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The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

Abstract

The events of 1989 had world-shattering revolutionary consequences. They brought about a new vision of the political based upon a rediscovery of democratic participation and civic activism. The upheaval in the east, and primarily in the central, European countries, represented a series of political revolutions that led to the decisive and irreversible transformation of the existing order. When explaining 1989, one needs to focus on three major themes: the deep-seated meanings of the collapse of state socialist regimes in east central Europe, the nature of revolutions at the end of the twentieth century, and the role of critical (public) intellectuals in politics. There is no single factor that explains the collapse of Leninism: economics as much as politics, and culture as much as insoluble social tensions converged in making these regimes irretrievably obsolete. The aftermath of 1989 generated a fluidity of political commitments, allegiances and affiliations that signalled a general crisis of values and authority. There is a need for 'social glue' and the existing political formations have failed to imagine such ingredients for the consensus needed in order to generate constitutional patriotism. A fundamental source for reinforcing democracy in east central Europe is the synthesis between the history and the memory of communism with the purpose of achieving moral justice.

The revolutions of 1989 were, no matter how one judges their nature, a true world-historical event, in the Hegelian sense: they established a historical cleavage (only to some extent conventional) between the world before and after '89. During that year, what appeared to be an immutable, ostensibly indestructible system collapsed with breathtaking alacrity. And this happened not because of external blows (although external pressure did matter), as in the case of Nazi Germany, but as a consequence of

Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland, 3140 Tydings Hall College Park, MD 20742, USA; vtisman@gvpt.umd.edu. In this paper I elaborate on and revisit the main ideas I put forward in my introduction to Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *The Revolutions of 1989* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) as well as in my *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (New York: Free Press, 1992; revised and expanded paperback, with new afterword, Free Press, 1993). Thanks to Bogdan Cristian Iacob and Mark Moll for editorial assistance with the manuscript.

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the development of insuperable inner tensions. The Leninist systems were terminally sick, and the disease affected first and foremost their capacity for self-regeneration. After decades of toying with the ideas of intra-systemic reforms ('institutional amphibiousness', as it were, to use X. L. Ding's concept, as developed by Archie Brown in his writings on Gorbachev and Gorbachevism), it had become clear that communism did not have the resources for readjustment and that the solution lay not within but outside, and even against, the existing order.[1]

The demise (implosion) of the Soviet Union, consummated before the incredulous eyes of the world in December 1991, was directly and intimately related to the previous dissolution of the east European 'outer empire' provoked by the revolutions of 1989. It is now obvious that the historical cycle inaugurated by the First World War, the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia in October 1917 and the long European ideological warfare (or rather a global civil war) that followed had come to an end.[2] The importance of these revolutions cannot therefore be overestimated: they represent the triumph of civic dignity and political morality over ideological monism, bureaucratic cynicism and police dictatorship.[3] Rooted in an individualistic concept of freedom, programmatically sceptical of all ideological blueprints for social engineering, these revolutions were, at least in their first stage, liberal and non-utopian.[4] Unlike traditional revolutions they did not originate in a millennialist vision of the perfect society, and they rejected the role of any self-appointed vanguard in directing the activities of the masses. No political party headed their spontaneous momentum and in their early stage they even insisted on the need to create new political forms, different from ideologically defined, traditional party differentiations. The fact that the aftermath of these revolutions has been plagued by ethnic rivalries, unsavoury political bickering, rampant political and economic corruption, and the rise of illiberal parties and movements, including strong authoritarian, collectivistic trends, does not diminish their generous message and colossal impact. And, it should be noted, it was precisely in the countries where the revolutions did not occur (Yugoslavia) or were derailed (Romania) that the exit from state socialism was particularly convoluted, tottering and, in the long run, problematic.

These facts should be kept in mind especially when we are confronted with discourses that question the success of these revolutions, by referring exclusively to their ambiguous legacies. The 'reactionary rhetoric' brilliantly examined by Albert Hirschman uses the futility, jeopardy and perversity arguments in order to delegitimise

[1] Archie Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 157–89.

[2] Eric Hobsbawn, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–91* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 461–99; see also George Lichtheim on 'The European Civil', in Lichtheim, *The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1967), 225–37; Bernard Wasserstein, *Barbarism and Civilization: A History of Europe in Our Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 666–704.

[3] See Václav Havel's reflections on post–1989 politics in Havel, *Summer Meditations* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) and *To the Castle and Back* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

[4] For the exhaustion of ideological-style secular religions see Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér, *The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1991), and S. N. Eisenstadt, 'The Breakdown of Communist Regimes', in Tismaneanu, *Revolutions of 1989*, 89–107.

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change per se, or make it look impossible or undesirable.[5] This line of reasoning, often encountered in the more sophisticated approaches, argues along the following logic: the post-revolutionary environment has unleashed long-dormant ugly features of the national political cultures, including chauvinism, racism, residual fascism, ethno-clerical fundamentalism and militarism, and it is therefore more dangerous than the *status quo ante*. Or, nothing really changed and the power-holders (party-state bureaucrats) have remained the same, simply affixing to themselves new masks; or, no matter what the women and men of the revolutions of 1989 had hoped, the results of their endeavours have turned out to be extremely disappointing, allowing political scoundrels, crooks and demagogues to succeed and to use the new opportunities to establish their domination.[6] Remembering the real message of these revolutions, revisiting their main interpretations and a number of key pronouncements made by the revolutionaries themselves, is therefore a politically, morally and intellectually useful exercise.[7] We should not forget that what is now generally taken for granted – the end of Sovietism – was only a possibility, and not even a very likely one, at the beginning of 1989. True, some dissident thinkers (Andrei Amalrik, Ferenc Fehér, Agnes Heller, János Kis, Václav Havel, Jacek Kuron, Adam Michnik, Ivan Svitak) thought that the system was slowly decaying and that it had no future, but even they were not considering the collapse an immediate possibility.[8] The whole philosophy of dissent – Michnik's 'new evolutionism' – was predicated on the strategy of long 'penetration' of the existing system, the gradual recovery and restoration of the public sphere (the independent life of society) as an alternative to the all-embracing presence of the ideological party-state, and the practising of anti-politics as a non-Machiavellian experience of authenticity, transparency, civility and good-faith.[9] Think of the subtitle of the extraordinarily influential collection of samizdat essays edited in the mid-1980s by Václav Havel: 'Citizens against the State'.[10] If there is a main moral of the great revolutionary drama that unfolded in eastern Europe in 1989, it is that history is never a one-way street, and that the future is always pregnant with more than one alternative. In other words, there is no ironclad determinism governing mankind's

[5] Albert Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991).

[6] Think of the street riots in Budapest in October 2006, provoked by the admission by the socialist prime minister Gyurcsányi of having resorted to blatant lies in the electoral campaign; the rise of the populist demagogue Gigi Becali (a former shepherd and now a multi-millionaire and owner of a major soccer team) in Romania in 2004–6 or the radical–absolutist calls for moral cleansing in Poland during the Kaczyński twins' hegemony.

[7] Krishan Kumar, *1989: Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

[8] Agnes Heller, 'Toward Post-Totalitarianism', and Ivan Svitak, 'A Future Without Communism', both in Vladimir Tismaneanu and Judith Shapiro, eds., *Debates on the Future of Communism* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 50–5 and 70–82.

[9] George Konrad, *Antipolitics* (San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984); Miklos Haraszti, 'The Independent Peace Movement and the Danube Movement in Hungary', in Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *In Search of Civil Society: Independent Peace Movements in the Soviet Bloc* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 71–87.

[10] Václav Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990).

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history. Indeed, as Jeffrey Isaac argues, the revolutions of 1989 had not only more than one cause, but also more than one meaning and proposed a challenging agenda not only for post-communist societies, but for Western democracies as well.[11]

It is true that there were a number of thinkers (one of those was Leszek Kołakowski) who anticipated the inevitable collapse of Sovietism. But very few really thought that this occurrence would be possible with such speed and, as a general rule, without violence. The nature of post-totalitarian, but still authoritarian regimes was not one conducive to negotiations and peaceful transfer of power from the ruling communist party to the opposition. Thus one of the most surprising developments of 1989–90 was the readiness of the communist elites in Hungary and Poland first to share and then to give up power. In so doing, they jettisoned the most cherished Leninist dogma regarding the communist party's 'leading role' (monopoly of power) and allowed for democratic transitions to start and proceed in a gradual, peaceful way. In other countries, however, reforms were rejected in the name of the defence of 'socialist gains of the people', but this confrontational line adopted by the ruling elites could not save them. The model of 'barracks socialism' had outlived itself and the desperate efforts to rescue it by what was known as the 'Gang of Four' (Romanian, East German, Bulgarian and Czechoslovak leaders) had no chance to succeed in the long run. Veteran observers of the Soviet bloc, historians, political scientists and journalists alike were struck by the extraordinary dynamics that in less than twelve months, and, with the exception of Romania, in a peaceful, non-violent manner, put an end to Leninist tyrannies in central and eastern Europe.[12]

The meaning of those events, the role of dissidents (critical, unregimented intellectuals) in the resurrection of long-paralysed civic societies, the overall crisis of those regimes and the decline of the communist parties' hegemony have generated an enormous amount of interpretative literature. The initial general temptation was to acclaim the role of dissidents in the breakdown of Soviet-style regimes and the rise of civic initiatives from below.[13] Euphoric accounts of the revolutionary wave, often compared to the 1848 'Spring of Nations', abounded, and Timothy Garton Ash offered some of the most eloquent articles along this line in his gripping contributions to the *New York Review of Books*, later collected in the volume *The Magic Lantern*.[14] The dominant trend was to regard these revolutions as part of the universal democratic wave, indeed a confirmation of the ultimate triumph of liberal democratic values over collectivist-Jacobin attempts to control human minds. This vision inspired the

[11] Jeffrey Isaac, *Democracy in Dark Times* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). For a particularly insightful analysis of the revolutionary upheavals of 1989 and their effects, with special focus on Poland, see Bronisław Geremek, *La rupture: La Pologne du communisme à la démocratie* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

[12] For ideological modern driven despotisms, see Daniel Chirot, *Modern Tyrants: The Power and Prevalence of Evil in Our Times* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

[13] William Echikcson, *Lighting the Night* (New York: William Morrow, 1990); Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics*; Andrew Nagorski, *The Birth of Freedom: Shaping Lives and Societies in the New Eastern Europe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993); Ivo Banac, ed., *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,1992).

[14] Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolutions of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

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reflections on the future of liberal revolution by political philosopher Bruce Ackerman for whom the dramatic changes in east and central Europe were part of a global revival of liberalism. In other words, their success or failure would condition the future of liberalism in the West as well, because we live in a world of political, economic and cultural–symbolic interconnectedness and interdependence.[15]

Very few analysts insisted on the less visible, but nonetheless persistent illiberal and neo-authoritarian components of the anticommunist upheaval in the east. To quote Ralf Dahrendorf's sombre forecast,

> The greatest risk is probably of another kind altogether. I hesitate to use the word, but it is hard to banish from one's thoughts: fascism. By that I mean the combination of a nostalgic ideology of community which draws harsh boundaries between those who belong and those who do not, with a new political monopoly of a man or a 'movement' and a strong emphasis on organisation and mobilisation rather than freedom of choice.[16]

Carried away by the exhilarating effects of the revolutionary turmoil, most observers preferred to gloss over the heterogeneous nature of the anti-communist movements: in fact, not all those who rejected Leninism did so because they were dreaming of an open society and liberal values. Among the revolutionaries were quite a few *enragés*, ill-disposed towards the logic of compromise and negotiations. There were also populist fundamentalists, religious dogmatists, nostalgics of the pre-communist regimes, including those who admired pro-Nazi dictators like Romania's Ion Antonescu and Hungary's Miklós Horthy. It was only after the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the velvet divorce that led to the break-up of Czechoslovakia into two countries (the Czech Republic and Slovakia) that scholars and policymakers realised that the liberal promise of these revolutions should not be taken for granted and that the aftermath of communism is not necessarily liberal democracy. In the early 1990s it became increasingly clear that the post-communist era was fraught with all sorts of threats, including bloody ethnic conflicts, social unrest and the infectious rise of old and new sorts of populisms and tribalisms.[17]

My main thesis is that the events of 1989 had world-shattering revolutionary consequences. Some authors praise the role of civic society, critical intellectuals and dissidents; others take issue with this approach, but none of them denies the important fact that these changes resulted in the end of Leninist regimes in east and central Europe. Whether the term 'revolutions' is the most appropriate to describe these changes is, of course, an open question. What is beyond dispute is the world-historical impact of the transformations inaugurated by the events of 1989 and the inauguration of a new vision of the political. In the profoundly insightful words of Timothy Garton Ash,

[15] Bruce Ackerman, *The Future of Liberal Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[16] Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (New York: Times Books, 1990), 111.

[17] Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Nationalism, Democracy, and Myth in Postcommunist Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998). For post-communist politics see Padraic Kenney, *The Burdens of Freedom: Eastern Europe since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

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The year 1989 left realities. Yet there was something new; there was a big new idea, and that was the revolution itself – the idea of the non-revolutionary revolution, the evolutionary revolution. The motto of 1989 could come from Lenin's great critic Eduard Bernstein: 'The goal is nothing, the movement is everything'... So this was a revolution that was not about the *what* but about the *how*. That particular motto of peaceful, sustained, marvelously inventive, massive civil disobedience channeled into an oppositional elite that was itself prepared to negotiate and to compromise with the existing powers, the powers that were (in short, the roundtable) – that was the historical novelty of 1989. Where the guillotine is a symbol of 1789, the roundtable is a symbol of 1989.[18]

Explaining 1989, one needs to focus on three major themes: the deep-seated meanings of the collapse of state socialist regimes in east central Europe, the nature of revolutions at the end of the twentieth century and the role of critical (public) intellectuals in politics. One needs to recognise the tremendous complexity of the revolutionary upheavals of 1989 and explain a number of otherwise deeply disconcerting evolutions: the marginalisation of the first post-communist elites (often recruited from the dissident countercultures); the former communists' recovery (conversion) and their return to leading positions in government; the ethical confusion of post-communism and the rampant cynicism that seems to bedevil all these societies.

Not only did the Soviet zone of influence and the Warsaw Pact come to an end as a result of these events, but they led to the fall of the Berlin Wall – that shameful symbol for contempt for civic rights – the disbandment of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the reunification of Germany and the conclusion of the cold war through the victory of the liberal West. Nowadays, as I write these lines, all this seems normal, even banal, but twenty years ago such a denouement of the East–West confrontation would have appeared surreal. It is, therefore, of great intellectual and political significance to revisit the main interpretations of these most fascinating developments in recent European and world history.

Why did the revolutions occur? Were they truly revolutions in the classic sense and, if so, what new ideas and practices did they propose? It is true, as some writers argued, that these were nothing but efforts to 'right' the wrongs of communism's experiments, or, to put it better, they were just endeavours to restore the pre-communist situation? Were these revolutions primarily a consequence of the economic failure of Leninism, in other words of the inability of command (centrally planned) economies to catch up with the challenges of the post-industrial age? What was the impact of moral or cultural factors on the emergence of civic society initiatives within late Leninist (post-totalitarian) regimes? What was the importance of the pre-1989 dissident and reform-communist traditions in different east central European countries? How does one account for the non-violent, self-limited nature of these revolutions and the absence of large-scale vindictive attempts to punish the former holders of power? What was the real popular attitude toward the dissidents and how can one make

[18] Timothy Garton Ash, 'Conclusions', in Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismaneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and their Aftermath* (New York and Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 398.

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sense of the transitions from 'velvet revolutions' to 'velvet counter-revolutions' or 'restorations'?

Indeed, it was the end of communism in east central Europe that accelerated centrifugal–disintegrative processes in the USSR, catalysed the national patriotic movements in the Baltics and Ukraine, and ushered in a new, post-cold war and post-bipolar world. As Ken Jowitt argued, this created a fundamentally new and dangerous situation in which the absence of norms and predictable rational behaviour on the part of the involved actors could result in global chaos.[19] This is not to deplore the end of the pre-1989 arrangements, but simply to point to the need to recognise that these revolutions, and the end of Leninism, have placed all of us in a radically novel situation. Understanding the revolutions of 1989 helps us to grasp the meanings of the ongoing debates about liberalism, socialism, nationalism, civic society and the very notion of human freedom at the end of a most atrocious century.[20]

As I mentioned before, the crucial question to be addressed is: were the events of 1989 genuine revolutions? If the answer is positive, then how do we assess their novelty in contrast to other similar events (the French Revolution of 1789 or the Hungarian one in 1956)? If the answer is negative (as some today like to argue), then it is legitimate to ask ourselves what they were. Simply mirages, results of some obscure intrigues of the beleaguered bureaucracies that mesmerised the whole of mankind but did not fundamentally change the 'rules of the game'? These last words, *the rules of the game*, are crucial for interpreting what happened in 1989 and, focusing on them, we can reach a positive assessment of those revolutions and their heritage.

In my view, the upheaval in the east, and primarily in the central European core countries, represented a series of political revolutions that led to the decisive and irreversible transformation of the existing order. Instead of autocratic, one-party systems, the revolutions created emerging pluralist polities. They allowed the citizens of the former ideologically driven despotisms (closed societies) to recover their main human and civic rights and to engage in the building of open societies.[21] Instead of centrally planned command economies, all these societies have embarked on creating market economies. In these efforts to meet the triple challenge (creating political pluralism, a market economy and a public sphere, i.e. a civil society) some succeeded better and faster than others.[22] While it is true that we still do not know whether all these societies have become well-functioning liberal democracies, it is nevertheless important to emphasise that in all of them the Leninist systems based on ideological

[19] Ken Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[20] For the impact of 1989 on the rethinking of liberalism's agenda, see Jerzy Szacki, *Liberalism after Communism* (Budapest and London: Central European University Press, 1995); Ira Katznelson, *Liberalism's Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[21] Ivo Banac, ed., *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1992.)

[22] Claus Offe, *Varieties of Transition: The East European and East German Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), especially 29–105.

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uniformity, political coercion, dictatorship over human needs and suppression of civic rights have been dismantled.[23]

Another factor that should be taken into account is the impact of NATO enlargement and EU expansion on the pace of democratic transitions. As Václav Havel put it,

> I felt that the expansion to the East would guarantee the irreversibility of the new conditions in these countries, and of peace in Europe. I could well imagine crowds of populists, demagogues, nationalists, and post-communists who would exploit every delay to argue, with increasing urgency, that the arrogant, consumerist, and selfish West neither recognised us nor wanted us, and therefore we must go our own way.[24]

Part of the explanation of the failure of Western social science to anticipate the collapse of Leninism as a world system is one of vision. The road to 1989–91 was prepared by the less visible, often marginal, but critically significant in the long run, workings of what we call now civil society (Solidarity in Poland, Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, unofficial peace, environmental and human rights groups in the GDR, Democratic Opposition in Hungary). In examining the wreckage of Leninism we should thus avoid any one-dimensional, monistic, approach; there is no single factor that explains the collapse; economics as much as politics and culture as much as insoluble social tensions converged in making these regimes irretrievably obsolete.

Yet these were not just any autocracies: they derived their sole claim to legitimacy from the Marxist-Leninist 'holy writ', and once this ideological aura ceased to function, the whole edifice started to falter.[25] They were, to use sociologist Daniel Chirot's apt term, 'tyrannies of certitude' and it was precisely the gradual loss of ideological commitment among the ruling elites, what was once a truly messianic ardour, that accelerated the process of inner disintegration of Leninist regimes.[26] In a way, the revolutions of 1989 were an ironical vindication of Lenin's famous definition of a revolutionary situation: those at the top cannot rule in old ways, and those at the bottom do not want to accept these ways any more. They were more than simple revolts because they attacked the very foundations of the existing systems and proposed a complete reorganisation of society. It is perhaps worth remembering: communist parties were not in power as a result of legal rational procedures. No free elections brought them to their ruling positions, but rather they derived their spurious legitimacy from the ideological (and teleological) claim according to which they represented the 'vanguard' of the working class and, consequently, they were the carriers of a universal emancipatory mission.[27]

[23] Ferenc Fehér, Agnes Heller and György Markus, *Dictatorship over Needs* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

[24] Havel, *To the Castle and Back*, 296.

[25] Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (New York: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1994).

[26] Chirot, Modern Tyrants; see also Raymond Taras, ed., *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Postcommunism in Eastern Europe* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1992).

[27] Giuseppe Di Palma, 'Legitimation from the Top to Civil Society: Politico-Cultural Change in Eastern Europe', *World Politics*, 44, 1 (1991), 49–80. In the same issue see Timur Kuran, 'Now out of Never:

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Once ideology ceased to be an inspiring force, and influential members of the ruling parties, the offspring and beneficiaries of the nomenklatura system, lost their emotional commitment to the Marxist radical behest, the Leninist castles were doomed to fall apart. Here we see the role of what has been called the Gorbachev effect.[28] It was indeed the international climate generated by the shock waves of the policies of glasnost and perestroika initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev after his election in March 1985 as general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that allowed for an incredible amount of open dissent and political mobilisation in east and central Europe. In the early 1990s Rita Klimova, a former Charter 77 spokesperson and Czechoslovakia's first ambassador to the United States after the demise of communism, confirmed to me, during several conversations, that Gorbachev's new thinking was perceived by the Chartists as a necessary condition (although not sufficient, of course) for major change in east central Europe. While it is true that for the first two years of his leadership (1985–7) Gorbachev's strategy toward eastern Europe was one of encouraging intra-systemic moderate changes, without considering the possibility of communist parties losing their privileged positions, after 1988 things started to change considerably. It was Gorbachev's denunciation of the ideological perspective on international politics (de-ideologisation) and the abandoning of the 'class struggle' perspective that changed the rules of Soviet–east European relations. The Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty was practically abandoned precisely twenty years after its initial formulation in August 1968, when it was concocted as a justification for the Warsaw Pact crushing the Prague Spring (Alexander Dubcek's experiment with 'socialism with a human face'). A joke was making the rounds in 1988 in Prague and other East European capitals: what is the difference between Gorbachev and Dubcek? None, but Gorbachev doesn't know it yet.[29]

The Gorbachev factor, without which the revolutions of 1989 would have been barely thinkable, was itself the consequence of the loss of self-confidence among communist elites. Gorbachev was not the liberator of eastern Europe and even less was he a conscious, deliberate gravedigger of Sovietism. Initially he used his power to repair rather than ruin the system. Much of what happened as a result of his originally modest reforms was spontaneous and unpredictable, and there was an immense gap between the Soviet leader's neo-Leninist illusions and the practical conditions within these societies. By 1988 Gorbachev acknowledged that, unless force was used, the Leninist system could not be preserved in the countries of the former

The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989', 7–48. Kuran identifies Václav Havel and this author as among the very few commentators who 'came close to predicting a major change', 12.

[28] Karen Dawisha, *Eastern Europe, Gorbachev, and Reform: The Great Challenge* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[29] 'The Strange Death of Soviet Communism: An Autopsy', *National Interest*, 31, special issue (spring 1993), especially the articles by Francis Fukuyama, Myron Rush, Charles Fairbanks, Peter Reddaway and Stephen Sestanovich.

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Warsaw Pact: unlike all his predecessors he refused to resort to tanks as the ultimate political argument and rejected the Leninist (or realpolitik) position that might creates right. In so doing, Gorbachev fundamentally changed the rules of the game. Thanks to the 'new foreign policy thinking', advocated by Gorbachev and his close associates Aleksandr Yakovlev and Eduard Shevardnadze, and resented by Politburo hardliners, the possibilities for political experimentation in east central Europe and in the former USSR expanded dramatically.

It is impossible within the confines of this article to discuss all the ethical and political legacies of the dissident movements, the nature of the 1989 upheaval and the causes of what Adam Michnik calls 'the velvet restoration': the syndrome of disenchantment with the dissident tradition, the political marginalisation of the once acclaimed heroes, and the return of more or less repentant or reconstructed communists to political prominence.[30] Themes that deserve special exploration are the fate of the former communists, the intricacies of the legal–political process of 'decommunisation' in different countries and the conflicting views surrounding the concept and practice of political (retroactive) justice. Let me say that the controversies regarding the treatment of the former party and secret police activists and collaborators were among the most passionate and potentially disruptive in the new democracies. Some argued, together with the first post-communist and anti-communist Polish prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, that one needed to draw a 'thick line' under the past and fully engage in a consensual effort for building an open society. Others, for reasons that went from unconditional anti-communism to cynical manipulation of an explosive issue, argued that without one form or another of 'purification' the new democracies would be fundamentally perverted.

The truth, in my view, resides somewhere in between: the past cannot and should not be denied, covered with a blanket of shameful oblivion. Confronting the traumatic past, primarily via remembrance and knowledge, results in achieving moral justice.[31] Real crimes did take place in those countries and the culprits should be identified and brought to justice. But legal procedures and any other form of legal retribution for past misdeeds should always take place on an individual basis, and preserving the presumption of innocence is a fundamental right for any human being, including former communist apparatchiks. In this respect the lustration law in the Czech Republic, with all its shortcomings, offered a legal framework that prevented any form of 'mob justice'. In Romania, where no such law was passed and access to personal secret police files was systematically denied to citizens (while these files continued to be used and abused by those in power), the political climate continued to be plagued by suspicion, murky intrigues and dark conspiratorial visions.[32]

[30] Adam Michnik, *Letters from Freedom: Post-Cold War Realities and Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 306–15.

[31] A. James McAdams, *Judging the Past in Unified Germany* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[32] For the turbulent experiences with de-communisation, see Tina Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghost After Communism* (New York: Random House, 1995); Noel Calhoun, *Dilemmas of Justice in Eastern Europe's Democratic Transitions* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

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It is important to notice that, while the structural causes of communism's collapse were similar, the dynamics, rhythm and orientation of these revolutions depended to a large extent on the local conditions. In this respect one may argue that it was the strength or the weakness of the pre-1989 intra-party reformist trends as well as oppositional traditions that explain the striking distinctions between these events in different countries. In Poland and Hungary the revolutions were gradual and peaceful, and the radical changes resulted from negotiations between enlightened exponents of the ruling elites and moderate representatives of the opposition. In Czechoslovakia and the GDR the disappearance of the Soviet protective shield (Gorbachev's refusal to encourage the communist governments to use force against mass expressions of civic disobedience) led to complete disarray at the top and the crumbling of the party/government machines. The existence of unofficial civic initiatives and the strategic vision of Václav Havel and his fellow Charter 77 activists explain the mildness ('velvetness') of the November revolution in Prague and Bratislava. Based on the constitutional fiction according to which it was the 'first German state of the workers and peasants', the GDR could not outlive the end of the Socialist Unity Party's monopolistic hold on power. In a matter of several weeks, the electrifying slogan 'We are the people!' chanted by hundreds of thousands in night demonstrations in East Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden and other major cities, turned into 'We are one people!', thereby making the issue of German reunification urgent and inevitable.[33] The initial voices of the East German revolution, all those poets, balladeers and ecological and human rights activists who had spent years under strict Stasi (secret police) surveillance, suddenly found themselves without a constituency. To their disappointment they discovered that most East Germans were not hoping to improve the socialist experiment, or to embark on a search for an ecological–pacifist utopia, but rather were eager to enjoy what they thought to be the benefits of West Germany's capitalist welfare state. Of all the former Warsaw Pact countries, the GDR was the only one that owed its very existence to a Soviet military presence and pure ideological considerations. It was also the only one that disappeared through unification with (incorporation into) the bigger and more powerful other state of the same nation. Indeed, whereas the velvet divorce of December 1992 led to the emergence of two independent, sovereign states (the Czech Republic and Slovakia), the end of the GDR amounted to the complete absorption of the former East Germany into the Federal Republic.

In Bulgaria the Gorbachevites within the top echelons got rid of Todor Zhivkov's sclerotic leadership through a Moscow-endorsed coup d'état. Their plan to preserve the system failed, however, because of the swift development of oppositional democratic forces fully committed to a systemic transformation. But the absence of robust dissident traditions, the factionalism among the democrats and the debility of radical reformers among the Bulgarian communists (rebaptised Socialists) led to a continuous fragmentation of the political spectrum and a state of political and social anarchy.

[33] Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).

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In Romania the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu used the military and secret police to quell the anti-communist demonstrations in Timisoara and Bucharest.[34] Dissent in that country was even weaker than in Bulgaria: any form of collective endeavour to challenge Ceausescu's uniquely personalistic autocracy had been long stifled by the Securitate (secret police). Alienated from his own party bureaucracy, internationally isolated and criticised by both East and West, outraged by Gorbachev's reforms which he publicly denounced as a treason to socialism, Ceausescu was an increasingly erratic despot; even the army and the secret police higher-ups were aware of the enormous risks of continuing to serve him and his clan. Thus on 22 December 1989 a mass upheaval in Bucharest and other major cities succeeded in getting rid of the Ceausescu couple (his wife Elena had become the regime's number two person). Their successors, however, were not anti-communist civic democrats, or pro-Western liberals, but exponents of the second echelon of party and government bureaucracies. They immediately formed a National Salvation Front as the country's new political leadership and did their utmost to contain the rise of civic and political movements and parties committed to fulfilling the initial revolutionary expectations. The widening chasm between those who hoped that Romania would finally break with its communist past and the authoritarian, restorative policies of Ceausescu's successors led to a climate of continuous strife, suspicion and confrontation in Romanian politics.[35]

The debate on the consequences of 1989 affects our perspective on the role of ideas and public intellectuals in historical changes, the very possibility of a new politics based on trust and morality, and the overall meaning of the anti-totalitarian struggle of critical intellectuals in eastern Europe. In my own writings on those events, I maintained – and I cling to this idea – that one of the most profound and enduring meanings of 1989 was the quest for a reinvention of politics along the lines spelled out by the dissidents. If this project fails and east central Europe reverts to some version of corporatism or quasi-fascist authoritarianism, the consequences of such developments would affect the West as well.

There are voices that consider these revolutions to be mere re-enactments of similar events in the past. In reality, the revolutions of 1989 have brought something novel into the story: unlike previous revolutions they did take place in the absence of a coherent, tightly formulated revolutionary doctrine. More than that, their victory was directly related to a strong suspicion among the revolutionaries towards any form of ideological hubris. Suffice it to mention here Václav Havel's and George Konrád's strong attacks on ideology in their writings of the 1980s.[36]

[34] Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[35] Vladimir Tismaneanu, 'Romanian Exceptionalism? Democracy, Ethnocracy, and Uncertain Pluralism in Post-Ceausescu Romania', in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, eds., *Politics, Power, and the Struggle for democracy in South-East Europe* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), 403–51.

[36] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvizdala* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984).

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Some authors (Tony Judt among them) argue that liberal dissidents never had a strong impact on their societies and that the region's pro-communist illiberal traditions, enhanced by the lingering effects of Leninism, are a major obstacle to liberal democracy thriving in the region. In this perspective, there is little usable past for exponents of pluralism to hark back to. Instead, there is a strong and unprocessed memory of real or perceived victimisation, a lot of self-idealisation and very little readiness for empathy and commiseration. At the opposite end of the interpretative spectrum stands Timothy Garton Ash. As one of the main chroniclers of the breakdown of Leninist regimes in central Europe and of the role of critical intellectuals in the emergence of civil societies, Garton Ash insists on the revolutions of 1989 as 'moral resurrections' and highlights the crucial status of public intellectuals such as Havel or Michnik as paragons of a new political style.[37]

This approach runs counter to the widespread temptation to discard the significance of dissent and treat former anti-communist dissidents as an extinct political force. The fact that many of the personalities mentioned by Garton Ash have lost their prominent positions in post-communist governments is not necessarily an indication of their defeat. After all, seizing power was not the ultimate dissident dream: the anti-political activists of the 1970s and 1980s were committed to the restoration of truth and morality in the public sphere, the rehabilitation of civic virtues and the end of the totalitarian methods of control, intimidation and coercion. In this respect, they succeeded. True, the new political order is not exactly a liberal heaven, and all sorts of unsavoury phenomena have come to the fore: cynicism, corruption, the economic empowerment of the former nomenklatura, chauvinist and nationalist outbursts of intolerance and hatred, new forms of exclusion and ethnic arrogance. But post-1989 east central Europe is a political and economic laboratory in which the new institutional arrangements will be strongly influenced by the legacies of forty years of Leninism.

To conclude, the revolutions of 1989 have fundamentally changed the political, economic and cultural maps of the world. Resulting from the widespread dissatisfaction with Leninist ideological domination, they allowed for a rediscovery of democratic participation and civic activism. After decades of state aggression against the public sphere, these revolutions reinstituted the distinction between what belongs to the government and what is the territory of the individual. Emphasising the importance of political and civic rights, they created a space for the exercise of liberal democratic values. In some countries these values have become the constitutional foundation on which the institutions of an open society can be safely built. In others the reference to pluralism remains somewhat perfunctory. But even in the less successful cases of democratic transitions (the Balkans), the old order, based on suspicion, fear and mass hopelessness, is irrevocably defunct. In other words, while the ultimate result of these transitions is not clear, the revolutions have succeeded

[37] Garton Ash, *Magic Lantern*, 131–56.

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in their most important task: disbanding the Leninist regimes and permitting the citizens of these countries to engage fully in the shaping of their own destinies.

The aftermath: hopes, dilemmas, uncertainties

During the two decades since the revolutions of 1989, east central European societies have evolved from authoritarian, extremely centralised and bureaucratic Leninist regimes towards pluralist–democratic forms of political and economic organisation.[38] To focus exclusively on their difficulties during the transition period is to miss the drama of social and political experimentation in that region. What is at stake is the validity of the liberal democratic paradigm in traditionally authoritarian societies (what can they look back to? what is their usable democratic past?).[39] In other words, it is important to identify the building blocks with which open societies can be built and can function properly.[40]

Second, we have to assess the meanings of the great transformations unleashed by the extraordinary events of 1989: are the newly awakened societies propitious to pluralism, or does the upper hand belong to illiberal, anti-modern forces? Even after NATO's eastward enlargement and the accession to the European Union of most east European countries (with the notable exception of the western Balkans) there is a striking tension between pluralist–democratic and ethnocratic and/or radical parties and groups in these societies.[41] As so formulated, the issue bears on the future of the regions as well as of Europe and of international security. If one thinks of Poland, with the ongoing drive toward a politics of vindictive retribution in the name of an absolute break with the past, one is struck by the resilience of Manichean temptations and behaviours. In the same vein, one notices the perplexing ideological transmogrifications of various political formations and the ideological fluidity of most professed ideological allegiances. Disturbing forms of anti-Establishment radical populist discourses compete with a no less disquieting perpetuation of corruption among the powers that be. The rule of law is still trampled by behind-the-scenes arrangements between various interest groups. Scandals abound and media empires have emerged, serving the interests of the press moguls rather than the objective information of the citizens. Many denizens of the post-communist world complain of the moral chaos in which political entrepreneurs can pursue some of the most

[38] One of the most important contributions to understanding communism and post-communism is Ken Jowitt's *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); for further interpretations of the implications of Jowitt's pioneering approach see Vladimir Tismaneanu, Marc Howard and Rudra Sil, eds., *World Order after Leninism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006). This part of my contribution is based on my essay 'Leninist Legacies, Pluralist Dilemmas', *Journal of Democracy*, 18, 4 (2007), 34–9.

[39] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), especially Part 4, 'After the Fall: 1989–2005', 637–776.

[40] Vladimir Tismaneanu, 'Civil Society, Pluralism, and the Future of East and Central Europe', and Maria Renata Markus, 'Decent Society and/or Civil Society?', both in *Social Research*, 68, 4 (2001), 977–92 and 1011–30.

[41] Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation*, and Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

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selfish agendas without any concern for the public good. In most of these countries critical intellectuals insist on the need for moral clarity whereas the political class remains narcissistically self-centred and impervious to such injunctions to live in truth. The consequence is a widening gap between political and civil societies.

The ideological extinction of Leninist formations left behind a vacuum to be filled by syncretic constructs drawing from the pre-communist and communist heritage (from nationalism, in both its civic and ethnic incarnations, to liberalism, democratic socialism, conservatism, populism, neo-Leninism or even more or less refurbished fascism). We deal with a fluidity of political commitments, allegiances and affiliations or, to put it better, with the breakdown of a political culture (that Leszek Kołakowski and Martin Malia correctly identified as Sovietism) and the painful birth and consolidation of a new one. The moral identity of the individuals has been shattered by the dissolution of all previously cherished or at least accepted values and 'icons'. There are immense problems in the continuity of both social and personal memory. There is little public trust and only a vague recognition of the need for a shared vision of the public good (that has often been emphasised by Václav Havel, George Konrád and Adam Michnik).[42] Assumed responsibility for personal actions, risk-taking and questioning of institutions on the basis of legitimate claims for improvement are still embryonic.[43] This may explain political turmoil and anti-government demonstrations in Hungary in autumn 2006, or the parliamentary putsch against Romania's legally elected president, Traian Basescu, with a complete disregard for the Constitutional Court decision, in April 2007.[44]

The difficulties and ambiguities of the left–right polarisation in post-communist regimes are linked to the ambiguity and even obsolescence of traditional taxonomies. In our post-modern age, with its universal disenchantments and political disillusionments, master-narratives such as Marxism or Leninism ceased to be exhilarating ideological projects, and the references to the 'left' (in its radical version, at least) are rather shallow gestures, born out of nostalgia or a search for the limelight, rather than expressions of genuine commitment.[45] As Adam Michnik and other former dissidents have often argued, the issue is not whether one is left or right

[42] Havel, *Summer Meditations*; George Konrad, *The Melancholy of Rebirth* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1995); Michnik, *Letters from Freedom*. See also Antohi and Tismaneanu, *Between Past and Future*.

[43] See John Rawls's discussion of criteria for asserting civic freedom and the idea of a well-ordered society in *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 30–40. For seminal contributions to this discussion see Szacki, *Liberalism after Communism*, and Ronald Dworkin et al., *From Liberal Values to Democratic Transition: Essays in Honor of Janos Kis* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004).

[44] See the commentary by Vladimir Tismaneanu and Paul-Dragos Aligica, 'Romania's Parliamentary Putsch', *Wall Street Journal (Europe)*, 20 April 2007. On May 19 Basescu overwhelmingly won in a national referendum (74.5 percent voted against his impeachment).

[45] This may explain the otherwise bizarre celebration in many media and academic circles of Slavoj Zizek's calls for a 're-enactment' of the Leninist moment in the history of the anti-capitalist praxis. See Slavoj Zizek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2001), and V. I. Lenin, *Revolution at the Gates: a Selection of Writings from February to October 1917*, ed. and with an introduction and afterword by Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 2002). For a devastating criticism of Zizek's recent writings see Adam Kirsch, 'The Deadly Jester', *New Republic*, 3 December

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of centre, but whether one is west of centre. Liberal values are thus seen by some as left-oriented simply because they emphasise secularism, tolerance and individual rights as opposed to different varieties of radicalism (including 'civic' or 'ethical,' clericalism or even theocratic fundamentalism).

At the same time, as shown by radical–authoritarian trends (often disguised as pro-democratic) in Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and so on, lingering reflexes and habits inherited from Leninist and pre-Leninist authoritarianism continue to exist: intolerance, exclusiveness, rejection of any compromises, extreme personalisation of the political discourse and the search for charismatic leadership. These Leninist psychological leftovers can be detected at both ends of the political spectrum ('right' and 'left'), and this explains the rise of the new alliances between traditionally incompatible formations and movements. In Russia, this takes the form of the Stalinist–nationalist coalition, with its own national–Bolshevik traditions. This also explains the rapprochement between Romania's allegedly pro-Western Social Democratic Party (whose honorary chairman is the former ideological apparatchik and president Ion Iliescu) and the 'Greater Romania' Party headed by the former Ceausescu court poet and rabid xenophobic demagogue, Corneliu Vadim Tudor. In the same vein, in the Czech Republic, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia merges in its ideology nostalgia for dogmatic Leninism and chauvinistic stances. Simply put, the old Marxist internationalist dream has long since been abandoned, but aversion to liberal values has remained a persistent ingredient for anti-democratic mentalities and practices.

One should seriously examine the fallacy of a discussion in terms of neo-communism: for such a development to take place, ideological zeal and utopian eschatological motivation are needed. Neither the former Polish president Aleksander Kwaśniewski nor Hungary's prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsányi, both linked to the post-communist left, can be described as ideologically driven. Instead, the successor formations to the Leninist parties have to cope with a widespread sentiment of disaffection with any socialist rhetoric.[46] The cases of the Serbian socialists, the former East Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism, and Romania's Social Democratic Party are emblematic of the ongoing trend towards the cooperation between radical nationalist forces and those nostalgic for bureaucratic collectivism. The foundation of this tendency is the ideological chaos created by the collapse of state socialism, with populism being the most convenient and frequently the most appealing ersatz ideology. Uprootedness, status loss and identity uncertainties are fertile ground for paranoid visions of conspiracy and treason, hence the widespread attraction of

2008, 30–7. For the disarray of the left at the beginning of the twenty-first century see Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Left in Dark Times: A Stand against the New Barbarism* (New York: Random House, 2008).

[46] For neo-communism to work it needs a real ideological blueprint linked to radical leftist ideas – that is, restructuring social and economical realities according to a set of quasi-utopian guidelines. It would also need ideological ardour. Instead, post-communist formations tend to exploit xenophobic and anti-market sentiments (Bohemia and Moravia, the former GDR). Kwaśniewski et al. are post-communists who gave up not only on the name, but also on the philosophical and political agenda of radicalism.

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nationalist salvationism. Marching with Stalin's (or Ceausescu's) portrait is not an expression of Stalinism (or Ceausescuism), but rather one of disaffection with the status quo, perceived as traumatic, anarchic, corrupt, politically decadent and morally decrepit. Especially in Russia, where this disaffection is linked to the sentiment of imperial loss, the cultural despair can lead to dictatorial trends. Exaggerated as they may be, references to 'Weimar Russia' capture the psychology of large human contingents whose traditional set of collectivistic values has dissipated and who cannot recognise themselves in the often contradictory new ones based on individual action, risk and intense competition. There are similar trends in Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary. Political radicalisation in the guise of historical retribution ('righting the wrongs of the past') can be used to achieve mass mobilisation and to delegitimise adversaries. This is not to say that the politics of amnesia, deliberately pursued by former/successor communists, has resulted in any form of much needed catharsis. On the contrary, as demonstrated by furious reactions in Romania to President Basescu's condemnation of the communist regime as 'illegitimate and criminal',[47] an unmastered past does not fade away and often strikes back with a vengeance.

With the private sector and the entrepreneurial class still in the making, political liberalism and the civic centre associated with it are under siege. Political parties in most of these countries are coalitions of personal and group affinities rather than collective efforts based on the common awareness of short- and long-term interests, and hence there are fragmentation, divisiveness, political convulsions and instability. One reason for the rise of populist, potentially fundamentalist movements is the presence of the paternalist temptation, the need for protection against the destabilising effects of the transition to market and competition. Another significant factor is the perception that the civic–romantic stage of the revolution is over and that currently the bureaucracy is intent upon consolidating its privileges. The strong attacks against former dissidents such Bronisław Geremek, Tadeusz Mazowiecki or Adam Michnik as 'protectors of the establishment' are an expression of this search for a second revolution. This is not to say that they are not to be questioned; the problem is recognition of the institutional dignity of the parliaments and the elected offices. If this trend gathers momentum, it could jeopardise the still precarious pluralist institutions. The same can be said about the ongoing attacks on Yeltsin for his allegedly pro-Western attitudes.

Political reform in all these post-communist societies has not gone far enough in creating the counter-majoritarian institutions (independent media, market economy, political parties) that would diminish the threat of new authoritarian experiments catering to the subliminal but powerful egalitarian–populist sentiments. The main

[47] The full English version of the speech by Romania's president Traian Basescu before the joint session of the Romanian parliament on 18 December 2006 can be found at Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania – CPADCR, www.presidency.ro. The most vocal critics of this condemnation have been Vadim Tudor's Greater Romania Party (and its viciously antisemitic and anti-Western namesake weekly) and the Social Democratic Party, chaired by Mircea Geoana, former ambassador to Washington and foreign minister in 2001–4. Iliescu is the honorary chairman of this party.

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dangers are the formulas linked to statism, clericalism, religious fundamentalism, ethnocentrism and militaristic fascism. These themes appear clearly in the discourse of the ethnocratic populism as evinced by Vadim Tudor's 'Greater Romania' party, but also among supporters of Slovakia's Vladimir Meciar, Serbia's Radical Party or the xenophobic groups and movements associated with various forms of Russian 'national Bolshevism'. Occasionally, even the former Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán has resorted to such rhetorical strategies in order to compromise his socialist adversaries. The key question, therefore, is linked to the risks of further political fragmentation in the region, with the more developed cases (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Baltic states) developing a culture of impersonal democratic procedures, whereas the southern tier is increasingly beset by 'movements of rage' (Ken Jowitt). On the other hand, developments in Hungary and Poland in recent years have shown that such regional distinctions are not set in concrete: in autumn 2006 Budapest witnessed a series of anti-government mass demonstrations, violence, repression and a lot of popular anger.

The weakness of the political parties is primarily determined by the *general crisis of values and authority*. There is a need for a 'social glue', and the existing formations have failed to imagine such ingredients for the consensus needed in order to generate constitutional patriotism. Instead, there is the feeling of betrayal by the politicians and a quest for a new purity. This is the rationale of the brothers Kaczyński's 'radical revolutionism' (at the right end of the spectrum) as well as the political resurrection of the former communist parties (in Lithuania, but also in Romania and Bulgaria). This also explains the power of Putin's neo-authoritarian politics of 'managed democracy'.

The ideological syncretism of 'Stalino-fascism' capitalises on the delays in the exercise of political justice. Think of Russia, where the much ado about the 'trial of the old party' has not resulted in anything significant. Demagogy, overblown rhetoric and the continuous indulgence in scapegoating undermine the legitimacy of the existing institutions and allow the rise of ethnocentric crackpots. This suppression of a public discussion is bound to fuel discontent and frustrations, thus encouraging demagogues and Mafiosi. Instead of lucid analyses of the past, new mythologies are created to explain the current predicament in the form of 'Judeo-Masonic conspiracies', supposed to endanger 'national interests', and magic references to the need for purification through retribution. Other problems are related to the delays in the coalescence of a political class: political values remain very vague, programmes tend to overlap and corruption is rampant. This is particularly dangerous in Russia, where there is a conspicuous absence of political competition between ideologically defined and distinct parties. The public mood is then inclined to see privatisation as the springboard for the rise of a new class of profiteers (a transfiguration of the old political elite into a new economic one). The political space is still extremely volatile, and the ideological labels conceal as much as they reveal. The urgent choice is between personalities, parties and movements that favour individualism, an open society and risk-taking versus those who promise security within the homogenous environment of the ethnic community. The legacies of 1989 are therefore part and parcel of this ongoing battle for what we can call, echoing Oscar Wilde, the soul of man under post-communism.

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