higher in comparison to the former country. The same trend continued in the second dimension, the degree of legality. The Ceausescu regime was characterized by its highly personalized style and the absence of rational-legal constraints. His rule was highly personalistic and unilaterally imposed. On the other hand, the regime in Albania was more flexible and allowed for some degree of self-government. The situation in Bulgaria was somewhere in between. The degree of self-government was higher, but there were still some restrictions.
procedures for the application of the law and the regimes were still not prepared to limit themselves within the rules that they prescribed. However, there were important differences between the legal systems: while the legal regimes were overwhelming by their scope, the judicial procedure was more limited. As a result, politicians were in a position to control the application of the law, which brought with it a degree of predictability of political authority.

4 State structures in a longer term perspective

Before turning to the post-communist development in the region we will briefly look into the longer traditions of Eastern European state structures. The development of the state and its administrative apparatus in the region has been characterized by a clear dichotomy between the Baltic and the Adriatic areas. The southeastern parts of the region, together with the Balkans, have through history been characterized by a different development path under communism. The southeastern parts have been more strongly influenced by the traditions of the Eastern European state and the legacy of the communist regime.

Many authors have emphasized that this historical dividing line between the Western and Eastern European states can be drawn from the Baltic to the Adriatic regions. This dividing line coincides with that between Western and Eastern Christianity, which has led to different cultural traditions.

The two cultures can be labeled as the communalism of the East and the individualism of the West. Western Christianity developed in coexistence with the Roman legal tradition, which meant that the concept of justice was that of an independent authority. In contrast, the Eastern European legal tradition was characterized by the idea of the state as a仪or, which had a role in the implementation of the law. This has led to different approaches to the application of the law and the regimes.

Debate of procedures for the application of the law and the regimes has been ongoing in Eastern Europe. The application of the law has been influenced by historical legacies, cultural traditions, and political authority. This has led to different approaches to the application of the law and the regimes.

Before turning to the post-communist development in the region we will look into the longer traditions of Eastern European state structures.
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 of importance. 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 Eastern European democracies, the post-Stalin leaders of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Mirek Havlas and Ceausescu, rationally chose to develop a unique Romanian variant with strong nationalistic sentiments.

So where do the post-communist states stand today? Looking at transformation success in general, it is clear that the differences between the countries are too large to be explained by merely comparing the different starting points in the transformation processes. Today, more than ten years after the fall of communism, some countries seem to have achieved relatively high levels of economic growth and political stability, while others struggle with significant problems of economic transition and political instability. The success of transformation processes is dependent on different starting points and on the specific policies and strategies adopted by the countries involved.
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, a large number of governments have been reforming public administration to ensure that it is consistent with the European Union’s expectations. For example, the Dutch government launched a program called “Modernizing the Civil Service” in 1996, which aimed to make the civil service more efficient and accountable. The aim of this program was to modernize the civil service by introducing new management practices, increasing transparency, and improving the quality of public services. The program was successful in reducing the size of the civil service and improving the efficiency of public administration.

Turning to the question of state restructuring, authors who have tried to estimate the degree of success in creating modern, democratic administrations since 1989 have concluded that the countries of Eastern Europe have made significant progress. For example, the Czech Republic has made significant strides in transforming its civil service, which was previously highly centralized and bureaucratic. The government has implemented reforms to decentralize the civil service, increase transparency, and improve accountability.

The degree of étatization is, as pointed out before, not only important for state restructuring, but also for the quality of the economic sector and the civil society. Efficient and democratic policy making requires an autonomous economic and civil society. In the most étatized countries all forms of independent activity were repressed, leaving very weak economic and social sectors today. Quite evidently then, Poland and Hungary have had a much better starting point – with less étatized societies and a relatively high degree of legality in public affairs – than countries that had less need for state restructuring, as the party-state penetration of society was more extensive.

The differences can partly be explained by the fact that a wing of the former communist party stayed in power in Romania while the communist party in Hungary was replaced by a democratic alternative. A contrast has been Romania where state restructuring has been very slow (Linz and Stepan, 1996:436). The degree of legalism is important for reform capacity today because, as discussed earlier, it affects the efficiency of policy-making both internally in and between state institutions. Lack of legalism in, for example, Poland and Hungary has led to a lack of trust between different actors than in countries where political authority was more restricted and predictable.

Quite evidently then, Poland and Hungary have had a much better starting point – with less étatized societies and a relatively high degree of legality in public affairs – than countries that had less need for state restructuring, as the party-state penetration of society was more extensive as well.
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less 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 era is corruption. The transition to a market economy has created new opportunities for rent-seeking. Bureaucrats have been more concerned with their own interests than with the public interest. This has led to widespread rent-seeking behavior. However, the extent of corruption varies from country to country.

In addition, transitional periods are typically characterized by delegitimation of the public sphere due to political turmoil. During the previous regimes, the quasi-legal states in general and Hungary and Poland in particular developed a degree of predictability of authority, facilitating legal-rational legitimacy as of today. Attitudes of bureaucrats and officials have not changed much. They do not believe in the system, they have a tendency to resort to self-serving behavior instead of serving common goals. Transitional periods are typically characterized by delegitimation of the public sphere due to political turmoil. During the previous regimes, the quasi-legal states in general and Hungary and Poland in particular developed a degree of predictability of authority, facilitating legal-rational legitimacy as of today. Attitudes of bureaucrats and officials have not changed much. They do not believe in the system, they have a tendency to resort to self-serving behavior instead of serving common goals.
6 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 participate in political processes, and government failures and economic decline create vicious circles in terms of obedience and trust in the new regimes.

Linkages between State Institutions and Societal Groups

Since the fall of communism, there has been a virtual explosion of civil society groups and the economic sector has been largely privatized all over the region. It seems to take a longer time to integrate these new elements into the existing state and to achieve a robust civil society. In some countries, the transition has been smoother, and societal groups have been able to influence policy-making processes. In others, however, the process has been more turbulent and the linkages between the state and society remain weak.

The paper focuses on the reasons for and problems of government failures in post-communist societies and the need for comprehensive institutional reforms. The analysis provided in this paper, however, shows the importance of focusing on these kinds of studies within a historical framework. The institutional legacy and the historical development of the states in ECE and the antecedents of present states are crucial for understanding the political struggles, the strategies and responses of different actors. The analysis provided in this paper, however, shows the importance of focusing on these kinds of studies within a historical framework.
Endnotes

1 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).

2 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).

3 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.

4 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.

References


