

POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION AS A EUROPEAN PROBLEM

Edited by Stefano Bianchini, George Schöpflin & Paul Shoup



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INTRODUCTION

POST COMMUNIST TRANSITION AS A EUROPEAN PROBLEM

The present volume is part of a series focussed on ten years of post-communist transition in Central European Initiative countries. The whole series is structured into four books. The content is the result of a two-year research project, which has involved over 60 scholars and experts from different countries of the CEI, EU and USA, with different knowledge, methodologies and scientific approaches. The project has been promoted by the Center for Studies of East, Central and Balkan Europe of the University of Bologna, under the auspices of the «*Europe and the Balkans International Network*» and with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The focus on CEI countries has emerged in Italy as the result of a regional policy that successive governments in Rome have promoted and developed since the demise of communism in Eastern Europe.

Actually, Italy followed in this respect a stop-and-go approach. This attitude was mainly due to the radical political changes that the country experienced in the 90s, either from the coming out in the open of inner systematic corruption or, paradoxically enough, from the unexpected obsolescence of anticommunist policies, which had had a great impact on the attitudes and expectations of the country's leadership, as well as on the functioning of institutions in general.

This situation explains why Italy, after launching the CEI, became less active in the political arena, as it was involved in a difficult process of internal transformation. It was only in the second half of the 90s, when the Prodi's government concentrated its efforts on meeting the criteria for adoption of the Euro, that Italy was able to interact again within a European context. As a result, the country played a new role in promoting regional strategies by strengthening the CEI and launching the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (1996-2000).

Meanwhile, the CEI found and lost reasons for its existence. When the core of the CEI was established, under the name of «*Quadrangolare*», an interesting experiment started on the very eve of radical changes in international relations. At the time, four countries with different international affiliations made the decision to establish a new framework of cooperation: a sort of bridge between different contexts was created.

When in November 11-12, 1989 the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Austria, Hungary, Italy and Yugoslavia met in Budapest and signed the declaration that set up the «*Quadrangolare*», Italy was a NATO founding member State, while Hungary was still a member of the Warsaw Pact, Yugoslavia a non-aligned country and Austria a neutral country on the basis of international agreements.

This specificity made the role of the *Quadrangolare* attractive for many countries as soon as they abandoned the communist system. In fact, and in keeping with the sudden evolution of the continental system of relations, the CEI played a significant role in its early phase by offering to European post-communist countries the first substantial link with Western institutions.

As a result, the *Quadrangolare* memberships increased rapidly and changed various names before adopting the current one, Center-European Initiative (CEI). Nonetheless, this process was stalled by the Yugoslav dissolution that provoked the vanishing of a founding member. Because of the beginning of the war in Southeastern Europe, the organization suffered from uncertainties, which had an impact on the expectations of the population of the member countries and their desire to be included in a stable, European, context. The end of Czechoslovakia had a less dramatic, but nevertheless significant, impact on the CEI functioning, while immediate post-communist hopes, widely shared behind the former iron curtain, were frustrated.

Meanwhile, the communist collapse had an impact on Italy, which immediately experienced a change in its domestic policy: many political parties with an apparently solid background (as the Christian Democracy, the liberal, the communist and the socialist parties) disappeared and the post-war leadership was overthrown. Involved in domestic affairs, Italy withdrew from the international arena.

In the end, the identity crisis of the CEI was strengthened by the beginning of a strategy of enlargement of EU and NATO, which offered a new opportunity for meeting East European hopes.

The reason of this CEI difficulty resides in two main factors. On the one hand, as said, NATO and the EU represented a stronger and more convincing framework in terms of security, inclusion and development. On the other, the pathway adopted by NATO and EU for negotiating the adhesion was based on *bilateral* relations with candidates. Consequently, the existing, although weak, multilateral and regional approaches were adversely affected.

As a result, the CEI was temporarily deprived of its peculiarity and perspectives.

However, the situation changed again, as the Yugoslav collapse deepened and its impact in the area extended.

The need for strengthening the EU integration processes was the outcome of the tumultuous post-communist changes, which revealed both the risk of rekindling old enmities, and the ineffectiveness of single European states in dealing with the Balkan disaster. The spread of this awareness was followed by the founding of SECI (a US leading cooperation agency for Southeastern Europe), and some years later by the launching of regional strategies through the Stability Pact and the World Bank's Balkan Initiative (1999).

In this context, the CEI has perceived the need for re-thinking its role as a regional framework which encompasses – at the beginning of the 21st century – two EU member-states, 7 EU candidate countries, 5 beneficiary countries of the Stability Pact and 3 CIS countries. In other words, the role of a bridge between different situations has emerged again as a political need.

In due time, Italy managed to overcome the *Tangentopoli* crisis and bring its budget under control by joining the Euro. A new, more positive trend began. The active diplomacy of Piero Fassino (deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and later Minister for International Trade and Justice) from 1996 has been providing a stimulus to the Italian political and economic presence in the post-communist world since 1996. All these developments offered new opportunities for reconsidering, between the centuries, the CEI role in a regional dimension and in connection with the European integration process.

This short reconstruction of the events related to the CEI helps the reader understand why in 1999 the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs granted a two-year international research project devoted to the CEI.

The aim was twofold: on the one hand, scholars and experts were invited by the Center for Studies on East, Central and Balkan Europe of the University of Bologna to analyze ten years of post-communist experience, in order to provide an assessment of a tumultuous decade of change. On the other, they were invited to make contributions and provide ideas on possible strategies for further actions of the CEI in fields to be identified and well defined.

Under the auspices of the «*Europe and the Balkans International Network*», which is the Academic Board of the Center and involves over 150 active scholars from 25 countries of Europe, USA and Canada, the Bologna University's Center accepted this exciting challenge, where academic analysis and political recommendations were interacting, at least to a certain extent.

Since then, the Center has been preparing gatherings and organizing workshops. Three broad teams of scholars were involved in the research and a group of young research fellows was associated with the research activity, in order to create the basis for a junior network of experts. A training opportunity was also offered to the juniors, who attended the Cervia International Summer School of the University of Bologna courses in 1999 and 2000.

As for the work of analysis, the main fields of actions were identified in the following areas: (1) political and social issues; (2) the economic sphere; and (3) the system of regional and international relations.

Since the beginning of the research, the differences in experience, political culture, inner and outer conditions of the countries that were being analyzed were evident to participants. Nonetheless, potential authors of the studies also identified a series of problems which were shared by all countries, particularly as time passed. Corruption, for example, has emerged as one of the most relevant factors that may affect the development of democracy and market economy, in spite of the fact that the basic legal and political conditions for their functioning have been more or less established.

Moreover, the awareness that regional economic cooperation was a positive factor (and not a misfortune) gradually became rooted in the different areas of the European post-communist world. In other words, social and economic discrepancies with the Western world and the pre-existing web of relations led to an increase in trade and greater mobility flows, encouraging cross-border cooperation. This occurred despite local contrasts, old autarchies and animosities. The trend had a positive impact on local production, distribution and consumption of goods. Sometimes, when armed conflicts were stopped, it acted as a lever for the peace building process by encouraging cooperation *with* neighbors, and not *against* them.

“Conditionality” has also played a crucial role in this process. Definitely, the goal of the inclusion in the EU framework has required (and it is still requiring) the systematic adoption of many «technicalities» (expressed by the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria or the *acquis communautaire*). Nonetheless, this is only part of the game. “Conditionality”, in fact, influences existing political cultures, because integration implies the development of a multiple system of relations with all member-states, existing and potential ones, in an effort to create a new, although still unclear, political subject. This is a challenging exercise for both candidate countries and member-States. Populations and/or leaderships do not necessarily accept this “conditionality” willingly.

Nonetheless, this mechanism shows a potential ability in exposing peoples to interdependence and teaching them how to manage it. At least, it has posed the problem. At the beginning of the 90s, security was tied – in the post-communist world – to a rapid inclusion within NATO. When the research project started, some of the participants from Poland or the Czech Republic claimed that their countries had nothing in common with Southeastern Europe. From their point of view, working together within a CEI framework was ineffective and useless. Later, the nearly simultaneous inclusion of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary within NATO and the beginning of NATO air strikes against Serbia and Montenegro proved how deeply Central European security was involved in (and affected by) the events of the Balkans.

In fact, why should Kosovo have been a problem for Spain, Holland, the United Kingdom or Italy and not for Poland or Slovakia or Ukraine: the complexity of interdependence strengthened the perception that regional approaches were unavoidable.

Additionally, the participants coming from «marginalised countries», such as Moldavia, Ukraine and Belarus, had difficulties in interacting in a context that apparently did not concern itself with the development of CIS, although the perspective of an Enlarged Europe would transform these countries into a buffer zone between the EU and Russia.

Therefore, a study for the CEI necessitated a dual approach. On the one hand, the analysis of ten years of post-communist transition required an attempt at coping with the countries' peculiarities, as well as the main lines along which interdependence had been growing during the decade. On the other, possible recommendations had to consider the fact that EU Enlargement and the Southeastern European stabilization were two different issues, albeit with a strong interdependent dimension. To make the question even more complicated, these two issues had an impact on those CEI countries doomed to exclusion from integration processes in the predictable future (as in the case of Moldavia, Belarus and Ukraine).

In this context, recommendations had to outline regional proposals for countries included in EU integration and regional proposals for *excluded* countries, keeping in mind that the CEI as a whole might have the opportunity to play a positive role in overcoming the risks of isolation for the countries in the latter category.

With this approach in mind, recommendations were extensively discussed by the teams of scholars together with a significant group of ministers, vice-ministers, policy-makers and diplomats from CEI countries, during the Forlì Conference of February 2001, after one year and half of research and analysis. The results were condensed in a specific book distributed to the CEI Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the meeting held in Milan on June 22, 2001.

Meanwhile, the analytical efforts made by the research teams were condensed into four volumes. Three of them were devoted respectively to social and political issues, economic relations and international aspects, as stated at the beginning of the work in 1999.

In addition to that, the need for collecting a number of chapters in a fourth book has emerged during the research period, a book in which the role of interdependence could be analyzed as a crucial factor in understanding post-communist transitions. Actually, the discussion within the research teams had emphasized interdependence both in the economic and in the international relations spheres to the point that different authors treated the subject extensively in their teams.

Nonetheless, the phenomenon of interdependence had to be considered also

in its social and political dimensions. Comparing the studies in progress, the authors became aware that local peculiarities and backgrounds, specificity in pathways and the presence or absence of conflict affected the transitions in different ways in CEI post-communist countries, although, at the same time, it was impossible to treat the single cases without considering the regional context.

Moreover, the regional dynamics – for example of the Vysegrad group, of the Balkans, of the Danubian-Carpathian basin, of the Belarus-Ukrainian area – were mutually influenced by a series of issues connected to security, EU Enlargement, majority/minorities relations, state-building processes, the establishment of legal frameworks and institutional effectiveness, and the struggle against criminality. The more the discussion tried to cope with these issues, the more sensitivity towards interdependence arose and the number of possible topics widened.

In addition to all this, the authors turned their attention to another aspect of interdependence. The fact that the Berlin wall was destroyed and Germany unified; that NATO, the EU and the USA were involved in the Yugoslav collapse; that migration flows have characterized new East-West mobility trends; that Enlargement and the Euro are going to change the political and economic balance on the Continent; that the rule of law is increasingly becoming part of a common concern in Europe; all these factors, amongst others, have emphasized the transnational dimension of the transitions in ex communist countries.

In other words, interdependence between sub-regions in Europe is not a unique phenomenon. There is also an interdependent dimension in what was considered – «once upon a time» – the East-West relationship.

Is, in fact, transition only a «status» of post-communist countries or is transition affecting post-anticommunist countries as well? Should changes be analyzed just in relation to the formal adoption of democratic rules and market regulations in Eastern Europe? Or should the study of the changes imply an all-out effort in understanding the redefinition of sets of codes, connected to loyalties, myths, symbols, expectations, peoples' perceptions of institutional frameworks and sovereignty in the existing system of States?

These questions offer an exciting ground for investigation, which in turn can open the door to new fields of research.

This book is a first attempt at handling the transition by drawing specific attention to the transnational *political* dimension of a certain number of topics. Above all, it is the authors' intention to help the reader gain an understanding of interdependence as a political category, which is able to interact both at the sub-regional and at the continental level.

By and large, the contributors have chosen to focus on the issues that will define the success or failure of the relationship of interdependence rather than the organizational mechanisms through which this relationship is institutionalized (the Council of Europe, OSCE, CEI, and so forth).

Starting from the need to assess how political transitions can be monitored, a number of authors undertake a comparative analysis of post-communism as a European political phenomenon. In his introductory essay, Professor Blondel analyzes the process of transformation from an authoritarian and centralized system to a plurality of subjects, which has led to a multiple structure of parties, sub-national authorities, autonomous groups and associations.

Then, in line with Blondel's approach, Professor Bozóki offers a detailed description of the regional strategy adopted in Central Europe in order to overcome the region's communist past. A comparative analysis of the Round Table talks in the area stretching from Poland to Hungary provides an opportunity for reconsidering the political values and visions of the region in terms of freedom, representation, consensualism and conflict management that crucially emerged between the 80s and the 90s in an area which apparently has successfully prepared itself for rapid inclusion in NATO and the EU.

Professor Bozóki, also offers certain insights connected to the process of reconsideration of history in Central Europe. In doing so, he establishes a nexus with the simultaneous change of elites and the impact of a decade of change on the perceptions of ordinary people as victims of communism as well as of globalization.

It goes without saying, meanwhile, that a great deal of thought has been given by the authors of these essays to the problem of how Southeastern Europe can find its proper institutional setting in an expanded European Union.

At the same time the book underlines that many of the problems that now face post-communist Europe are shared by Europe as a whole. As Professor Bianchini points out in his essay «Post Communism, post-Westfalianism», it is no longer possible to draw a hard and fast line between the forces shaping developments in different parts of Europe. This is above all true in respect to the transnational problems, which are besetting the continent – migration, mobility of elites, and, of course, the globalization of the economy. In this perspective, as Professor Bianchini notes, “Post communism is just starting and the future won't be boring”¹.

This communality of problems within the European Continent has most recently been affirmed by the removal of Milosevic in Yugoslavia. Following the victory of the democratic opposition in Serbia in the fall of 2000, authoritarianism lost its last major foothold in the Balkans. This contrasts, dramatically, with the situation in the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union where authoritarian, or quasi-authoritarian regimes predominate (within CEI, this is particularly the case of Belarus and Ukraine). It remains to be seen, meanwhile to what extent the intensification of the flows of communications and increased

¹ Stefano Bianchini, «Post Communism, Post-Westfalianism. Overcoming the Nation-State», in *This volume*, p. 200.

levels of political, economic and cultural links between the West and the post-communist world may have an impact on the authoritarian exercise of power.

The starting point for the essays to follow is therefore that the states of South-eastern Europe are European in their essential traditions and attributes – even if they differ in respect to their historical experience and national outlooks, both among one another and with the states now making up the European Union. In this respect, the states of Southeastern Europe are only beginning to forge a new identity as part of a larger Europe.

Professor Julie Mostov, in urging that a network of transnational interdependencies replace national borders, acknowledges that Southeastern Europe is beset both by globalization and extreme fragmentation. Such fragmentation provides a setting within which ethno-national forces continue to resist change. A junior researcher, Malina Kroumova notes that relations between Europe and the Balkans face a clash between externally imposed norms and the ability of the states in question to assimilate these values and outlooks. Furthermore, Professor Schöpflin suggests that the very notion of Europe has a different connotation for the post communist states and for the states of the European Union (a point to which we shall return below).

In addition, the economic situation in the countries of Southeastern Europe leaves much to be desired. While this will be the subject of another volume, economic stagnation and a decline in living standards over the past decade have set back hopes for a rapid integration of the region with the rest of Europe. Malina Kroumova drives this point home in her essay on Bulgaria, suggesting that “The structure of economy of the Balkan countries has deteriorated from the beginning of the transition and most of the countries have sunk into inflation, high unemployment, increasing international debt and continuing social stratification”². Further, as Professor Shoup suggests, the international community has been struggling to develop means of containing conflict in the region, yet remains largely at the mercy of what he calls «crisis diplomacy», unable to craft lasting solutions to the region’s ethno-national conflicts, notably in Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

It follows that in the decade to come Europe will be engaged in a multiplicity of tasks in the Balkans. Some will seemingly be at odds with others. The dominant theme of these essays is the need to counter ethno-nationalism by diminishing the role of the state and restricting the claims of the nation-states of the region to absolute sovereignty. But Southeastern Europe must in many cases build viable states before other tasks (economic, social) can be undertaken. It is above all a region of new states, and in some cases, (Bosnia and Kosovo) quasi-states under international tutelage. Albania and Macedonia are beset by prob-

² Malina Kroumova, «Defining the Parameters of State Policy Toward Minorities: the Balkan Experience in the 90’s», in *This volume*, p. 132.

lems arising out of the inability of the central government to assert its authority. The task facing the international community, and in particular Europe, is to combine both «nation building» with «nation destroying» in a setting where identity is equated with the possession of a national culture, security with the existence of one's own state, and human rights for minorities with the politics of state survival. This will not be easy.

The past decade has also witnessed real and lasting change for the better. While democracy no longer engenders unquestioned enthusiasm, the alternatives, especially a return to authoritarian rule, are even more discredited. Although ethno-nationalism is widespread, the states of the region are committed to Europe and are struggling to free themselves from the political isolation they experienced during the communist period. The region's commitment to change and reform is itself a guarantee of political stability at a time when democratic institutions remain fragile. The essays in this volume are testimony to the presence of reform-minded professionals and intellectuals pressing for change in the Balkans. The lessons of the past decade, they suggest, can be summed up as follows. In addressing the problems of the region realism must be accompanied by idealism. At the same time idealism cannot be divorced from realism. Regardless of the specific programs Europe embarks upon in Southeastern Europe in the decade ahead, they will succeed only if both pragmatism and a sense of vision apply.

The issues raised in the essays that follow reflect the complexities of the consolidation process not only in Southeastern Europe, to which we have just alluded, but also to the whole post-communist area.

In dealing with the prospects for a broadening of the European Union to the states of Eastern Europe, Professor Schöpflin notes a disparity between the pragmatic approach taken by EU member states toward union on the one hand, and the normative «Europe as Culture» of Eastern Europe on the other. Professor Schöpflin suggests that Eastern Europe views its acceptance as equal partners in a European Union as a normative issue, infused with cultural meaning. In his closing remarks, he suggests that the «Monnet paradigm» is reaching its margin of diminishing returns, and that EU integration must be made attractive as a «cultural norm». Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that it is precisely in Eastern Europe that a new cultural meaning for a united Europe may emerge.

The junior researcher, Luisa Chiodi, in her essay on the promotion of civil society and local NGOs in the Balkans, raises the question of whether the growth of these bodies has been a «top down» process, rather than one from the grass-roots. She suggests that the relations between donors and local NGOs are characterized by unbalanced power relations, «fraught with structural impediments and misunderstandings»³. She also notes the success of NGOs built on existing

³ Luisa Chiodi, «Promoting Civil Society: local NGOs in the Balkans since the 90s», in *This volume*, p. 69.

community traditions and meeting immediate community needs. In doing so, she echoes Schöpflin's concern for legitimizing and employing the values of Eastern and Southeastern Europe society for broader ends.

Other essays explore more prosaic but equally important issues. Professor Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic highlights the importance of reviving and consolidating institutions of higher learning in conformity with European standards.

Several contributors have focused on the question of minorities. Another junior researcher, Zoltán Balázs, in his essay on national sovereignty and human rights recapitulates the process by which Europe for the first time sought to codify minority rights and press for their implementation in Eastern Europe. He suggests that the emphasis on human rights issues by European institutions over the past decade has contributed to the consolidation of democratic institutions in the Balkans. At the same time, he warns that racism and discrimination against minorities remains a pressing issue in the Balkans, although hardly unique to the region.

Malina Kroumova examines the Bulgarian model of ethnic relations to demonstrate both the difficulties and the opportunities that country-specific circumstances offer in reducing minority tensions. Her conclusions echo those of Balázs. In her view, international concern over human and minority rights facilitated Bulgarian efforts to resolve minority tensions. In her words, "The desire to end Bulgaria's deep international isolation as a result of the violence against the Turks helped activate civic commitment to human rights"⁴.

Two conflicting approaches typify the discussion of how democratic values can, with European assistance, be deepened and broadened in Southeast Europe during the decade ahead. The first approach is pragmatic – continued stress on the implementation of the human rights agenda of the European watch-dog institutions (OSCE, Council of Europe) and practical steps toward regional cooperation in education and other fields. These efforts will undoubtedly remain central to the European agenda. With time we can anticipate that experience will accumulate on the most effective means of making European aid to Southeastern Europe effective. Certain immediate steps are suggested in the essays of Uvalic-Trumbic and Luisa Chiodi.

But there are doubts, as well, that such initiatives can provide the impetus needed to change outlooks and values in these societies. Professor George Schöpflin speaks (in reference to the implementation of reforms) of the danger of an "elite-led integration with insufficient popular backing"⁵. He wonders whether the gap between the public and the private sphere – a legacy of the communist era – is narrowing. In his view "there is little sign that this is happening with any

⁴ Malina Kroumova, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁵ George Schöpflin, «Post-Communism and the Perceptions of Europe», in *This volume*, p. 101.

speed”⁶.

In the same vein, Malina Kroumova notes that what may be treated as a narrowly defined human rights issue in the West may, in the context of past experience in Southeast Europe, take on a different cast. She warns that, “Communities utilize history, language and religion as their identifying markers, while giving different historical interpretations. This contradiction renders negotiation between them impossible when the question of identity is at stake”⁷. Thus she raises a central problem which Europe will confront in dealing with the Balkans in the decade ahead. Must one accept this ethno-national frame of reference in the name of realism? Deal only with those who think differently (that is, as Europeans)? Or simply circumvent the issues of identity, national ambition, and the struggle for statehood (now expressed in smaller and smaller territorial entities such as Montenegro) by engaging in «crisis diplomacy»?

By way of response, the essays of Bianchini, Mostov and Balazs, to varying degrees, stress the need of a wholesale reassessment of the nation-state framework within which Europe presently functions. While this may appear at first glance impractical, Professor Bianchini argues that borders are permeable, in practice, and that state sovereignty is no longer absolute. Above all, the impracticality of the present fragmentation of the Balkans suggests the need for change. This breaking down of the borders of the nation state in Southeastern Europe in Bianchini’s view is a process, which Europe can facilitate and in which she must participate.

Professor Mostov, for her part, strikes a more radical note, and asks whether the costs of maintaining the peace in the Balkans by force are not in any case greater than the expense of introducing transnational institutions. Her vision of an enlightened society freed of its ethno-nationalist past is, in fact, revolutionary. Precisely in this may lie its appeal to the young and educated urban elements of the region.

The question remains whether the Balkans can be transformed into the image of Europe in the foreseeable future. Failing such transformation, Southeastern Europe will remain highly dependent on her moral quest for integration with Europe as a motive force for reform. To sustain this sense of quest, Europe must be both pragmatically and spiritually engaged in the region, which means that stabilization in the Balkans might have a significant impact on both the Enlargement and the Deepening processes of EU. The reason is simple: on the one hand, in fact, Enlargement – as it was the case of NATO in 1999 – will involve the newly included countries in a policy of intervention in the Balkans, which requires systematic and long-term strategies. On the other, the need for effi-

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁷ Malina Kroumova, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

ciency in decision making, imposed either by the adoption of a common currency or by actions meant to address the problem, the unstable and desegregated area surrounded by an Enlarged Europe (which will possibly include in future Romania and Bulgaria), will make the deepening of *political* integration unavoidable. Alternatively, the whole attempt of integration may run the risk of failure.

In the end, the transitions started by the communist collapse, do not concern a mere adaptation of East European institutions to a Western model. On the contrary, transnational forces as well as peculiar developments within the European communities seem to encourage a broader and more challenging transformation of the Continental political society.

It is our hope that these essays will provide insights and some inspiration on how this mission is to be accomplished.

Stefano Bianchini, George Schöpflin and Paul Shoup