

DEMOCRATIZATION WITHOUT
DECOMMUNIZATION.
THE BALKANS UNFINISHED REVOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Due to their perspectives of European integration and the formidable incentives they face in this process, the Balkan countries are set on a clear course towards improving their democracies. As one external factor, the general fall of Communism, has triggered their transition, another external factor, the accession perspective to the European Union, has been a crucial factor of consolidation. Domestic factors explain only how smooth or difficult a transition was, but the final goal of the political change is everywhere the same. Communism was a mixture of domestic regime and regional empire, and everything needed reinvention after it collapsed. The more reinvention needed, the greatest the task to reconstitute the nation, the state and the society, and the more difficult the political transition, because the task was not identical in every postcommunist country. Prior to asking ourselves if democratic transition succeeded or failed in a given society the preliminary question is to what extent Communists had succeeded or failed there, not to bring about happiness, but to destroy completely the organic society and replace it with one designed by them.

Keywords: Balkans, Communism, democratization, historical legacies, revolutions

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Democratization is not a frequent topic in relation with the Balkans. In a region plagued by ethnic conflict and state-building problems, often in some combination with one another, the usual paradigm of democratic transformation risks being inappropriate. For a polity to democratize, it should first be acknowledged as one by its entire population and granted the same recognition by the international 'powers', the historical contributors, due to their conflicting interests and relentless intervention, to what we call today 'Balkans'. To meet these two conditions simultaneously was proved an exceptional historical occurrence in South-East Europe. As Barrington-Moore jr. once put it, small East European countries should not even be included in discussions on social and political change, as 'the decisive causes of their politics lie outside their own boundaries.' In one form or another, and despite occasional years of respite, it is fair to say that Romania, Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia became finally able to decide on their own course only after 1990, and then so burdened by legacies not of their own doing, such as borders, that this freedom was considerably reduced. Nowhere did the warning of J.S. Mill sound more terrible than in the Balkans finally liberated and left to themselves of the early nineties:

'It is, in general, a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of government should coincide in the main with those of nationality... Where the sentiment of nationality exists in any force, there is a *prima facie* case for uniting all the members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart. This is merely to say that the question of government is to be decided by those governed'.

The Balkans had also traditionally been the poorest part of Europe, Russia excluded. The national income per capita in 1938 was of 81 (dollars 1937) in Romania, 80 in Yugoslavia and 71 in Bulgaria, compared to 120 in Hungary, 170 in Czechoslovakia and 440 in Britain. Between Romania's 81 and Poland's 100 the difference was not that great, which makes the boundaries of this kind of clusters always doubtful. The percentage of the population depending on agriculture was historically another element of likeness, Yugoslavia's 74 matching well Romania's and Bulgaria's 71 (1930), with Hungary at 51% and Greece at 50. The World Bank classifies them presently as 'lower-middle-income economies', together with Maghreb countries, Central America, China, Russia, Turkey but no Central European ones. Their economic performance was uneven during the last century. Romania enjoyed its best economic times in the late thirties, while Yugoslavia managed throughout Communism to grant its citizens considerably superior standards of living compared to the rest of Communist countries. The best economic times for Bulgaria are yet to come. Transition hit hard all three countries, some economists estimating that Romania's and Bulgaria's economic contraction was equivalent to former Yugoslavia's economic destruction caused by war. Also, the Yugoslav war had negative economic consequences for every Balkan country, trade and Danube transportation

being affected for most of this period. Bulgaria has actually crossed into the 21st century with a foreign Monetary Council regulating its currency and macroeconomic policy after experiencing a financial collapse in 1996. The World Bank estimated the 2001 GNI per capita at 1710 USD for Romania and 1560 for Bulgaria, compared to Slovakia's 3700, Russian Federation's 1760 and Yugoslavia –what was left of it- 940.

Despite their stormy history which turned the name of a mountain chain in an adjective, 'Balkan', vague but definitely negative, the Balkans are in Europe and as such their fate is bound with the larger region they belong to, postcommunist Europe. Nothing becomes more natural than discussing democratization of the Balkans in the context of the larger wave of democratization (the global third, or fourth, or fifth, according to various counts), which swept through the postcommunist world after the end of the Cold War. Beyond the exceptional features of the Balkans, this paper looks at how the democratic transition of various Balkan countries can be explained, and how these explanations fit the broader theories of democratization and political change. It draws on two rounds of regional surveys that Romanian Academic Society designed for Freedom House, UNDP and the Fifth Framework research project of the European Union. The first round was executed in 2000 in Bulgaria and Romania, and in 2001 in Serbia for Freedom House Regional Networking Program. The second was completed in 2003 for the EU Fifth Framework Project in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. The data for Albania and Kosovo comes from two 2003 surveys organized for UNDP by the author. BSS Gallup, the Center for Policy Studies Belgrade and the Center for Urban and Regional Sociology CURS Romania executed these surveys.

Transitions unfolded

By 1989, the year of the change in East Central Europe, only Yugoslavia gave signs of moving in the Balkans. Three distinct Communist systems operated in the region with differing implications for post-Communist reform: an essentially Stalinist, totalitarian regime in Romania and Albania; an orthodox Communist regime in the Soviet-bloc state Bulgaria; and a reformed Communist system in Yugoslavia that had incorporated some liberal elements and shared a number of features with the Central European states. For this reason, and also because of devolutionist pressures from its constituent Republics, Yugoslavia was the most open to Central European influences. The federal government of Ante Markovic had been trying to liberalize the economy in a similar way to previous attempts in Hungary, pushing even further for privatisation, but due to nationalism in the Republics its success was less desired than its failure. In November 1989 the Serbian ruling Communist party SKS allowed political pluralism for the first time, declaring on the opportunity of its Eleventh Congress that "the SKS has no reason or desire to administratively impede the formation of political parties".

However, in the same fall of 1989, while in the Yugoslav Republics steps were taken to prepare for political pluralism, in Albania and Romania party meetings were denouncing the fall of Central Europe to capitalism and bourgeois influences and each of the two countries were presented by leaders as the last bastions of true Communism. Bulgaria was somewhat in the middle in this second half of 1989, with frozen politics, but enough tolerance for informal opposition, which was spreading fast and becoming more organized. By contrast, zero tolerance was the politics in Romania and Albania, where people attempting to cross the border were shot on the spot. Unlike Central European countries, Balkan government enjoyed full national control over repressive agencies. There were no direct subordination links to the KGB and no Soviet troops in any of these countries. This deprived the local opposition, scarce as they were, of the legitimacy of anti-Soviet movements from Central Europe, and also made local Communist governments more effective in defending themselves.

Romania was the first to move decisively. By the Thirteenth Party Congress in November the country numbered only few and isolated dissidents; some were actually former Communists. Political mobilization had attained unprecedented levels: by 1989 Romania had 4 million party members, a third of the adult population, more than double the average percentage of members per capita in the region. While in the Universities of Liubljana or Belgrade many faculty members were not party members, no student could register in a PhD program in Romania by the late eighties without belonging to RCP (Romanian Communist Party), and the faculty was fully enrolled. Clearly, however, a party membership card had come to mean a sort of driving license, a convenience tool. As it shared with Albania a tremendous deterioration in life standards, with collapse of heating systems and shortages of basic goods, Romania had a particular situation: no organized opposition, but widespread hate of Ceausescu's regime. Listening to Radio Free Europe, which was forbidden, was the only but nearly general opposition practice. By RFE the Romanians heard of changes sweeping across Central Europe. Hungarian media, always interested in Romania due to the presence of the nearly two millions Hungarians in Transylvania, and the Romanian speaking Moldovan media, across the border in perestroikist Soviet Union were also inciting openly the Romanian public to ask for a liberalization of Ceausescu's regime. Freedom of travel was nearly as severely limited in Romania as in Albania: however, the only country where Romanians could travel easier, Hungary was attracting more and more refugees and unlike previous years, was not returning them on Ceausescu's requests. Quite to the contrary, Hungary decided to open its border with East Germany and Austria, which contributed decisively to the fall of the whole block. As political scientist Ghita Ionescu had written already in the sixties, only primitive coercion such as the Berlin Wall was keeping afloat the eastern regimes, an eventual removal of the Wall bringing about dissolution for the artificial peoples and states created by Communism.

The fear to be left behind Central Europe was growing and feeding opposition as Ceausescu was delivering more and more speeches bitterly denouncing Gorbachev for his deviationism. The feared *Securitate* uncovered a first workers' plot on December 8, 1989 in Iasi, and they were all arrested. It was bad enough for the regime, because conspirators were Romanians and proletarian, so they could not easily be discarded as foreign agents of some Western imperialist power. The next uprising happened in Timisoara, caused by the harshness of Ceausescu's repression. The attempt to coerce a local Hungarian pastor to move in a domicile assigned by the Securitate was resisted by a few members of his congregation, and due to the proximity of the house to a large marketplace where hundreds were queuing for trams a larger crowd of Romanians soon joined the besieged pastor. This group consisted mostly of workers, who did not stop there but toured central Timisoara shouting slogans against Ceausescu. After the Army shot some tenths of protesters the whole city raised and by December 20th hundreds of thousands gathered in the Central Square declared Timisoara a city free of Communism. In a desperate attempt to turn the rest of the country against this city Ceausescu denounced them as agents of foreign powers and convoked a large meeting in his support in Bucharest. His microphone suspiciously broke during the meeting and the state TV did not cut immediately the image of his panic in front of a few slogans shouted against him. That night a handful of Bucharest protesters fought against police and Securitate to control the center of the city. By the morning they were defeated and arrested, but over one million workers who came to factories at seven formed large columns and invaded the center of the city. Protest rallies were also held in Transylvanian cities, and when Ceausescu fled his headquarters by noon the news was announced from the TV station fallen to protesters. This was December 22, and in that moment in all the great cities millions of protesters invaded party headquarters, burned flags and looted *Securitate* headquarters.

This was a pure anarchical movement. There might have been, as hypothesized later, some agents to prompt protests who worked for some foreign intelligence agency as well as some *Securitate* officers who acted as revolutionaries and got themselves elected in provisional 'salvation' bodies. By the evening of the 22nd, however, the movement, unlike in Timisoara where it had days to get organized, had no leaders and no structures. An ad-hoc structure was created in the invaded party headquarters, including a few dissidents, amongst which Ion Iliescu, a well-known opponent of Ceausescu from within the Party. This body announced that very same evening its first decree, granting all freedoms- travel, association, protest, speech- as well as free elections and the end of the Communist party. Unlike the gradual evolution of Central Europeans the Romanians had it all in the space of one day.

That very evening the endeavor started however to control this beginning of a Revolution. Although clear proof is missing of a plot between Ion Iliescu and Ceausescu's repressive structures, the following days had a marked resemblance with Lenin's teachings on how to organize a coup d'etat. First,

Iliescu was elected president of the ad-hoc revolutionary body National Salvation Front (NSF) and started to sign decrees in his own name. Second, to avoid anarchy, he had encouraged people to elect management bodies throughout the country to replace the old ones: all this hierarchical structure of NSF he turned overnight into a political party and announced his intention to compete in forthcoming elections against the other parties, which were just starting from scratch. Protesting in the streets became impossible in those crucial days due to fire by snipers, who kept Bucharest people indoors for over ten days. Ceausescu was arrested fast and executed after a summary trial on December 25, allegedly in order to discourage the snipers to continue resistance. As no snipers have ever been trialed, and no serious investigation has been performed to find out who shot during those days, killing hundreds in Bucharest only, the most anticommunist section of the population became convinced that this diversion had been organized by Iliescu himself to allow him to control the popular movement. The hard fact remains that Iliescu consolidated his position after December 22 with the support of former repressive agencies, fearful for their fate and desperate to find a moderate leader able to channel the popular anger directed against them. He also controlled the state TV, and won the popular vote in May 1990 despite continuous street protests. To control the urban opposition which remained in the street Iliescu resorted to vigilante groups, such as the coal miners, who in June 1990 beat the protesters to death in University Square, destroyed the University of Bucharest, the headquarters of opposition parties and the opposition press, with the tacit endorsement of the police.

The NSF was initially a mix of spontaneous elements and Securitate agents. After May 1990 elections, however, three former nomenklatura members managed to secure the Presidency, the chairs of Senate and Deputies' Assembly. *NSF did not start as a Communist successor party: it became one in time, as reformers were pushed out and conservative Communist elements were recuperated, especially after a new round of elections in 1992.* Iliescu's party had the upper hand of the opposition in the first years of the transition also by presenting them as allies to the allegedly secessionist Hungarians, and the state TV embarked fully in this diversion campaign against the Hungarian minority and the anticommunist opposition.

As it took the small anticommunist parties, mostly based on inter-war historical parties, many years to get their act together, Romania had its political swing only as late as 1996. Despite fears to the contrary, Iliescu left power peacefully and there ended the Romanian political transition. However, anti-communists did not win the absolute majority, so they had to ally with former NSF people, who paralyzed decommunization. Their most important gesture was to put an end to the national communist official discourse by enrolling the Hungarian party into the coalition government. In most professions, law and order agencies and bureaucracy, the old regime remained however strong. By 1996 much of the influence of former elites had been successfully converted into wealth.

The Bulgarian Communist party, which was not fully dominated by one family as in Romania, moved to replace leader Todor Jivkov in November 1989, when it had become clear that the emerging opposition could no longer be controlled by violence, as the case had been up until 1988. Alongside Romania and Albania, Bulgaria had seen the longest totalitarian regime with the harshest repression of dissidents from the Eastern block. While the party clearly chose a Central European path, moving to reform itself in order to keep control, organizing a roundtable with opponents and giving up its political monopoly in January 1990, the street followed the example of Bucharest. Students' demonstrations asking for a radical break-up with the past intensified in 1990. And as in Romania, this urban unrest backfired at elections, when rural areas voted overwhelmingly for the Communists, who lost however in larger cities. The electoral map of 1990 was similar in both countries, with anticommunist cities and conservative countryside, where voters preferred a slower and less disputed reform path. Control of state media mattered in both countries, but also early surveys such as Times Mirror Gallup 1991 showed that totalitarianism had a legacy in the public opinion. Majorities endorsed the one party-system still in that year in both Romania and Bulgaria, and although people did not want to revert to Communism, peasants especially were in favor of a moderate authoritarian regime, and considered that with replacement of leaders Ceausescu and Jivkov the necessary change was over. The results of elections did not stop protests in neither of the two countries, but in Bulgaria the better organized Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) managed to obtain freedom of the state TV and won elections against former Communists as early as 1991. They did not manage however to keep power for more than a year, and they lost then a new election round to former Communists in 1994. The confrontation between UDF and Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) in this period was dramatic, including street protests and walkouts from Parliament, very much the pattern that Albania's Democratic Party copied afterwards. BSP managed to crash the Bulgarian economy by 1997, and since only by then had UFD managed to discipline its component parties to form a coherent political formation, a truly strong anticommunist government resurged only very late, after the patterns of the transition had already been set. It is however worth mentioning that the UFD Filip Dimitrov government did try in 1991 to apply some form of lustratia to the Bulgarian administration, purging it of some former Communist elements. But as it had just one year in power the attempt remained largely on paper.

The transition of Yugoslavia was prompted by and went hand in hand with the dissolution of the federal state. The latter was brought about by its state structure and internal borders designed in Communist times, which carried the historical tension between Serbs and Croats to its most extreme consequences. In other words, Communism added to a historical conflict the immediate incentives for self-interest based conflict. The two particularly problematic interventions were the drawing during Communism of the inner

borders, letting important fragments of Serb population in other Republics, and the 'con-federalization' of the country by the 1974 Constitution, which gave further impetus to republican communist parties to act as 'national' parties. The permanent threat to the federation by separatist republics in Yugoslavia had an important hand in determining the mode of transition in this country. With the retirement of the Slovene CP from the federal one in January 1990 the start was given in a race against the federal state. While Milosevic, not yet the fierce nationalist he afterwards turned out to be, was struggling to keep control within Serbia, the 1990 elections in the Republics brought victories for the opposition parties, which were considerably more radical than the Croatian or Slovenian Communists had been, and who were afraid that the Communists in Belgrade will hinder the economic transition on the Central European model they had planned. Helped by the situation in Croatia and Kosovo and by the widespread feeling of the Serbs that the other Republics were very selfishly trying to place all economic difficulties on Serbia alone and secede to their advantage, Milosevic turned gradually and consciously into a nationalist. In this way he deprived his internal opposition of its main weapon against him and turned it against them, as for years any resistance against him as a head of state defending the country was easy to label as antipatriotic. The year 1990 in Yugoslavia was a fierce struggle for power between former and forthcoming elites, which used the issue of federation to their advantage and with absolutely no care for the consequences. Helped by the plurality system that Serbia had meanwhile adopted, as well as by the usual combination of control over state media and rural areas Milosevic won the December 1990 elections, falling short of the absolute majority. It was his best electoral score, as in the next elections he had to ally with V. Seselji's party to assemble a majority. However, in the face of a loosely organized street-based opposition he managed to secure his control over Serbia. War with Croatia helped him in many ways: under war logic it was easier to control protest demonstrations and especially the free media. However, due to Yugoslavia's more liberal past both nationalism and Milosevic encountered important opposition in urban and intellectual milieus, a fact often forgotten. To counter a liberal civil society far better developed than in Romania or Bulgaria Milosevic, as Iliescu in Romania in the same time, made use of the old guard: academicians from Communist times, heads of the Church who had obtained their position due to support by Communist government at the time, and especially former repressive agencies, scared by the change and the price they would have to pay in the event anticommunists won. These unholy alliances manipulated real and invented threats against the nation and state to their advantage and managed to delay for ten years in Serbia the victory of the anticommunists. A street fight was needed for Milosevic to go eventually, or he would have stolen his first lost elections at the ballot. Ion Iliescu had only the one thousand dead at the Revolution to haunt him, and by 1996 he knew he could not be legally tied to the mysterious Revolution bloodshed. Unlike him, Milosevic had to answer for the

paramilitary troops which had committed genocide, for federal troops which had favored it, for assassinations of opponents and even mafia type economic activities. So he fought his way up to the Hague tribunal for war crimes. But by doing so, he contributed to the Balkan transition pattern of Serbia, very different from its Slovenian and Croatian counterparts, which followed a Central European path, national emancipation led by anticommunists and first rounds of elections consequently won by them.

Albania was the last to start de-freezing. After the death of Enver Hodja, the party leadership divided between a hard-line group surrounding his wife and a more pragmatic one around Ramiz Alia. Even the most reformist people in the party, however, imagined that the isolation of Albania would prevent it from contamination. The country was affected by even worse shortages than Ceausescu's Romania. Pushed to their survival limit, Albanians started to perceive they did not have so much to lose. Protests started in the North, a traditional anticommunist area, then spread to Tirana. Ramiz Alia lost many months copying Ceausescu's erroneous strategy, that is, accusing the other Socialist countries of betraying socialism and protesters of being paid by foreign intelligence agencies. The more he repressed protesters, the more dissent grew, and as secret service was still strong enough to prevent organization of an opposition, Albanian anticommunism turned spontaneous and even more anarchic than in Romania. Unknown rioters devastated at night state agencies, and even schools and hospitals, and law and order have gradually broken to the point that repressive agencies became largely ineffective in face of widespread violent protest or crime. People seeking refuge besieged embassies in Tirana and Greek Albanians crossed in large numbers the Southern border to Greece. As Alia's speeches turned more gorbachevist and he started to relinquish the traditional external isolation of Albania, internal opposition became more organized. Out of human rights groups and students' movements an opposition party finally emerged, with some former Communists included in it, including Dr. Sali Berisha. A multiparty election was organized in the last week of March 1991. Meanwhile Alia had taken a step back, allowing new figures like Fatos Nano to persuade the voters the Communist party had changed. Controlling the state media, the only one with a large reach, and still enjoying a monopoly in more distant areas than Tirana Communists won this first round with a two thirds majority, but the opposition continued to fight in the streets. Albanians started to quit the collective farms and take their land back informally, and the distance between formal rules and informal behavior grew dramatically in these years. The government of Fatos Nano, despite pledging to radically reform the economy, was brought down by a general strike and its successor held only until a year later. In March 1992 anticommunists from the Democratic Party (DP) of Berisha won elections for the first time. They started economic reform but soon indiscipline and internal bickering took root. Most of it was blamed on Berisha's authoritarian style, but seeing the erratic and selfish behavior of small parties and politicians of anticommunist oppositions in Serbia, Bulgaria

and Romania it is unlikely that without Berisha DP would have performed any different. He did try a deeper decommunization, but he lacked both internal and international support to pursue it. The economy slowly caught up, but not the rule of law: Albania remained prone to outbursts of anarchical violence, which finally brought down Berisha after he succeeded in winning a second disputed election in 1996. The collapse of a pyramidal game deprived thousands of their savings: barracks were attacked and armed gangs managed to give the impression that the state had entirely collapsed. Indeed it took years after this for Albania to reinstate some form of law and order, and the process is still not completed. After the retreat of any Western backing for Berisha and the return to power of Socialists the unrest decreased somewhat. Such trends are hard to interpret, however. DP members have always accused an invisible hand in the Albanian riots of 1996-1997. Clearly, at least for their own profit, if not on the orders of Socialist leaders, agents of influence of the Communist secret service made themselves very busy in Albania, Serbia and Romania during the transition and it was often difficult to distinguish a spontaneous riot from a planned diversion. Proof is however missing: the lack of primary sources, with archives still sealed, plagues the recent history of these countries still, rendering the business of political scientists who interpret events difficult and risky in the absence of basic documentation.

The transitions in the Balkans had therefore a number of common features, alongside specificities involving especially Yugoslavia. Leaving the latter aside, these belated changes enriched the Central European experience with a few features of their own, but also shared important characteristics of the first transformations.

1. Popular mobilization mattered enormously. Once Communism broke, widespread discontent started to manifest itself as open opposition, unorganized and street-based at first, more and more structured later. People in the Balkans were strongly encouraged and motivated by changes in Central Europe and tried to imitate anticommunist movements there. From the students' well organized and non-violent protests to the violent claims and movements of marginal groups these transitions were fought in the streets not for months, as in Central Europe, but for years. During this time a more organized, civilized and peaceful civil society developed.
2. Former Communist power establishments were stronger and more decided to protect their advantage than in Central Europe, where they had less to fear, as they could blame the worst of Communism on the Soviets. In all the countries in the Balkans, due to the absence of the Soviet Union from the near picture national networks of power existed linking secret services, army, party figures, opinion leaders and managers of state companies. These networks worked hard to save their influence and convert it into wealth, even if that meant sacrificing the Communist party itself, as in Romania, and creating an

opportunistic one. The reason they managed to control so much of the transition was that elections rarely touched anything else than Parliament and government, and structures of influence within secret services, military and business (such as banks) retained their power.

3. An urban-rural divide was very visible in the first rounds of elections, with cities voting for anticommunists, and peasants for socialists. These countries preserved, due to their historical underdevelopment, large shares of rural population consisting in subsistence farmers or pensioners from the collective socialist farms. These were easier to control by Socialist governments, as they completely depended for subsidies and various licenses to local Communist gatekeepers, decided to keep their strategic positions. This poor and nearly illiterate part of the population also displayed authoritarian values and found more natural that a strong leader, rather than a Parliament, would run the state. Poland was the only Central European country with an important rural population comparable to the Balkans, and unsurprisingly patterns of Polish political transition are the closest to Balkan patterns. Bulgaria has the largest urban population of the four countries discussed here (Serbia, Romania, Albania being the others) and the Bulgarian transition showed more balance between the Socialist and their contenders.
4. Balkan Communist parties had an alternative way to reform their parties besides the social democratic path of Central European countries. A collectivistic constituency existed in each and every postcommunist state, explaining why socialists fared so well after their initial setback. But the Balkans had also large ethnic minorities and poor borders. Nationalism and socialism combined proved to have a stronger appeal. To keep power the Communists, especially in Serbia and Romania turned more and more nationalistic. The combination of unitary state, proportional representation and openness to cooperation across ethnic lines from every party kept the ethnic difference manageable in Romania and Bulgaria and gradually removed it from news. The reverse proved true for former Yugoslavia, which did not have minority problems, but a far more difficult to solve state building problem.
5. The capability of challenger parties to the post-Communist rule was below the Central European level in Romania, Bulgaria and Albania, due to the intolerance their Communist regimes had displayed towards any opposition. However their party systems stabilized fast to two blocks, Socialists and anticommunists, despite lack of consolidation of individual parties.
6. Decommunization proved hard or impossible. But this was not exceptional: Romania and Poland are identical in their failure to prosecute criminals of the Communist times. The difference is,

however, that national communist countries were far more communized to begin with and their lack of decommunization proved a strong advantage for former Communists, giving them an important power advantage. It also hindered change in many sectors, some not political at all.

7. To explain the achievements of the new democratic regimes the behavior of post-communist parties in transition is far more important than the behavior of the opposition anticommunists - since they all behaved similarly. The policy distance between incumbent and challenger elites was initially smaller in Central Europe, than in Romania, Bulgaria or CIS. The more elites agree on essential issues, such as the privatization, the smoother and faster the transition. The central European case is special because the consensus there was for a different regime from the onset of these transitions in 1989; and I would argue that this was so because the communist parties there had already exhausted the possibilities of reforming the socialist economy prior to 1989; where they had not, such as in Romania, they tried this in-between approach in the first years of the transition and failed. However, in the second part of the transition policy distance decreased considerably between the postcommunists and challengers, very much like in Central Europe.

And the outcome is...

What are the final results of these transitions? Romania and Bulgaria are considered consolidated democracies by the European Union, which invited them to join in 1999. Serbia has been pursuing a democratic path after the fall of Milosevic, despite often scares of return by nationalists, but she also had to give up any decommunization. Rather, in order to defeat nationalists, an alliance with non-nationalistic Communist elements was formed after the assassination of anticommunist Prime Minister Zoran Djindic. Albania is on the way to become a member of NATO and even EU, as it signed the preliminary Stabilization and Accession Treaty. In fact both Albania and Serbia were formally promised together with the rest of Western Balkans that joining Europe is only a matter of when, not if. More difficult situations face countries with still serious state building problems, like Macedonia, Bosnia, and the province of Kosovo, not discussed at all in this paper as their problem are unrelated to democracy per se. Freedom House scores continue to be far worse for Balkan countries, even for Romania and Bulgaria, compared to Central Europe, especially due to their early 1990s history. They score however better than former Soviet Union countries, the Baltics, of course, excepted.

Political culture in these countries is presently democratic. The same features are present as in Central Europe: parties are not trusted, Parliaments are the least popular of all democratic institutions, trust in Courts is shabby, experts, and not political governments are what people would prefer. However, those endorsing undemocratic alternatives are now at Central European levels (*see Table 1*).

Table 1. Dissatisfied democrats

Agreement with the following statements:	Romania	Bulgaria	Serbia
	%	%	%
Democracy best despite shortcomings	74	61	76
The most important government decisions should also seek popular approval via a referendum.	68.3	69.5	63.2
We should have another electoral system in order to vote representatives directly and not party lists.	92.8	75.3	86.3
We should have experts running the country instead of political governments	81.2	56.8	89.7
Even between elections the government should read polls and take only measures popular with the majority of people	86.1	80.4	86.0
Country better off run by the military	15.6	10.9	15.4

Source: Romanian Academic Society, www.sar.org.ro

Attitudes towards corruption are also not too different from Central Europe, despite ratings of these countries as far more corrupt by Transparency International or Freedom House (*see Table 2*). Respondents complain of corruption and resent particularism. The administration and law and order agencies are slowly changing from behaving as agents of authority and repression to public services. The public identifies the new politicians as responsible for the persistence of the culture of privilege favoring certain groups, in fact they include them among the profiteers of corruption. The deficit of accountability is shown in the public perception that some groups, especially politicians are untouchable by law.

Table 2. Attitudes towards rule of law

Country	Only good laws should be respected	Some people are above the law	Politicians are above the law	Corruption widespread	Bribing a civil servant last year
Romania	42	68	88	70	15
Bulgaria	31	87	93	63	14
Serbia	41	81	90	63	18
Montenegro	48	69	78	-	16
Macedonia	57	85	92	-	10
Albania	56	60	66	75	45

Source: Romanian Academic Society, www.sar.org.ro

The practice of bribing, besides extra-payments for doctors and nurses is not so widespread as one would expect and the satisfaction with the public service obtained by bribing is low (*see Table 3*). Connections, therefore influence, is the currency greasing the public service and the economy, not cash. Public goods are distributed according to power status, very much as during Communist times, only holders of power changed to some extent. And this highly upsets the publics in Balkan countries, as elections do not change much of this pattern (*see Table 3*).

Table 3. Perception of corruption and practice of bribing

	Romania %	Bulgaria %	Serbia %	Albania %
Corruption widespread in the public sector	70	63	63	75
No fair treatment without having to bribe someone	1	68	45	48 -
Had to bribe to get fair public service last year	15	14	14	35

Source: Romanian Academic Society, www.sar.org.ro

The syndrome formed by low political trust, frustration with transition and residual Communist attitudes that we see in Table 4 can be found all across postcommunist Europe. The poorest a country and the more painful its transition, the likelier it will become the dominant syndrome of public opinion. It is grounded in the perception of one's current living standards compared to Communist times. Objective data confirms, indeed, that citizens of Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, in terms of purchase power, fare indeed worse now than in 1989, the last Communist year. Few can fully grasp the advantages of no longer living in a shortage economy and enjoying freedom if having their purchase power half or less than what it used to be with little sign of recovery. And social suffering of transition is not evenly spread: alongside the many households crippled by inflation or unemployment fabulous fortunes sprang up, often in occult ways and the widespread perception is that transition is only continuing the injustice of Communism (*see Table 4*).

Table 4. The good old Communist times

	Romania %	Bulgaria %	Serbia %
Same people enjoy privileges regardless of regime	72	76	90
Communism was a good idea badly put into practice	70	69	59
Household worse off now compared to Communist times	67	63	72

Source: Romanian Academic Society, www.sar.org.ro

Which legacies matter?

The Ottoman and Byzantine legacies of the Balkans were often invoked to explain the present shape of these democracies. It is high time to discern which, if any, Byzantine and Ottoman legacy matters for the current politics and societies of the Balkans. I mention these two legacies together because of their specific intricacies. The Ottoman Empire adopted many of the Byzantine political practices making them its own. This means that Balkan societies were left behind on two accounts: on one hand, they followed passively the Ottomans in their stagnation and decline, being both politically and economically subordinated; on the other hand, even in those 'autonomous' societal sectors, such as Church, they remained suspended to the late Byzantine Empire, an abstraction beyond time, therefore beyond evolution. The legacies with a lasting impact for the Balkans can be summarized as follows:

1. *Social*. Due mostly to sharing the Ottoman landholding pattern, which was at the heart of the Empire's organization, the Balkans emerged from pre-modern times with small peasant holdings as main form of property in rural areas and no autonomous cities, the Ottoman city being state-centered and state-managed. Unlike Bulgaria and Serbia, the Romanian principalities enjoyed limited autonomy, so they had large estates, but they adopted the small holdings property model at the end of the First World War due to populism and pressure of the model existing in neighboring countries.
2. *Political and Byzantine* In mediaeval and premodern times rulers from the Balkans to Moscow followed the Byzantine model more in its exterior appearance than in anything else. Some essential features were enough salient, however, to matter for pre-modern and modern political culture of the Balkans. Those were, in brief, three. The first is the historical inferiority of the Church to the ruler, missing the historical tension among the two which created the first source of power pluralism in Western Europe. Not only did the ruler pick the candidate of his like from pretenders to the highest Church position, but also the prelates could be deposed at the ruler's will. The Eastern Church had no leverage comparable to the excommunication of the mediaeval Popes, so its head was confined to the sorry role of blessing whatever the ruler did and whichever pretender to the throne emerged stronger, even against an anointed prince. The flock of Balkan rulers copied also the second feature of the model, the autocracy of Byzantine despots. While separation of executive and judicial power became eventually the norm of Western monarchies, the traditional Byzantine way of gathering them in the hands of the monarch continued up until the 19th century in the Balkans. Finally, the third Byzantine inheritance is the absence of the Germanic, later continental, model of one son

inheriting all, which played a role in the weakening of local monarchies.

3. *Political Ottoman.* The absence of autonomous cities meant the absence of civil society and counterweight to the power of the landowners in the principalities. The absence of a domestic aristocracy throughout the Balkans meant the absence of equilibrium between the central government power and the periphery. The arbitrariness of appointments and dismissals, often regulated by cronyism only, led to subversion of any tradition of sound government. The principality of Wallachia alone enjoyed in the 18th century 34 different reigns and an impressive number of successive appointments: 74 for Heads of the Council, 95 for Chancellors, 95 for Treasurers, and 89 for Chamberlains. Elites and commoners alike were marked by this strong and often arbitrary central interventionism and developed informal devices to keep them and their families afloat. The overwhelming presence of a hyper-regulatory state in the life of these provinces led therefore to a generalized behavior of rules avoidance. The need to act evasively, if not dishonestly, became a necessity when the well organized and governed Ottoman state was transformed into a chaotic and corrupt polity. For something like two hundred years, economic and even physical survival depended on the ability of the people and especially of their leaders to outwit the superior authorities.
4. *Demographic.* The most important change that the Ottoman rule brought to South-East Europe was the large scale demographic transformation of the area, the consequences of which still determine the relationship of its peoples to each other... 'Forced settlements by the Ottomans, and after 1699 by the Habsburgs in the region they acquired as a result of the Peace of Karlowitz, added to the demographic changes brought about by the population movements'. In other words, the Ottoman rule induced intentionally, on one hand, and prevented unknowingly, on the other hand, that natural process of ethnic homogenization which took place in most of Western Europe before modern times.

The question is how did these legacies affect the regimes these countries enjoyed after gaining their independence from Ottomans? The Balkan countries were given or guaranteed their nominal independence in 1878, so more than 120 years ago. The region remained however under the strong influence of the Great Powers until at least the end of First World War, and the borders and polities then created bore a strong Western mark. They were not the organic creation of history, shaped more or less naturally in centuries of wars and bargaining, as in Western Europe, but a poor match between historical evolution and the balance between winners and losers of the First World War. This is still strongly felt in the whole region, East Europeans in general perceiving their borders as 'wrong' compared to West European. Even Kosovars, who do not have a state yet, perceive that Albanian inhabited territories in Macedonia should

belong to them. Bulgarians have to cope with Macedonians next door speaking actual Bulgarian, similarly to Romania with Moldovans and other Romanian speaking counties, lost due to Ribbentrop - Molotov pact to Stalin's Soviet Union, but which have since ended up in Ukraine.

Table 5. Wrong attitudes or wrong borders?

Agreement with the following statements:	Romania	Bulgaria	Kosovo	Serbia
	%	%	%	%
There are parts of our country which belong to others	67	45	81	50
Minorities a threat to sovereignty and borders	44	43	78	75

Source: **Romanian Academic Society, www.sar.org.ro**

The task of building simultaneously nation and state together with political liberalization proved hard to achieve in agrarian economies, where illiterate peasants formed the majority of the population still in 1918. The advent of Communism was fought bravely and uselessly in Romania and Bulgaria, where the Soviets took care to repress first and foremost those who had liberated their countries from the Nazis. Churchill gave a clear signal of the low Western interest in the region when proposing to Stalin in Moscow the informal division of influence (10% Western influence versus 90% for the Soviet Union for Romania, 25 % for Bulgaria, as compared to 50% for Hungary, and 50 % for former Yugoslavia). Clearly no Ottoman legacies mattered in the region turning Communist.

However, the social structure of East European societies mattered for the type of Communism they enjoyed. Communism fought strongly to destroy any autonomy of the societies it invaded and the resources of autonomy these societies had were a historical product. The larger the urban elite the more difficult it was to destroy it fully, and peasant societies of the Balkans had thin middle classes, landowners and peasants, not the best combination. An autonomous church subordinated to Rome like the Catholic church was clearly a better resistance tool against Communism than the Orthodox Church with its tradition of subordination by secular rulers. Demography and development mattered both for how these countries were treated by their Communist regimes. Albania still has only 39 % urban inhabitants, compared to Yugoslavia's 52, Romania's 56 and Bulgaria's 69 (while Hungary has 64, Poland 65). The destruction caused by Communism, ranging from social engineering to forced industrialization was deeper in poor rural economies, where the underdevelopment provided the necessary alibi for strong social intervention. There is a historical path therefore partly explaining from the type of Communism to the residual Communist attitudes during the postcommunist transition.

Explaining democratization in East Central Europe

Two types of theories are the most often advanced to explain why a country is a democracy or an autocracy. One set refers to structural explanations, used in dissimilar ways by modernization theory adepts, world-system and dependency theorists and structural history adepts. Common to all these approaches is the idea that a country's present can be best explained in the virtue of its past. The best synthesis of this approach is the article of Zbigniew Brzezinski in the issue of *Journal of Democracy* celebrating ten years from the Soviet Breakup. To explain the divergent paths of Soviet successor states, he claims, 'we must look primarily to history and culture'. Samuel Huntington thinks along the same lines with his clash of civilizations theory, although his other book on the third way of democratization also allows for non-structural explanations. Huntington places one of his civilization fault lines in postcommunist Europe, predicting that Central European countries, due to the closeness to the West of their history and their religion (Protestant or Catholic) are more likely 'to develop stable democratic regimes'. He clearly expected neither the Balkan countries nor former Soviet Union to make it. Another structural explanation, linked to culture and history, is geography. Democracy spreads by diffusion, and the closer a state is to the democratic- and prosperous- West the likelier it is to become developed and democratic. The place in the world system of a country (core versus periphery) was also assumed to play an important role. The last two factors proved themselves in recent tests alongside economic development.

The second set of explanations, the actor-centered approaches, is usually stressed to explain why a country starts on its road towards being a democracy. Based on the seminal work of the authors of 'Transitions from Authoritarian Rule' this approach looks at specific conditions under which democratic transitions are initiated. The implication is that we may find different factors mattering for the consolidation of a democracy (and here we expect structural factors to play more of a role) than for its initiation. As Michael McFaul puts it 'Inert, invisible structures do not make democracies or dictatorships. People do'. As Karl and Schmitter noticed, there are enough similarities between the consolidation process in postcommunist Europe and that of Latin American countries justifying a unitary theory explaining democratic transitions. Where Eastern Europe might be different from Latin America, however, is in the *initiation of the democratic transition*, and the cases discussed in this paper are rather eloquent.

Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania are clear examples of the regional diffusion effect and the most important inductive cause of democratic transition was external, not internal. Unless Communism as a global order did not break down in Eastern Europe the designated heir of Nicolae Ceausescu, his son Nicu, would today govern Romania as the Assad son

governs Syria or Kim Jong North Korea. Control of the society by Communist parties was very high by 1989 in the Balkans, unlike in Central Europe, where a martial law was needed in Poland to keep things frozen. Challenger elites did practically not exist, unlike in Central Europe, with the partial exception of Yugoslavia. What existed was the widespread perception that Communism is a total failure as a regime and the feeling of urgency these societies must be reformed by copying a Western model. Once it became clear from Central European examples that repression is no longer working, even in these toughly controlled autocracies oppositions started to emerge. At first their manifestation was anarchical, because the political police, far more effective and aggressive than in Central Europe, prevented any form of organization. But this was grass-rooted opposition, based in the total lack of legitimacy of Communism at the time of its demise. This explains why these oppositions included, besides intellectuals, workers, minorities, taxi drivers, Communist party members and a constellation of social groups. Furthermore, except Albania in 1990, even Communist power establishments have come to accept the bankruptcy of the system. The stake of the transition was therefore not ideological. It was a competition for the control of the future transformation, and a tough one, because former regime elites had far more resources in the beginning than the unorganized streets opposing them. Only due to this inequality of resources did former regime elites finally accepted to give up their power monopoly. They expected in this way to win themselves the elections, stop the challenge from the streets and gain international legitimacy. They calculated well and they did win initially, but the challenge did not stop and the transition continued to be fought in the streets. The political transition meant spreading the autonomous pockets of political choice from urban areas and the capital to the rest of the society, and as the number of entrepreneurs slowly grew, and the employees of state companies decreased, anticommunists eventually won elections. Their only resources had been the continuous mobilization of constituencies in favor of change with Western support, while Communist successors thought to manipulate democracy by drawing on the dependent and passive part of the population (also the poorest and least educated) and also to keep it in its sorry state by their social and economic policies. A regression model on World Values Survey explaining democratic attitudes proves the existence of this cleavage between the urban and active population, and the rural and state dependent one, while invalidating a popular suspect, religion (with controls for religiosity). Democratic constituencies are made of the active, the young and the educated, who believe the individual, not the state, is responsible for one's fortune. The model also proves that democrats are the most critical towards corruption, identified as the survival form of the Communist culture of privilege (*see Table 6*).

Table 6. Explaining grassroots democratic attitudes

Independent variables	ALL	Wording and scales
Rural	.091***	(1 village to 8 city over 200 K)
Active	.091***	(Employed fully or partly and student 1; pensioner, unemployed and social aid beneficiary 0)
Wealth	.101***	Subjective evaluation of household welfare from 1 to 10
RELIGION	ns	Scale based on the likelihood denominations correlate with democracy, according to Huntington's 'Clash'; Muslim 1. Orthodox 2. Catholic 3. Protestant 4
CHURCH ATTENDANCE		From 1 weekly or more often to 7 never
AGE	-.030*	No years
EDUCATION	.091***	Age when finished school
STATE RESPONSIBLE VERSUS CITIZEN RESPONSIBLE	.089**	Scale from 1 to 10 with individual responsibility ten
SUBJECTIVE CORRUPTION	.105***	Scale from 1 to 4 with 4 perceiving most corruption in the public sector
CONSTANT	1.80** (.080)	B (Std error)
NO	8559	
ADJ. Rsq	6.9	

Legend: OLS regression models with dependent variable democracy best system of government despite shortcomings, with 1 minimum agreement and 4 maximum; Year of polling 1995 for World Values Survey. Pooled database includes Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Bulgaria. Values are 'beta' standardized coefficients unless specified otherwise.

***** significant at 0.1% ;** significant at 1% * significant at 5%.; ns- non-significant item.**

Do actors then matter? They certainly do, once external factors allow political change, but what kind of actors are these? One can hardly call the coal miners, the Serb paramilitary troops who seek their fortunes from war spoils and the taxi drivers protecting students demonstrations in Belgrade 'elites'. Few leaders exist, especially in the anticommunist oppositions, which struggle for years to find suitable candidates to run for presidency. Ion Iliescu is a charismatic man, and this matters for the fortunes of his opportunistic party. Both him and Milosevic have the clear support of the former regime elites, and the opposition of Western minded intellectuals. They are however opposed by many other groups besides elite groups and it takes years in these countries until the broad urban democratic constituencies for change are able to organize

themselves properly and create an elite. Again, Yugoslavia, due to its more liberal Communism is nearly an exception on this count.

The balance of power that Michael McFaul uses to predict the outcome of a democratic transition is a good indicator in explaining various transition paths, but it requires being itself explained. It is also not only a balance between elites, but reflects the social cleavage between the dependent and the autonomous in postcommunist societies and as such it is a shifting border. When the Baltic states return land to peasants without limiting the size, on political, not economic considerations, as the other countries have done, they succeed in creating the only peasants in the region who do not vote for postcommunists. Decommunization, understood as elimination of consequences of Communist social engineering, not just a witch-hunt, could have helped move the border faster, but due to the close balance of power anticommunists were simply not strong enough to do it.

This balance of power, therefore, originates in the type of Communism a country had and is only revealed on the occasion of the first elections. Romania and Albania have the greatest disequilibria. In Yugoslavia manipulation of threat to the nation and real threats to the state are needed to boost the power of former elites and affect what would have been initially a close match. Albania has still the strongest former Communists, and therefore the greatest contestation, which shows in the fact that Albanians, unlike in the other countries, still identify political conflict as the number one source of social conflict. Unlike Belarus, the part of the Albanian society seeking political change knows however that it can rely on Europe and this helps them in the confrontation with conservative elements. Revolutions have never been won in a few years; they take a long time. As Alexis de Tocqueville put it 'Seen as a whole from a distance, our history from 1789 to 1830 appears to be forty one years of deadly struggle between the old regime with its traditions and men, meaning the aristocrats, and the new France led by the middle class. 1830 would seem to have ended the first period of our revolution, or rather, of our revolutions, for it was always one and the same, whose beginnings our fathers saw and whose end we shall in all probability not see'. Clearly there are numerous elements of unfinished revolutions in each and every of the Balkan countries after fifteen years or less. Above all, the Balkan path to democracy seems to endorse the suggestion by Robert Nisbet that every radical social change is likely to originate outside the system.

But also there is a clear positive trend. Neither Albania nor Romania would turn out like Belarus. Due to their perspectives of European integration and the formidable incentives of joining Europe they have a clear direction, towards further improvement of their democracies. As one external factor, the general fall of Communism, has triggered their transition, another external factor, the accession perspective to the European Union, has been a crucial factor of consolidation. Domestic factors explain only how smooth or difficult a transition was, even if the final point reached in the presence of powerful incentives for political change was the same. Communism was a mixture of

domestic regime and regional empire, and everything needed reinvention after it collapsed. The more reinvention needed, the greater the task to reconstitute the nation, the state and the society, the more difficult the political transition, because the task was not identical in every postcommunist country. Prior to asking ourselves if democratic transition succeeded or failed in a given society the preliminary question is to what extent Communists had succeeded or failed there, not to bring about happiness, but to destroy completely the organic society and replace it with one designed by them. But that is already a question for historians, showing the risk to rush a model to explain social change where historians have not completed yet their task of documenting how facts assemble in their usual mix of hazard and necessity.