POLITICAL PARTIES IN POST-COMMUNIST EASTERN EUROPE

PAUL G. LEWIS

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Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe

Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe is the first textbook to survey the course of party developments in eastern Europe as a whole in the post-communist period. Firmly locating the political changes in eastern Europe in a comparative context, this book relates the specifics of the post-communist situation to the broader picture of the early stages of party development in western Europe and also to contemporary models of party organization in established democracies.

After a brief historical introduction to the overall context of post-communist change in eastern Europe the book considers the process of competitive party formation and the sequence of democratic elections that have structured and given impetus to the development of independent parties. Paul G. Lewis examines the types of party that have emerged and their contrasting ideological orientations as well as the striking levels of electoral volatility and parliamentary fragmentation in many parts of the region. Later chapters examine the degree to which stable party systems have evolved in eastern Europe and the contribution that parties make to the emerging democracies of post-communist Europe.

The book reveals that there are indeed identifiable democratic party systems now in east-central European countries; yet the Balkans and the former Soviet Union are still dominated by the institutional legacies of communist rule. Whilst there are some similarities between party systems in eastern Europe and those of established democracies, this book reveals major organizational differences, as well as a higher level of instability which reflects the effects of social transformation. *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* will be an invaluable resource, accessible to undergraduates of politics and European studies, as well as the non-specialist reader.

Paul G. Lewis is Reader in Central and East European Politics at the Open University. He has worked and published extensively on issues of democratization and party development in eastern Europe, and the course of recent historical development. He is the author of *Central Europe since 1945* and has edited an innovative volume on *Party Structure and Organization in East-Central Europe.*

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Preface

More than 10 years have now past since partially contested elections in Poland during the summer of 1989 and the installation of the first non-communist prime minister in eastern Europe since the 1940s. It was following those developments that orthodox communist rule, which derived its credentials from Soviet authority and had strong roots in the Stalinist model that flourished in the Soviet Union, was swept out of the region, and the Soviet Union itself was also, in words coined in a very different context, consigned to the dustbin of history. During this relatively brief period the region as a whole has been a laboratory for a process of far-reaching political change generally, if rather optimistically, characterized as one of democratization.

To the extent that democratic tendencies have prevailed over the temptations of post-communist authoritarianism, competitive parties have been one of the primary organized agencies of political change and the main vehicle for the institutional development of post-communist democracy. As political actors, the contemporary parties do not appear in any heroic light; they are rarely supported or even voted for with any great enthusiasm; their leaders are tolerated rather than acclaimed; and their organizations are generally seen as parasitic and a hospitable workplace for wheeler-dealers rather than dignified supports of a new democratic order. Yet, for all their weaknesses and the mundane problems of survival and operational activity they confront, parties have indeed shaped the main motor mechanism of political change in post-communist eastern Europe and their growth has been one of the key dimensions of democratic development.

A decade of post-communist change, and the holding of three or more contested elections in the more advanced democracies of eastern Europe, offer enough of a perspective and provide a considerable amount of empirical material on which to base a comparative survey of the critical issues of party development that have arisen throughout eastern Europe and the post-communist region as a whole (although Russia itself does not form part of the main discussion). Much has happened in a relatively short period of time, and an enormous number of publications in the area of democratization studies have appeared, many of which involve issues of party development and analyse the impact of party activity in particular areas. This book is designed to offer a broad overview of the

process as a whole, and provide a guide both to the course of party development and the nature of east European party activity for the non-specialist reader.

Many colleagues have contributed to an understanding of party development in the different countries of the region and helped with access to material on various aspects of party activity. An early interest in post-communist party development developed within the productive and congenial framework of a research project on Regime Change in East-Central Europe funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, which ran from 1991 to 1995. It was convened by Michael Waller, and also involved Bill Lomax, Geoffrey Pridham and Gordon Wightman, all of whom contributed to a growing interest in east European parties and a better understanding of their activities (Gordon Wightman has been particularly assiduous with help on Czech and Slovak developments). Many other colleagues who participated in this and other projects throughout the first post-communist decade have also been of great assistance during the preparation of this book. It is certainly not possible to mention them all, but particular thanks are due to Radzisława Gortat, Gabriella Ilonszki, Petr Kopecký, Elena Korasteleva and Vello Pettai. Anyone foolhardy enough to attempt a comparative analysis of developments in the numerous and highly diverse countries of eastern Europe automatically offers up innumerable hostages to fortune and commits inevitable inaccuracies, for all of which I apologize in advance. I sincerely hope though, and indeed firmly believe, that the broader benefits of the comparative view nevertheless outweigh the specific shortcomings of its outcome.

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1 Political change in eastern Europe

Introduction

The emergence of independent, competitive parties and the development of party government has been one of the most significant aspects of recent political change in eastern Europe. Political parties appear as one of the most prominent institutions of modern liberal democracy. It is hardly possible, in practice if not in theory, to conceive of a functioning representative democracy without some kind of competitive party system. The development of a range of reasonably effective parties is a prime indicator of the democratization of the former communist countries and the progress they have made towards joining the broad European community of established democratic nations. Parties help anchor the recently established democratic regimes in a broader society and contribute to their stability amidst multiple processes of rapid social and economic change. Effective constitutions and the diverse processes involved in the rule of law are strengthened by the possibilities parties offer for the development of a more active citizenry and the emergence of a robustly democratic political culture. There are also strong reasons to believe that such conditions are conducive to stable processes of economic development and the formation of effective market economies. This book is designed to provide an overview of the critical process of party development in eastern Europe both for those with a special interest in contemporary processes of change in the region and others concerned with the nature of modern political parties more generally.

Firstly, though, it is necessary to define the terms of the survey. Most people have a good idea of what a political party is, although experts find it difficult to agree on a *definition* that sums up its basic characteristics. As social institutions parties can carry different implications and their attributes vary in significance according to social context. Some influential definitions direct attention to a party's primary activity of contesting elections and seeking to place its candidates in public office.[1] Other analysts point out that parties can exist under regimes that do not hold elections, and that otherwise normally constituted parties sometimes choose not to contest a particular election or elections in general.[2] A further criticism of the office-seeking approach is that it provides insufficient grounds for distinguishing between parties and interest groups.[3] Such writers then tend to elaborate on other characteristics and the range of functions parties can perform.

The focus on electoral activity and the ambitions of parties to achieve government office are, nevertheless, of particular importance. In the context of post-communist eastern Europe it can be argued that participation in competitive elections is a major feature of party identity formation and the evolution of such organizations. Party competition is a prominent feature of the contemporary regimes that distinguishes them from the single-party dictatorships of the communist period and provides at the present juncture a natural focus of attention. Consideration of parties that are non-competitive is hardly of great interest here. At the present stage of east European party development, too, the distinction between party and interest group is a difficult one to draw and should not be over-emphasized.

Ranging beyond the question of definition, it must also be recognized that the very *concept* of party and its global scope is problematic. Surveys of parties on a general basis or within a particular region have not been common, and attempts to generalize about them on a comprehensive basis have encountered major conceptual problems. Reasonably stable, well-developed parties tend, quite simply, to be found in established liberal democracies and it is not clear that the parties identified in other contexts are quite the same kind of political institution. Some of the difficulties involved in such comparative exercises could be left to one side in the early stages. The first prominent modern, post-war overview by Maurice Duverger did not pay any attention to the countries that later came to be recognized as the Third World.[4] Leon Epstein was more aware of the problem of scope but acknowledged in his work that discussion of democratic party activity essentially concerned those nations that have participated actively in the 'special Euro-American development' of the last few centuries.[5]

Giovanni Sartori did pay attention to the largely unstructured party activity in Africa and some Latin American countries, although this largely served to emphasize the singularity of the European pluralist model. Von Beyme once more preferred to restrict his focus to parties in western democracies. More recently, Alan Ware has, quite reasonably, been unapologetic in continuing to direct close attention to parties in liberal democratic regimes – although in the context of the 1990s one of the five cases he considers is that of Japan. Discussion of political parties on a general basis has, then, tended to reinforce the focus on established democracies in Europe and associated countries in North America and Australasia. One important work shifted attention to the Third World and dealt with *Political Parties and Political Development*. It tended in this context, however, to emphasize the advantages of one-party regimes – a view that was very much of its time and of limited relevance to the study of parties in contemporary eastern Europe.[6]

In truth, the description and analysis of modern political parties remains rooted in the context of the established democratic regimes of the western world and is by no means necessarily the worse for that. It is certainly the prime reference point for party development in eastern Europe. The one-party regime that evolved within the Soviet dictatorship, and subsequently spread to other parts of Europe and the world, had little in common with the experience of liberal-democratic, competitive party politics. It does not now have a great deal to contribute to the general study of modern party politics.

But that does not mean that the west European and American origins of the party experience, as well as specific implications of the liberal-democratic context, should be ignored in a broader study. In a useful survey of activities outside the liberal-democratic heartland Vicky Randall deplores the prevalence of Euro-centrism and rigid concepts of what a political party should be.[7] The importance of the experience of established liberal democracies for party development and modern party practice overall cannot be ignored – but neither should the specific nature of some of the implications derived from that analysis. Established western practices might well provide the benchmark for modern party activity but, in the context of this study, it would be a mistake to expect the new democracies of eastern Europe either to replicate western models in any detail or to reproduce their party systems within a few years of the ending of dictatorship. Expectations of new democracies often reflect an idealized understanding of western experience and a faulty grasp of the important changes that many established democratic parties are undergoing.

A second major question of definition concerns the region itself. If the idea of the political party itself needs to be examined before being applied to the context of post-communist democracy, so that of eastern Europe also requires some elucidation. Any definition of eastern Europe is firstly, of course, a matter of geography – but also far more than that. The notion of eastern Europe, like that of Europe itself, carries a range of normative overtones and is often associated with particular values. For most of the post-1945 period the definition of the region was quite straightforward. The communist eastern Europe that emerged with the construction of the Iron Curtain was easily defined. From the late 1940s to 1989 it referred to the countries located to the east of the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria and Italy that did not form part of the Soviet Union.

With the removal of the Iron Curtain it now makes sense to revert to an earlier and broader view of eastern Europe – although one that still excludes European Russia, which merits separate treatment by virtue of the Eurasian status of the Russian whole, lingering remnants of its superpower status and special features that mark it off from the smaller countries closer to the democratic European mainstream. The eastern Europe at issue here is, therefore, quite simply defined. It consists of that part of Europe that cannot be described as western – a term with connotations not just geographical but also political (involving an established democratic order and in most cases membership of the European Union and NATO) and economic (capitalist countries with established market economies).

Contemporary eastern Europe thus includes most of post-communist Europe and major portions of the former Soviet Union. The coverage of this book extends to include the Baltic republics, characterized in any case by a firm identification with the countries of central Europe, as well as Moldova with its strong links with Romania. Although more distant from the European heartland, too, Ukraine and Belarus are also broadly European and their status remains reasonably distinct from that of Russia. But such definitions are also contentious and can be highly divisive in political terms. While few would argue with the borders of contemporary eastern Europe being extended to include parts of the former

Soviet Union, many citizens of the pre-1989 eastern Europe, particularly in Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and the Czech Republic, now wish to be known as inhabitants of central Europe, or at least east-central Europe. They have no wish to be identified with the population of any part of the former Soviet Union and assert a distinct cultural, political and economic identity closer to that of western Europe than the regions ruled directly from Moscow until the very end of 1991. Some of them may even feel downright insulted that their rapidly democratizing countries and developing party systems are covered in a book on eastern Europe. It is not the intention here to evoke any such response. My view is just that it is more useful to have a broad view of eastern Europe that encompasses all nineteen post-communist countries of Europe (with the exception of the more ambiguous case of Russia) and, for purposes of comparison and analysis, to direct attention to the marked political, social and cultural differences within that broad category. This survey of the new parties will in any case tend to be more strongly focused on the countries of central (or east-central) Europe that are closer to the west and where party development has generally been more advanced – and which are also countries where the process has been better documented.

It is not just the classification of the different sub-regions that is contentious but also their composition in terms of particular countries. My preferred grouping, and that which will be used throughout this book, distinguishes between the countries of:

- east-central Europe: Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic;
- the Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania;
- the Balkans: Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and most of the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia);[8] and
- former Soviet republics: Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.

Some political science texts have a slightly different focus. The central Europe examined by Attila Ágh in his recent text, for example, includes not just the countries I describe as east-central European but also Croatia.[9] In a further variant, Keith Crawford includes as constituent parts of east-central Europe all the countries of the former Soviet empire, and includes within it Albania, Bulgaria and Romania.[10] There is no general agreement on what constitutes contemporary eastern Europe or on how the countries that make it up should be grouped.

The classification proposed above is, in my view, somewhat more coherent than the other variants not just in geographical but also in political and economic terms. In line with most east-central European colleagues, indeed, it is difficult not to acknowledge also that these essentially geographical groupings also carry broader social significance. As listed in Table 1.1, the countries of east-central Europe are both further along the democratic path (Freedom Ranking) and richer (GDP per capita). After 1990, Slovenia, for example, rapidly left the 'Balkan' location of the former Yugoslavia to form part of a richer and more democratic east-central

Table 1.1 The countries of contemporary eastern Europe

	Freedom ranking, 1998–99	*$GNP per capita, 1998*	*$GDP in 1998 (1989=100)*	*Unemployment rate, 1996–97*	*Population, (millions)*
Slovenia	1.5	9,976	104	7.3	1.987
Czech Republic	1.5	5,040	95	4.0	10.304
Hungary	1.5	4,510	95	8.7	10.153
Poland	1.5	3,900	117	11.3	38.650
Estonia	1.5	3,390	76	10.0	1.458
Lithuania	1.5	2,440	65	5.9	3.705
Latvia	1.5	2,420	59	18.3	2.470
Slovakia	2	3700	100	11.6	5.381
Romania	2	1,390	76	6.0	22.570
Bulgaria	2.5	1,230	66	13.7	8.310
Macedonia	3	1,290	72	42.5	1.983
Moldova	3	410	32	1.7	4.310
Ukraine	3.5	850	37	2.8	50.536
Croatia	4	4,520	78	13.4	4.572
Albania	4.5	810	86	15.0	3.324
Bosnia	5	300	–	72.5	3.738
Yugoslavia (Serbia/ Montenegro)	6	2,300	–	26.1	10.597
Belarus	6	2,200	78	2.8	10.215

Sources: Column 2, combined average ranking from 1 to 7 (A. Karatnycky, ed. *Freedom in the World: Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, New York: Freedom House, 1999), Column 3, World Bank Report (at www. worldbank.org/cgi.bin), Column 4, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development: *Transition Report 1999* (London), Columns 5 and 6, UN Economic Survey of Europe (at www. unece.org/stats/trend/svn.htm).

Europe. In political terms, on the other hand, Slovakia moved away from the more advanced category. Following the break-up of Czechoslovakia it diverged from the broadly democratic path taken by other east-central European countries and continued to show (at least until the elections of 1998) some of the authoritarian characteristics of several of the Balkan and post-Soviet countries. Although former Soviet republics too, the Baltic states entered into fast-track democratization and maintained an economic lead over other former Soviet republics. It is reasonable, therefore, to place them in a separate category.

Contemporary international decisions reinforce the principles underlying this classification. In a further variant of sub-regional fine-tuning, the European Union expressed its own judgement on the pattern of political and economic development in eastern Europe in 1997 by identifying Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and the Czech Republic as the countries best suited for early entry to an enlarged community. The fourfold subdivision of eastern Europe is therefore primarily geographical, but also political and economic in some of its broad implications – although these can only be regarded as loose and suggestive in a general sense.

A third, and final, point of definition needs to be added about the term 'post-communism'. This is used to refer to the period after 1989 (in the former eastern Europe) or after 1991 (in the former Soviet Union) when, in the first case, the exercise of Soviet power ceased to be effective and, in the second, the rule of Moscow or the Soviet communist party came to an end and the USSR disintegrated. There is, notes Leslie Holmes, 'no readily identifiable and reasonably specific ideology or even theory of post-communism'.[11] But then there is no particular reason why there should be. Post-communism is simply a condition that exists in countries that have sloughed off communist rule. This common history is indeed likely to leave the countries with important similarities in the immediate post-communist period, but they can be expected to diminish over time rather than forming a distinctive pattern of post-communist evolution. This is precisely what seems to happening in contemporary eastern Europe in terms of levels of democratization and diverging paths of economic development. Nevertheless, for many people the term does carry significant political overtones. The idea of the 'post-communist party' is often used to refer to organizations formed on the basis of former ruling parties not just in a descriptive or historical sense, but also with the distinct implication that they carry over some authoritarian baggage from the former period. In this book any judgements will be based on empirical analysis of the particular party, and the term 'post-communist' will be used in a straightforward descriptive and historical sense rather than in any evaluative way.

Historical background

1989 was a momentous year both for the countries of eastern Europe and the development of a democratic Europe as a whole. Its most striking image might well have been the opening wide of the heavily guarded gates set in the Berlin Wall and the eagerness with which Berliners set about its demolition with pick-axes and crowbars, but in the longer run it was a process of construction that would do most to determine how long and in what form this newly gained freedom would survive. It was not bricks and mortar that were primarily at issue. Central to the process was the building of new political institutions and the establishment of a diversity of parties capable of expressing the interests and aspirations of a modern population. A range of influences bore on the prospects for party development and the capacity of the countries of eastern Europe to produce stable party systems capable of sustaining new democratic systems. One important factor was the region's limited experience of liberal democracy and the relative weakness of party development before the onset of communist rule.

In distinction to the longer established democracies of the west, the newly independent countries of post-communist eastern Europe had little experience of multi-party democracy or the practice of pluralist politics. Even before World War II, when the major portion of contemporary Belarus and the Ukraine already formed part of the Soviet Union, most of the other countries of eastern Europe had little success in preserving or implementing the principles embodied

in the democratic constitutions most of them had adopted after the end of the previous war in 1918. Czechoslovakia was the only exception in maintaining a fully democratic regime through to its demise with the Nazi invasion of the already weakened republic in March 1939. Democratic experience elsewhere was very limited, and the different kinds of constitutional order introduced throughout the region were rarely fully implemented.[12] The development of parliamentary democracy was abruptly curtailed in Bulgaria with the overthrow of the Stamboliiski government in 1923, in Poland after a coup d'état in 1926, and in Yugoslavia with the proclamation of a royal dictatorship in 1929. In Hungary there was little in the way of democratic development at all, the brief Soviet Republic of Béla Kun in 1919 being followed by a series of administrations under the overall supervision of Admiral Horthy until his removal in 1944. Apart from a brief extension of the franchise in 1920, the Hungarian electorate also remained restricted to 27.5 per cent of the adult population, so the limited degree of party competition was further restricted in its democratic reach in terms of popular representation.

Although early democratic aspirations – let alone practices – generally gave way to authoritarianism and varying degrees of dictatorship, the east European regimes were still distinct from the totalitarian system created in the Soviet Union. Political rule might well have been dictatorial and repressive in many cases, but it was by no means as tyrannical or monolithic as that established in Stalin's Russia. Unlike the situation within the resolutely one-party system installed in the Soviet Union, parties and elections did make some input to eastern Europe's public life and democratic processes retained some political significance. Thus, within the strongly monarchical system of rule that persisted in Romania, the National Peasant Party won a major electoral victory in 1928 and embarked on a series of reforms; Bulgaria, too, saw a People's Bloc of diverse party forces voted into power in reasonably free elections in 1931 to cope with the effects of the Depression. The Polish election of 1928 offered a fair degree of political choice and it was only after the passage of a new constitution and the death of Marshal Piłsudski in 1935 that dictatorial currents gained real strength. While the limits placed on party activity and the maintenance of a restricted franchise might mean that inter-war east European political life bore little resemblance to the practices of modern democracy and the party systems of the west, it at least saw a semblance of the institutional pluralism and competitive politics wholly absent from the territories that made up the Soviet Union.

As the region emerged from the ravages of the Nazi dictatorship after World War II, former parties were re-established and some features of party competition again came to the fore. Not surprisingly, the resurgence of party politics was more solidly based and longer lasting in Czechoslovakia, where the communist party gained a respectable 38 per cent of the vote in free elections held in 1946. Free elections were also held during November 1945 in Hungary, and here the communists gained a more modest 17 per cent and were soundly beaten by the anti-communist Smallholders' Party. In the region as a whole, though, the picture was a mixed one and the short phase of renewed pluralism more evident in

some countries than in others. Party competition and organized opposition had little chance to develop in Romania, Bulgaria or Poland, where the Soviet Union had shown a strong determination to impose its political will from the outset. The power of non-communist forces during the short-lived coalition phase of post-war Hungarian political life was also soon sliced away by the 'salami' tactics famously adopted by the nation's communist leaders.

Soviet influence was less decisive for developments in Yugoslavia and Albania where the communist movement had stronger domestic roots. A Communist People's Front rapidly took control in Yugoslavia and gained 91 per cent of the vote in federal elections held during November 1945, with a negligible number of ballots being cast in a combined residual 'opposition' urn. Communist leader Josip Broz Tito enjoyed considerable political support as commander of the partisan forces that had played a major role in liberating the country, but he too had little sympathy for parliamentary democracy and no inclination to tolerate the activity of competing political parties. The three Baltic states and the republic of Moldova (which had formed part of pre-war Romania) remained in the possession of the Soviet Union, as they had briefly been before Germany's invasion of Russia in 1941, and thus saw no part of this brief phase of patchy pluralism in eastern Europe.

Such elements of democracy and party competition that had emerged were soon eliminated as Soviet forces strengthened their grip over the region. Even in Czechoslovakia, the tenuous phase of post-war pluralism only lasted until the communist coup of February 1948, by which time the consolidation of communist power had involved the elimination of all elements of liberal democracy elsewhere in the region. From that year on Soviet control was maintained over most of eastern Europe (Yugoslavia and Albania remained the exceptions) and communist party rule persisted without facing any institutionalized challenge until just before its demise with the Polish elections in 1989.[13] Popular revolt erupted on occasion, but no formal political opposition or alternative parties were ever permitted. The closest eastern Europe came to this was during the period of Solidarity's initial legal existence during 1980–81 in Poland, but the organization's leaders paid some lip-service to Soviet requirements and continued to insist that it was an independent trade union and not a political body.

Once more, though, political life in communist eastern Europe differed from the Soviet Union and the monolithic character of the Soviet system was never fully replicated. The worst excesses of totalitarian rule were only approached during the early years of communist rule before Stalin's death in 1953, and even then were never fully applied in a country such as Poland. Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Poland even had a range of formally established political parties, although the non-communist 'puppet' organizations had no political independence and were unable to act as an opposition or to contest elections (they stood on a joint platform with the communist party when the largely ritual elections were held). In further distinction to Soviet practice, a range of social institutions enjoyed considerable autonomy in some countries and exercised a corresponding degree of public influence. Diverse social, cultural and religious organizations

were allowed to exist and, although not essentially political in character, they often exerted considerable public pressure and impinged on the political sphere, representing elements of pluralism within the overall uniformity of the communist system. The role of the Catholic Church in Poland was the most striking example of this tendency. Political life in eastern Europe was more diverse and consistently showed more signs of incipient pluralism than the Soviet Union, although still to a much lesser extent than in western Europe and other liberal democracies.

It was also underpinned by the existence of a more advanced, differentiated and generally freer society. A greater freedom of association and elements of a civil society both reflected and reinforced existing levels of national tradition and public awareness. This enabled some countries to sustain a relatively high degree of social independence in the face of the bureaucratic political monopoly embodied by the communist party. To varying degrees its influence also affected leading members of ruling communist bodies, who often showed more political acumen and greater sensitivity to the public mood than their senior comrades in the Soviet elite. There were overt signs of political pluralism within the party organization, which sometimes took the form of inner-party factionalism and further qualified the monolithic quality of communist party rule in eastern Europe.[14] This was most prominent in Hungary and, particularly, Poland where it undoubtedly contributed to the successive leadership crises and instability of communist rule in that country. Factional tendencies were less apparent in Czechoslovakia, although a movement for inner-party reform came dramatically to the fore in the developments that led to the Prague Spring of 1968. These features of east European communist rule helped prepare favourable conditions for pluralist party development when the regional political climate changed. Such experiences also strengthened the capacity of former ruling parties to transform themselves into social democratic bodies capable of acting with considerable political skill in the post-communist democracies.

The historical background for party formation and development in post-war eastern Europe in 1989 was, then, quite a differentiated one. None of the countries in the area had experienced democratic politics or the relatively free operation of independent parties during the preceding 40 years of communist rule, although background social conditions and the character of communist rule differed significantly throughout the region. The brief interregnum between Nazi dictatorship and the consolidation of communist rule had provided some opportunity for party activity. But in most countries this was very limited and even in a more positive case such as Czechoslovakia the period concerned was only short. It was only in that country that the 20 years or so of inter-war independence had seen the relatively successful operation of a democratic system and the conduct of party politics in ways that had tended to sustain effective government, contribute to political stability and maintain the integrity of a newly established multi-ethnic state. The inter-war experiences of the other independent states in the region were less conducive to the establishment of any kind of democratic tradition, but the experience of national independence itself helped create the basis for a modern political community and was generally a positive factor for subsequent

processes of post-communist democratization. The experience of Belarus and Ukraine, most of whose territory had formed part of the Soviet Union from the outset, was quite different in this respect.

In these countries questions of state formation and primary definition of the political community were faced for the first time when the Soviet Union ended in 1991. This clearly impinged on processes of post-communist democratization and party development, as basic issues of civic identity and political representation had to be faced from the outset. There was little sense of such identity in Belarus and limited faith either in its statehood or capacity to develop as an autonomous political community, particularly on the part of its president, Aleksandr Lukashenka. Much of the early political agenda in independent Moldova was similarly dominated by issues of national identity and pressures to merge its territory with neighbouring Romania. In such cases questions of whether a state should exist at all crowd out those concerned with how it should develop and the objectives its government should pursue, matters that are the normal stuff of party politics. Ukraine showed more confidence about its national identity, but parties in the early phase of post-communist independence rarely spanned the divide between the western area that formed part of pre-war Poland and an east that was long ruled by Russia. Political life in Latvia and Estonia was similarly characterized by a major gulf between native inhabitants and the sizeable Russian population, which continued to act as a major obstacle to the formation of an inclusive political community.

Neither had all conflicts about the national bases of other east European states and the essential character of the political community been settled during the inter-war period of independence. Problems of state formation and political integration remained to dog the post-communist period in some areas. Many key problems of state formation and violently conflicting claims on the territories of eastern Europe had been placed on the agenda with the break-up of the Ottoman, Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian empires at the end of World War I but were never fully settled or, even by the end of the communist period, moved sufficiently down the political agenda to maintain anything more than a temporary political stability.[15] During the communist period such tensions were generally suppressed rather than brought to any clear resolution.

Questions surrounding the ethnic character of the inter-war state had been particularly prominent in Yugoslavia, where they were tackled with considerably less success than in Czechoslovakia. This had predictable consequences for the fate of the country's democratic regime, which collapsed in 1929, while nationality issues were also very prominent in Hungary, Romania and Poland. The fault lines that ran through the original Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes at the time of its formation in 1918 (it only took the name Yugoslavia with the failure of the original regime in 1929) thus remained to dash any hopes of a peaceful post-communist transition in the early 1990s. Amongst the former Yugoslav republics it has only been post-1989 Slovenia, which is ethnically homogenous and thus not subject to the conflicts seen elsewhere, that has escaped the threat of inter-community violence and developed a reasonably effective party system to