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## POLITICAL TRANSITION IN FORMER COMMUNIST STATES

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**Abstract:** *THIS ARTICLE INTENDS TO PRESENT AN ANALYSIS OF TRANSITION IN POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. THE PERSPECTIVE USED IS ALSO A "POST-COMMUNIST" ONE IN THAT IT TAKES INTO ACCOUNT SOMETHING THAT HAS NOT PREVIOUSLY BEEN TAKEN AS IMPORTANT OR RELEVANT IN DISCUSSIONS OF THE ISSUE - NAMELY, EACH POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRY IS DIFFERENT EVEN THOUGH THEY ALL HAD THE SAME SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT. THUS, IT IS IMPORTANT NOT ONLY TO SEE WHY SIMILAR COUNTRIES HAVE DIFFERENT FORMS OF TRANSITION, BUT ALSO HOW WE CAN UNDERSTAND THESE DIFFERENCES. ACCORDING TO THIS ANALYSIS, AN ADEQUATE ANSWER COULD ONLY BE OBTAINED BY STUDYING TRANSITION FROM THE EVENTS THAT BRING ALL THESE COUNTRIES TOGETHER, BUT ALSO FROM THOSE THAT SEPARATE THEM. THIS KIND OF SEPARATION IS INTERESTING FOR CURRENT ANALYSES, BECAUSE IT INVOLVES A NUMBER OF VARIABLES THAT OPERATE DIFFERENTLY IN EACH POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRY AND BRING SPECIFIC OBSTACLES TO THE TRANSITION THAT FOLLOWS.*

**Keywords:** *PEACEFUL TRANSITION; VIOLENT TRANSITION; CIVIL SOCIETY; POLITICAL REGIME TYPE; POPULAR DEMOCRACY*

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### TRANSITION PROCESS

The political, institutional and ideological changes that followed the events of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe came to the attention of specialist authors (Daniel Chirot, Katherine Verderz, S.N. Eisenstadt, Ken Jowitt, Vladimir Tismaneanu), some of them making predictions, even in the years leading up to it, about the political development of this European area, which had been attributed "a unique creative role in producing ideas and experimental solutions to the major problems of the modern world" (Jowitt, 1999, p. 229). The concept of "revolution" - seen as "the only way to bring about democratic change in a totalitarian (Bozoki, 1992, pp. 13-29) state" - in the context of 1989 implies a difference in the course of events, in that the transition in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe did not follow the same recipe, although there were similarities between them. From this point

of view, the specific ways in which communism transitioned to post-communism lend themselves to a comparative analysis, the purpose of which is to highlight the specifics and points of connection between them, all the more so as the image of a bloc, of the whole of the countries that were formerly part of the USSR does not overlap with the way in which this transition took place (Purec, 2009).

These movements with a strong impact on society as a whole, together with the adherence of the discourse of intellectuals among the masses, provide us with a generalised explanation of the characteristics of the transition process and the relationship between elites and the masses. Countries where the revisionist experience was absent or drastically limited (Bulgaria, Romania) have disfavoured the emergence of alternative intellectual currents, which will lead to repercussions because "the chances of success in regime change are greater where a civil society functioned before the authoritarian regime, where a political culture (even if limited) was formed" (Bozoki, 1992). From this point of view, "because civil society was underdeveloped or fragile in Bulgaria and Romania, and communist elites were unable to offer alternatives to their disastrous policies, the transition was significantly different in these countries." (Jowitt, 1999) The difference in political culture among the new political leaders made the difference between the newly liberated states possible.

The process of democratisation, marked by the collapse of the Soviet empire, was difficult due to the fact that the communist regime had made a *clean sweep* of the newly decommunised societies, destroying all traces of social association. "Some scholars (Ekiert, Hanson, 2010, pp 31-69) argue that the transition to democracy depends on the existence within society of special social, economic or cultural preconditions, although there is little agreement on their role. A different school of thought shows that democratisation is primarily a process initiated by certain political leaders who have the will and the skill to start the process (Gorun, 2006). Taking into account the preconditions necessary for the construction of a democratic regime, we note that their existence has been a plus for the transition process. Whether or not there is agreement on their role in the democratisation process at this stage, we believe that their absence would have slowed down or hindered progress" (Mărcău, 2020, pp. 44-45).

### THE YEARS BEFORE THE TRANSITION

The concrete approach to how the transition unfolded will be made following the analysis of the phenomenon of dissent and civil society, elements related mainly to the role of critical intellectuals, elites and in a few cases broad, mass movements. It is also important to note whether or not mass uprisings took place during totalitarian regimes, seen not necessarily as a direct attack on the work of the elites, but as a manifestation of another form of protest, sometimes as a result of the involvement of ordinary people with the dissidents, as a representation of the same motivations - dissatisfaction with a system in which "living in truth" does not exist. The moment when the two directions of the "parallel polis" would come together would come in 1989. Earlier mass uprisings include those in Poland (1980-1981 - the Solidarity movement), the Hungarian revolution of 1956, which set a "protest precedent", the Prague movement of 1968, and in Romania (the 1977 miners' strike in Valea Jiului, the 1987 Brasov uprising).

"The Fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989, "pushed countries into transition. Communism proved incapable of recovery, and states were forced to establish a new regime. Before offering an explanation of the need for transitions, we want to find an explanation for the collapse of the communist regime". (Mărcău, 2020, pp. 112-113). Totalitarianism has shown itself to be a colossus with legs of clay. It collapsed under its own weight as a result of disastrous policies. Poland was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to demonstrate to the world something previously unimaginable: communism can be put into reverse. "In symbolic terms, 1989 represents the



year of liberation from the tyranny of the communist regime. As a domino effect, in all the countries under the umbrella of the totalitarian regime a current was felt which generated a desire for freedom which materialised in successive decommunisation. Why do we use the term "domino"? Because once the regime had shown signs of weakness in one state and lost its legitimacy, it could no longer resist in the others. (Mărcău, 2020, p. 165). It was just a small step, but enough for the 'steamroller' of liberalisation to sweep through the totalitarian regimes of the remaining communist (Mărcău, 2015, pp. 87-92) states.

### TRANSITION PROCESS IN ROMANIA

Romania did not have a peaceful transition, the stage of negotiation with the former power structures was completely non-existent. "For the first time in history a communist regime was successfully and violently overthrown." (Eyal, 1990, p. 141). A very harsh repression apparatus, a fragile, unsettled civil society, a complete lack of reformism and the atomisation of society are the hallmarks of a dictatorship that lasted for decades and was very difficult to overthrow. This violent transition can be interpreted in several ways. It can be explained by the immobility of Ceaușescu's position, who, unlike his East German counterpart, did not hesitate to use force, even directly on the population. The collapse of his regime came as a result of major mistakes: "the belief that Romanians would endure any suffering, no matter how great, without a murmur; the presumption that the geopolitical interests of East and West would remain unchanged; the belief that the communist nationalism promoted by Ceaușescu was a secure base; the mistake of believing that any constant conflict promoted by the authorities within Romanian society would neutralise any opposition to the regime; the mistake of believing that the use of force would defeat the Timisoara uprising, but the cruelty of the massacre had ignited opposition throughout the country, full confidence in the army, which had been constantly denigrated and deprofessionalised." (Eyal, 1990, p. 156). The violence of the Romanian revolution is, in Stelian Tănase's opinion, proof of the non-existence of dialogue between elites and society during the Ceausescu period "The inability of civil society to self-govern had not made it possible for them to meet in a space of negotiation that would facilitate, as in the central area of the continent, the transfer of power and not its bloody conquest" (Tănase, 1996, p. 118). But what did not surprise Stelian Tănase is that the rest of the countries that had experienced a peaceful, or almost peaceful, transition had made various moves over time, and if we refer strictly to Poland we have to credit the Solidarity trade union for the "war" of attrition it waged with the communist regime over the 10 years.

As a result of these considerations, a connection can be established between the nature of the regime and the type of transition "the nature of the communist regime determined the mode of succession to power (negotiation, forced resignation, mutual state-society violence)" (Tănase, 1996, p. 118). In the case of the other states the transition was generally a peaceful one, the result of political negotiations and compromise, with communist power structures being removed or maintained for a provisional period, their removal being a consequence of the support for free or partially free elections. Legitimation was based on political negotiation and general consensus, and *de jure* through constitutional amendments. In Poland, Czechoslovakia former dissidents will become presidents of the country. Jeliu Jelev, in Bulgaria, as a result of his important role in the opposition, will become president. Dissidents and the reformist "functional elite" will meet at the negotiating table. In Romania, "the revolution was not a movement with a political platform and - despite what the country's immediate leaders claimed - was not led by anyone. It was a violent revolt against a man and his system, born of desperation, followed by a rapid (and probably planned) seizure of power. On 22 December no more than three different competing groups claimed leadership, and the group that won was the one that took over Radio and TV. This group was made up of leading members of the PCR.



The FSN was made up of an amalgam of former officials: Ion Iliescu (former Secretary of the Central Committee), Dumitru Mazilu (security officer and diplomat), Silviu Brucan (editor of the newspaper *Scântea*). They all had one thing in common: a conflict with Ceaușescu at one time or another. Not the same kind of dissidents appeared in other Eastern European countries during the same year." (Eyal, 1990, 146).

As far as the citizens are concerned, there was a current of resistance, and this was due to the "negative legacies of post-communism that underpinned the construction of politics and economy in the early years of freedom. Any economic or political steps taken were viewed with scepticism by the population. For the population, almost all politicians were thieves, the new police represented the former Securitate under a different name - but with the same militiamen - and some politicians were rightly considered former activists of the former Communist Party. Immediately after the bloody events of December 1989 and the change of the Communist regime to a so-called democratic one, Romania's citizens found themselves in a sea of freedom, perhaps too great to assimilate in such a short period, which led to a real degeneration.

### CONSEQUENCES OF THE TRANSITION PROCESS

The transition process in Romania has been difficult and has progressed much more slowly than in the rest of the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Although our state experienced a bloody regime change, this did not lead the new political leaders to approach a linear process of democratisation, as various dissensions appeared in the new free political scene from the beginning. The disagreements of the new leaders made possible various protests<sup>1</sup> by the population of the capital that continued well into 1990. The stages of democratisation were not respected, so that a *compromise* between the FSN and the other political (Mărcău, 2019, pp. 69-76) parties was not possible.

Most of the regime changes that have taken place have been within the existing political institutions and constitutions in force. Even the original amendments to the constitutional text, including the most radical - the abolition of the Communist Party monopoly - were formulated or ratified within the legislative frameworks of the previous regimes in the existing parliaments. "Everything was done through procedures stipulated in existing constitutions or through extra-parliamentary consultations later ratified by parliaments."<sup>2</sup> In Poland, Hungary opted to amend the old constitution ("small constitution"), and "countries that managed to adopt new constitutions early (1991) - Romania, Bulgaria - are not necessarily the most democratic." (Palmer, 1996).

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<sup>1</sup> See the *mineriada* of 13-15 June 1990.

<sup>2</sup> J. Rupnik, *Post-totalitarian Blues*, in *Revolutions of 1989*, ed. cit;



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