A Brief Guide to Social and Political Change in Eastern Europe

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NOTE: THIS IS A WORK IN PROGRESS. IT IS NOT TO BE QUOTED OR CITED.
This brief guide provides basic information on social and political change in Eastern Europe.

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Chapter One: A Socio-Cultural History

Language Groups

Eastern Europe is home to many languages. Although the national languages of many countries in CEE belong to the Slavic languages, the region is not uniform in this sense. The Slavic languages belong to three main groups (within which they are more similar to each other than between groups): West (like Polish), East (like Russian) and South (like Bulgarian). Some languages in the region belong to other groups such as Romance (Romanian).

Specific for the region is the use of Cyrillic alphabet. It is historically related to the spread of Orthodox Christianity (Cyril and Metody) and it is currently common in countries with Orthodox tradition (but there are exceptions, e.g. Romania).

Religions

Countries of CEE belong to a range of religious traditions, of which the greatest geographical coverage have the Catholic (in the west) and the Orthodox (in the east) Christianity. The most strongly Catholic countries are Croatia (96% of EVS respondents declared belonging to this church), Poland (98%), and Lithuania (94%). Almost entirely Orthodox population
characterizes: Russian Federation (91%), Moldova (96%) and Romania (89%). The countries with strongest Protestant tradition – Latvia (33%) and Estonia (38%) – in the past belonged to the Danish state. The countries with largest proportion of Muslim population are: Kosovo (77%), Albania (76%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (42%). The highest percentage of declared atheists is in Czech Republic (16%). For comparison, the most atheistic country in Europe is France (17%). In some countries almost everybody declares belonging to a religious denomination (Romania 98% and Poland 95%); in others people belonging to a religion are a minority (in Estonia only 34% declare belonging to a religion, in Czech Republic is 31%).

Religiosity differs a lot across the CEE region. It is highest on Romania -- over 50% declare that religion is very important in their lives -- Macedonia and Montenegro, and lowest in Estonia and Czech Republic, which is the least religious country in Europe. However, membership in organizations related to the church is overall low. It is highest in Moldova and Albania, where respectively 15% and 12% of population declare membership in such organizations. For comparison, in Iceland and Denmark over 60% of population declares membership.

**Alcohol**

One of the cultural divisions across Europe and CEE countries is between the various cultures of drinking alcohol. This geographical variation is called ‘alcohol belt’ and associates with particular regions the dominating type of alcohol beverages consumed. East and north are characterized by dominating consumption of vodka (in CEE – in pure form these will be the post-soviet countries), south (in CEE: south of Poland and Ukraine) – by consumption of wine, and the northern-central region – by consumption of beer. Poland is usually considered a vodka and beer country.
Part II  History of Eastern Europe from World War Two to 1989

Chapter Two: World War Two and the Origins of Communism in Eastern Europe

We begin in 1917. Europe is in the midst of World War One (1914 – 1918), the first 20th Century war to engulf all of Europe. During the Great War, over 70 million military personnel were mobilized and over 9 million people were killed.

By 1917, the Russian people had enough of war. The Russian Empire lost 3.3 million people to World War One. Following on the heels of the 1905 Russian revolution, a mass uprising against the Russian monarchy in which the Soviets first appeared as a major political force, came the Russian Revolution of 1917. This mass uprising against the reformed Russian monarchy by workers, peasants and soldiers took the form of mass strikes and protests and was led by a social movement organization called the Soviets. Soviet means “council,” and over the course of 1917 these councils agitated for and won the revolution, eventually creating the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Led by the Bolsheviks – Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, first and foremost – the aim was to create the world’s first Communist state based on Marxist principles.

The Soviet Union espoused pro-democracy and anti-capitalist ideology, though more in rhetoric than in practice. Josef Stalin came to power in 1922 and remained there until his death in 1953. Under his rule, at least a million (if not millions) were starved to death in the Ukraine and many millions more were executed or exiled in “purges.” The USSR moved to a centrally planned economy, eschewing Western supply and demand in favor of rigorous state control over the markets. As part of Stalin’s forced industrialization policy, over the course of the 1930s, Stalin poured tons of resources into the military.

World War Two

We examine World War Two from an Eastern European perspective. World War Two started at the tail end of the Great Depression, when in 1939, Germany and Russia invaded Poland. America did not join the war until 1941. As with World War One, World War Two engulfed all of Europe.

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1 Military build-up was intended to spur industrialization. See Mark Harrison. 2001. SOVIET INDUSTRY AND THE RED ARMY UNDER STALIN: A MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX? No 609, WARWICK ECONOMIC RESEARCH PAPERS. “It is true that the Soviet Union, although a relatively poor country, allocated somewhat greater resources to defense than other countries at a similar level of development for much of the twentieth century. For most of the interwar period, for example, most other European countries, including the United Kingdom, were spending 2 to 3 per cent of their national incomes on defense, and the United States even less.14 In contrast the peacetime share of Soviet military spending rose unremittingly from 2 per cent in 1928 to 6 per cent in 1937 and 15 per cent in 1940.”
September 1939: Germany invades Poland; USSR invades Poland shortly thereafter.

1940: USSR invades Baltic States; Germany invades Denmark, Netherlands and other European countries. Soviet secret police murder 20,000 Polish military and allied P.O.W.s, buries them in mass graves in Katyn.

1941: In June, Germany attacks USSR. In December, Japan attacks USA; Germany declares war on USA.

1943: Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. First Great Powers meeting, in Tehran, Iran.


1945: Soviets reach Berlin; In May, Germany unconditionally surrenders to Allies.

The powerful role World War Two played in 20th Century cannot be underestimated. The cost was simply enormous: Over 60 million people died during WWII, including 20 million from USSR (of which half are civilian deaths), which translates into 12 percent of their population; in Poland, 5.9 million died (of which half were Jews), almost 16 percent of their population, and 7 million Germans died. Whole cities were reduced to rubble, including Stalingrad, Warsaw, and Dresden, and many, many more suffered great damage. With no intention to make light of any of the deaths or destruction, to understand the impact of WWII on Europe, and Eastern Europe in particular, we can place these numbers in contrast with the United States: over 400,000 Americans died, or 0.32 percent of their population, and outside of the military base in Pearl Harbor, no city, town or village in the U.S. was even remotely damaged as a result of World War Two hostilities. World War Two was a tragedy for Europe by every possible measure: it was marked by genocide, mass rape, and the wholesale collapse of everything one now takes for granted, including democratic rule, modern capitalist markets and human rights. World War Two created tens of millions of refugees – civilians who fled from the front lines all around them, and prisoners of war. Everyone knew someone who was affected by the war. As a testament to its enormous impact, it is impossible for any single person to comprehend the scope of the devastation. It is simply too big.

After World War Two, a completely devastated Europe had no choice but to repair, rebuild, and recuperate. This reconstruction in Western Europe, aided in part by the U.S. under the Marshall Plan, completely occupied the efforts of Europe. Country boundaries shifted, new governments were formed, economic markets re-opened, homes and schools were built, refugees were resettled.

After World War Two, the fate of Eastern Europe was left to the Soviets. The U.S. had no intention of fighting over Eastern Europe, and Churchill’s Britain had not the power to stand up to Stalin. That the USSR wanted Eastern Europe is as old as the Russian Empire. The Soviets envisioned Eastern Europe as both a barrier against and a doorway to Western Europe. Much of the outline for the carving up of Eastern Europe occurred at the Yalta Conference in February 1945. Yalta was in the Soviet Union, and there, Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill – the so-called Big Three – discussed the postwar peace. Roosevelt wanted Stalin to help with the continuing war with Japan, while Churchill pressed for an agenda for governing the newly defeated Germany. They would not interfere with Soviet designs on Eastern Europe.
As for Poland, Stalin said, “For the Russian people, the question of Poland is not only a question of honor but also a question of security. Throughout history, Poland has been the corridor through which the enemy has passed into Russia. Twice in the last thirty years our enemies, the Germans, have passed through this corridor. It is in Russia’s interest that Poland should be strong and powerful, in a position to shut the door of this corridor by her own force. It is necessary that Poland should be free, independent in power. Therefore, it is not only a question of honor but of life and death for the Soviet state.”

How did Eastern Europe become Communist? Officially, the story is that in each Eastern European country the Communists acceded to political power through democratic processes: creation of political parties, elections via secret ballot, and formation of government coalitions. Unofficially, the transition from postwar government to Communist government was done through force via the disregard of legitimate democratic practices. When it became obvious that the Communist parties would not become the majority, those with military and political power used any means possible to win.

To understand the origins of Communism in Eastern Europe, we must first understand the context of a war-ravaged Europe. The first context is psychological adjustment to radical change: from the West and from the East, everyday folks in Eastern Europe – from the smallest village to the biggest city – became accustomed to radical changes in who runs in the country and who owns what. During World War Two, whoever controlled the state at the time put farms and factories into the war-effort. After years of trauma and radical change, postwar radical change did not seem so radical. Of course, Communism was favorably seen by many: the idea of forging a new society based on cooperation and the common good was an appealing notion after a decade and a half that saw economic collapse and total war. Equally important was that life was dominated by practical things, such as daily physical survival. Such preoccupations reduce desire for ideological struggle.

Next is demographic change. The political, economic and military elite, who would normally come to power, suffered many losses. Many of the sons and daughters of prominent industrialists, politicians, military officers and the landed-gentry had their parents die or were themselves killed, or had lived in exile. The wholesale murder of millions left room to the survivors for upward mobility. Some saw the communist regime as inevitable, and a means upward.

Perhaps the most important reason was that the Soviet Union emerged as an unchallenged leader in the region, and they clearly wanted to ensure that every one of those weak Eastern European countries become loyal to the USSR. In general, the Soviet Union had the following main mechanisms of realizing their will: (1) military forces stationed in-country, (2) Soviet “advisors” strategically placed in political parties, and (3) money and other resource-based incentives for in-country nationals to cooperate. In addition to these, each country had its own unique variations. For example, in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, countries at some point hostile to the Allies during World War Two, the Soviets controlled the Allied Control Commissions (ACCs). By law ACCs oversaw all local administrations operated by nationals: “This gave the Soviet authorities an official instrument to steer policies, veto or

authorize appointments, and in other ways gradually ensure Communist Party domination over local bureaucracies” (Gross 1997:30).

Poland had its own peculiarities, but also followed general principles. Some context is necessary. Russian and Polish relations were never good, and the Katyn massacre was a recent, and strong, sore point. Also, Poland was among those countries with an organized underground armed resistance (Yugoslavia was another). Most Poles opposed Soviet intervention in postwar reconstruction. To install Communist-friendly regimes required the elimination of that armed resistance and their sympathizers.

How did the Communist party come to power in Poland? In general, Poland’s temporary government, installed and maintained by the Soviets, eliminated all opposition and effectively used propaganda to get people to vote for their policies. In 1945, as the war wound down, the Soviets created the conditions for the Communist take-over and the ruling regime, sympathetic to Soviet Communists, used the state apparatus to this end. Specially targeted were the military and political elite, the ones who would provide the greatest resistance. Also targeted were the peasantry, who were ideologically opposed to collectivization.

One step was to create a secret police. The Soviets, in collaboration with some Poles, created a “Security Office” in NKVD (later, KGB) style, a secret police designed and authorized to suppress dissent. Many in the armed resistance (Home Army) fled to the forests, and were hunted down. Informants were cultivated or forcibly created. A quasi-State of Emergency, via official decrees from the national government, was created and enforced: a series of decrees selectively nullified interwar legislation, broadened the range of offenses subject to arrest and death penalty, and established penal camps. Special courts were set-up to “try” Poles suspected of German collaboration or activities against the Allies (read: USSR). In addition, “A massive propaganda campaign was mounted… in an effort to convince people to vote in favor of the regime’s proposals” (Gross 1997: 101). In Poland, the peasantry (farmers) was an ideologically strong bloc and formed the Polish Peasant Party. The military was deployed to help with the propaganda effort, and “they prompted the dissolution of 75 Polish Peasant Party Clubs, organized 1,913 village meetings in which over 285,000 people participated, and removed 27 communal administrators and 61 village administrators” (ibid 102). The main Polish Communist party formed an alliance with the Socialist party, and won 80 percent of the vote in the 1946 elections.

By 1947, then job was done: the political and armed opposition was crushed and the Communist party was in power.

After the establishment of Communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe, the USSR wanted to consolidate and legalize its continued control. To do so, they needed legal documents authorizing the use of military power. This authorization came in 1955, when the Soviet Union and countries of Eastern Europe signed the Warsaw Pact. Like NATO, it is a pledge of military cooperation: when one is attacked, all are attacked. Key to this military agreement is that attack does not need to be external—it can come from within, such as violent revolution to overthrow the government. If, say, Hungary were to have an armed rebellion against the Communist regime, the Warsaw Pact allows the Hungarian government to ask the Soviets to intervene militarily. The Warsaw pact is a great irony: the Soviets, who came to power through armed revolution, forced a military pact to stop armed revolution.

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Chapter Three: Life under Communism, 1945 - 1989

In this section, we will define Communism, investigate the Cold War, and try to understand what life was like under a Communist regime.

What is Communism?

The first thing we should understand is that there were varieties of Communism in ideology and in practice.

Table 1. Archie Brown’s Six Characteristics of a Communist System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Political</th>
<th>B. Economic</th>
<th>C. Ideology</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Democratic Centralism</td>
<td>4. Command economy, as distinct from a market economy</td>
<td>6. Existence of, and sense of belonging to, an international Communist movement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Notes from the table:

A1. The Communist Party is “the leading party.” Since the Communists represent all legitimate societal, political and economic concerns, and since it is the force pushing society from mere socialism to the higher stage of communism, the Communist Party is the only legitimate political party: there is no need for another.

A2. Also known as bureaucratic centralism. It is comprised of two main ideas. First, options are debated, but decisions are final; Second, political life is hierarchically structured, with the Communist Party on top and all other decision-making bodies underneath.

B3. This is, essentially, state ownership of the means of production. There are variations of this: in Poland, most agriculture was privately owned, and some businesses were privately owned. In Romania, all agricultural production was state owned and controlled and private business did not exist.

B4. Economically, Communist regimes are centrally planned. This means a heavy intervention into the market, and strict controls on production and consumption. How did it function? Communist regimes produced plans (usually every five years, set for the next five years, the so-called “Five-Year Plans”): what should be produced and how much. Perhaps the best way to understand this is that capitalist laws of supply and demand do not apply in Communist centrally-planned economies. In capitalist systems, producers adjust what they make and how much depending on demand signaled by consumers. The cars made are dependent on what cars people want and how many they will probably buy (based on previous sales). In Communist centrally planned economies, the Communist Party dictates what and how many cars will be produced, and consumer demand is not taken into account. Producers

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do not compete; instead, they work together to fulfill the Five-Year Plan. Correcting “mistakes” in the Plan can be very difficult, but adjustments were made.

C5. Society is oriented to the perfection of the socialist system, to transcend socialism and build the way to communism. Communism is envisioned as the perfect system.

C6. Communism was a worldwide movement. Since all workers deserve to be “free,” and communism is the one true way to freedom, communism must be spread globally. This is a moral imperative.

What was the Cold War?

The Cold War was a battle between the two “Superpowers,” the USSR and its allies and the U.S. and its allies. It consisted of (1) propaganda, (2) political maneuvering in the United Nations, (3) proxy wars and (4) military build-up. The Cold War’s origins are in dispute, but most agree that it was in full swing as soon as World War Two ended, and the Truman Doctrine of containment was born. The Cold War ended at the fall of Communism.

Propaganda is a form of biased communication used to influence others of a superior ideology, and that competing intellectual positions are inferior. Both the U.S. and the USSR used propaganda extensively during the Cold War. Propaganda is designed to not only influence those hold competing ideologies, but also, and possibly primarily, those who are already under the influence. In America, it was anti-Communist and anti-Soviet Union propaganda; in the Soviet Union, it was anti-Capitalist and anti-American propaganda.

Part of the propaganda effort is found in the history textbooks used in high schools. One study of world history textbooks used in the U.S. found that they paid increasing attention to the USSR and communism, but also with increasing disdain and inaccuracy.

As the Americans and the Soviets vied for hegemonic economic, political and military position, they fought Cold War battles in the United Nations and around the world. The United Nations was created in the aftermath of World War Two as a means to settle international disputes without resorting to war. Although most nations eventually became members of the U.N., there is great inequality between them. Within the United Nations, there is a group of key nations that form the Security Council. According to the U.N., this decision-making body “has primary responsibility, under the Charter, for the maintenance of international peace and security.” It is an exclusive club with five permanent members, all victors of WWII: The U.S., the USSR (now, Russian Federation), China, France and the United Kingdom. Non-members can be part of the deliberations, but cannot vote. Decisions must be unanimous, as each member of the Security Council can veto a decision made by the rest of the council. The U.S. and the Soviets extensively used vetoes to undo decisions initiated by the other.

In battling for supremacy, the U.S. and the USSR also used proxy wars. Proxy wars are military conflicts fought by rival factions in other countries using U.S. or USSR resources in which personnel of the U.S. and the USSR did not come into direct contact. The wars were costly. Some of the major wars were the Korean War (1950-1953), in which 40,000 Americans died, 46,000 South Koreans died, 215,000 North Koreans died, and 400,000 Chinese died. There was also the Vietnam War (approx. 1955 – 1975), in which 58,000 Americans died, 250,000 South Vietnamese died, and about 1 million North Vietnamese died. During the Soviet-Afghan War (1979 – 1988/9), 13,310 Soviet soldiers died (35,478 wounded); it is not known how many Afghans and allied fighters died, with some approximations between 1 and 2 million.

Key to military build-up was amassing weapons of mass destruction, the most important of which was the nuclear bomb. Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. and the USSR competed over their capacity to build these weapons and increase their range and efficiency. At various points, starting in the 1970s and accelerating in the 1980s, the U.S. and USSR mutually agreed to limit the number of weapons they built, but not their lethality. So far, only the U.S. was ever used a nuclear weapon in conflict (on Japan in 1945). Billions and billions of rubles and dollars were spent on proxy wars and military build-up.

What was life like under Communism?

Life is a big concept: let’s break this down by sections.

Politically, Communist regimes are one-party rule, meaning that all political decisions go through the Communist Party. Rival parties are not encouraged and there is no inherent right to form them. Espousing a political (or economic) view that is contrary to that of the Communist Party is actively discouraged, and can lead to bad ends: you can lose your job or, 

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6 http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/coldwar/korea_hickey_01.shtml
in extreme cases, be arrested, depending on your level of influence. There are mechanisms through which one can complain, but since complaints can be used against the complainer, such complaints are rare.

Capitalism as the West understood it did not exist and consumer culture was of a far different type. For example, to buy a car you must “sign-up” at the car dealership, of which there are few (lines are long; you must wait for hours in order to sign up). Since the State will produce a set amount of cars, and much fewer than what consumers want, consumers must wait for their car for 1, 2 or 3 years. There are few, if any, choices as to what cars are available at the time when it is your “turn” to buy a car. All major consumer goods are done this way. For smaller-scale consumer goods, the lines are long. Instead of supply and demand, Communist economies are supply and luck: economies function on a first-come, first-served basis, where those lucky enough – or with proper connections – obtain limited supply goods. Lines for everything were long, and domestic life was spent in long lines. Consumer life was drab, with dull, if any, packaging. This was a shortage economy, when everything one wants is in chronic short supply. The idea of “customer service,” in which promptness, efficiency and friendliness are ways for service providers to best their competition, was non-existent. Why should waiters be prompt, efficient and friendly if there was no competition between restaurants? Overt hostile disdain towards customers by bureaucratic staff and by restaurants and all other service providers was the norm.

A second major feature of economic life was that all Communist regimes in Eastern Europe were forced to rapidly industrialize. Most countries were heavily dependent on agriculture. In the Soviet Union, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, about half of the population worked in agriculture. By the 1980s, this declined to about a fifth of the population, and over half worked in construction and transport. To compete with the West, the Communist regimes moved mass numbers of people from the rural areas to the cities. Industrial output was focused on raw material extraction and construction materials, not on consumer goods. Note that any statistics from Eastern Europe during this time have varying levels of unreliability: percentage of women in parliament is hard to hide, but economic statistics are easy. Because political and economic spheres were one, not separate, numbers were fudged and fabricated.

Forced industrialization meant mass movement to cities. This required housing. Housing is plentiful, as the Communists built many huge apartment blocks. Yet, the living space was small. Communal apartments, or so-called multi-family apartments, were common (but not the norm). This meant that three or so unrelated families lived in the same apartment. These apartments were large, but privacy was limited. Communal bathrooms and communal kitchens reduced one’s sense of privacy. In addition, the apartment blocks were built in the great hurry that was forced industrialization. They were meant to stand for 20-30 years, but most of them have surpassed that time limit. Building quality varies considerably, and many are of poor quality. With cars hard to come by, the public relied on public transportation which was clean, efficient and cheap.

College was free – if you passed the test to get in – but afterwards the State assigned you a job. This job could be far from your hometown. Income inequality was very low as people in various jobs with varying levels of skill got paid low wages.

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You are guaranteed a job, but not necessarily a good job. Communist regimes are full-employment economies, meaning that unemployment – the situation of looking for, but not finding a job -- did not officially exist. Since the inefficient economy had to create jobs for everyone, bureaucracy increased and redundant positions were created. People occupied positions that did not have to exist, or could be performed by one person, or a smaller group of employees. Working everyday in such unimportant jobs was tiresome.

Censorship was omnipresent and came in two forms: (1) official censors of every media (newspapers, radio, television) and information dissemination, including schools and mail, and (2) self-censorship, i.e. “the policeman inside your head.” What you think cannot be said, and what you write cannot be written.

The Communist Party sought to control all forms of information dissemination. This was done in a variety of ways. First and foremost was domestic spying by “secret” police and other domestic agencies. This includes microphone and telephone intercepts, mail censorship, “surreptitious entries into private homes and public institutions,” and radio and telex institutions. The scope of the surveillance state is not known, and may never be known. What is most important is how people perceived the security apparatus as being everywhere – whether it was, or was not, is less important. It was the perception of total surveillance that controlled the citizenry. According to one former spy chief in Romania, “over 90% of the Romanian officers [had] their offices and homes electronically monitored at least periodically” (68). He claims that Ceausescu had hundreds of thousands of microphones installed. Domestic spying varied by Communist Party chief, and can grow rapidly. In 1965, Romania had one central and 11 regional electronic monitoring centers, and 5 central mail censorship units. By 1978, it had 10 central and 248 “peripheral automated portable units covering small towns, vacation resorts” frequented by foreigners and 48 mail censorship units. The secret police, such as Romania’s feared Securitate, created a massive national network of informants.

The State kept extensive files on all citizens captured and victimized in the network; after 1989, these files were released to the public: wives found out that their husbands were informing on them, sons and daughters found out that their parents were informers, and vice versa, that life-long friends were reporting intimate conversations. Domestic spying has a strong corrosive force on social bonds.

Academic freedom – the ability to write and research and criticize as one likes within an academic setting -- varied by country and by time period. In Poland by the mid-1960s, there was greater academic freedom than in Romania.

Perhaps the most insidious of them all is self-censorship. People refused to speak aloud what they thought for fear of their thoughts being broadcast by informants to the State, who take a dim view of criticism and dissent. The State had the legal ability to arrest and detain suspected enemies of the State, and it was the State that dictated what makes for an enemy. Abstinence from critical thought was wholly possible, given the glaring flaws all around. Yet, many Soviets cried when Stalin died.

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Not everyone lived this way. The nomenklatura and Party members lived a life of comparable luxury. Nomenklatura means two things: (1) a list of jobs doled out by the Communist Party and (2) the people who held these jobs. To get a job on the nomenklatura list, you had to be friends or family of a Party member, or be a Party member yourself. Membership has its considerable privileges: nomenklatura had better wages, better working conditions, freedom to travel outside of the country, and could shop in special, nomenklatura-only shops with access to Western goods. For the rest, there was the black market. Things could be had, but only under the table, or outside of official channels.

All of this fostered a deep-seated hatred and distrust for authority and for the government. Authority is something to be avoided at all costs, and cheating the system is a survival strategy, not a crime.
Chapter Four: Transition from Communism to Post-Communism

In this chapter we explore why Communist regimes in Eastern Europe fell. To understand the Revolutions of 1989, we must look back on the history of mass resistance in Communist regimes from the 1950s to the 1980s.

There are a number of instances in which masses resisted the Communist authorities. Note that before 1989, only few – Hungary in 1956, for example – were led by the hope that the Communism system itself would fall. Most uprisings sought changes in the system, rather than its wholesale collapse.

To understand these uprisings, its context must be kept uppermost in mind: After some initial enthusiasm for the new Communist Party government – the people were constantly reminded that out of years of world war and economic collapse the bright, shining future was clear on the horizon -- by the mid-1950s folks saw clear signs that the political, economic and social systems were in ill-health. Government-led repression and monopoly of the means of violence, coupled with insufficient channels for the masses to express displeasure with the government maintained the troubled Communist system. Dissent occurred all the time, but mass dissent was rare. Omnipresent was the domestic security apparatus, as well as the threat of USSR military intervention (via the Warsaw Pact).

Major Mass Eastern European Bloc Uprisings 1945 - 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Autumn, 1956</td>
<td>Small revolution against Stalinist-like authority</td>
<td>Intervention by Soviet troops, rollback of reforms, repression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>Spring-Summer 1968</td>
<td>Liberalization of society and political system, non-violent public demonstrations</td>
<td>Intervention by Soviet troops, rollback of reforms, repression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>December 1970</td>
<td>Strikes and demonstrations against rise in food prices</td>
<td>Polish authorities use violence to end the uprising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(also 1976)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>August 1977</td>
<td>Miners in Jiu Valley protest low (and non-existent) pay and poor working conditions</td>
<td>Romanian authorities use Securitate agents to identify and arrest the leaders of the opposition, many workers were fired, and promised reforms reneged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>August 1980</td>
<td>Strikes against proposed raise in food prices and poor work conditions start in Gdansk shipyards, spread throughout country, creation of Solidarnosc</td>
<td>Polish authorities declare Martial Law until 1983</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While each instance had its own peculiarities, some common themes of Eastern bloc uprisings were: (a) working class protest and the desire of workers to form trade unions independent of
the Communist Party, (b) liberalization and proposed political reforms met with harsh resistance by authorities within the country and by the Soviet Union, (c) the constant – and, as 1956 and 1968 showed, probable – threat of Soviet military intervention.

What is the significance of Eastern bloc uprisings? It is not possible to draw a single line from any of these instances of mass resistance to the Revolutions of 1989. If there is a line, it is the “history of resistance” that people remember and use as motivation and courage for the future. The history of resistance can be a powerful force, but it is not, in and of itself, the primary factor.

Revolutions of 1989

In 1989, one country after another within Eastern Europe initiated revolutions that sought deep structural changes to the Communist system or its entire collapse. By the end of 1989, all countries in Eastern Europe were on their way to becoming post-communist. The main characteristic of the majority of Eastern Europe’s 1989 revolutions was relatively non-violent negotiation with the Communist governments. Romania was the exception, in which at least 1000 people died in overthrowing the Ceausescu regime.

There are three main theories as to why the Communist Systems in Eastern Europe collapsed: (1) “Reagan won the Cold War,” (2) “Gorbachev’s liberalization,” and (3) “Bad economy.” While they can be talked about separately, in reality there are elements of truth in all of them, though the last two theories are the most sufficient causes of the Revolutions of 1989.

Reagan Won the Cold War

According to this theory, in the 1980s President Ronald Reagan sought to end the Cold War. Reagan assumed that the Soviet society was immoral, with flagrant abuses of human rights, and that the Soviet economy was teetering on the brink of collapse. The idea was to portray the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” on the wrong side of history, and to out-compete with the USSR on every economic and military aspect. This tough rhetoric, confrontational approach would be enough to put the U.S. in moral position to assume the role of the world’s lone, good superpower, give motivation and courage for the masses to overthrow their government, all while pushing the Soviets into spending more on their military than their economy could withstand. The end result would be the collapse of the Soviet economy which would force them to change their economic and political system.

There are many problems with this theory. First, it is difficult to trace direct connections between tough rhetoric – “evil empire” and “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” – and the changes introduced in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during the 1980s. There is no evidence that the masses of Eastern Europe needed tough rhetoric from the U.S., as (a) they had a history of mass resistance before Reagan and (b) there is a tremendous gap between rhetoric and actual material support for revolution. Second, because Soviet defense and other economic statistics are not credible, it is not possible to know whether Reagan’s policies had anything to do with the Soviet military spending or the economy. In the end, Reagan’s former Vice President, President George H. W. Bush, presided over the Revolutions of 1989, and he studiously and deliberately did nothing overt outside of some tentative rhetorical support for

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10 Key to this was that in 1975 the Soviet Union signed the “Helsinki Accords,” in which the Act’s "Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States” included a statement on the inviolability of human rights.
the on-going revolutions. Bush I wanted to let the region transition itself by not intervening to any obvious extent, and with some careful words about supporting democratic aspirations. Bush I had to be more careful, of course, because he feared unnecessarily angering the Soviet Union during what was then, still a Cold War.

Gorbachev’s Liberalization

When Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union, he wanted to reform, but not eliminate, the economy and the political system to allow for some free-market supply and demand and political dissent. His liberalization reforms have become known as “perestroika,” meaning “restructuring” and “glasnost,” meaning “openness.” Over time he developed friendly relations with President Reagan and signaled to the Eastern bloc countries that they are now free to pursue their own path towards communism. The combination of these factors enabled authorities within Eastern European countries to institute reforms and for the masses to demand deep structural changes. Change began with Poland’s roundtable talks and elections, and the idea of not just reform, but wholesale collapse of the Communist system, snowballed from country to country.

Bad Economy

In this theory, the bad economy was the main factor. Decades of the fudged and fabricated economic statistics that guided the centrally planned economy, the inability of within-country authorities to change the economy in response to global economic crises, and the wholesale disillusionment with the Communist System was unsustainable. Both the authorities and the masses knew that either change would come, or that the system would collapse. In the end, change had come and the system collapsed.

These two theories should be seen as intertwined. Most agree on two main factors that enabled the Revolutions of 1989:

(1) The Soviet Union clearly stated to all countries that they would have to take care of their own internal affairs, and that if there were changes, the Soviet Union would not intervene militarily. This gave the green light for changes. Because the USSR held Eastern Europe together via military force, the removal of that force opened up new avenues for activist groups to challenge the government.

(2) Eastern Europe experienced terrible economic conditions, and this built up considerable popular resentment toward the government.

Revolution 1989 could not have happened without both of these conditions occurring at the same time. The governments saw that change was inevitable, and that they would fare better in a post-communist world negotiating than fighting.
Chapter Five: From Post-Communist Society to the European Union Era

The years 1939 to 1989 left a glaring mark on Eastern Europe, and influenced its economic, political and cultural trajectory after the Revolutions of 1989. We are now in the second decade of the 21st Century, over twenty years after the fall of the Communist system, and whether we can meaningfully refer to present day Eastern Europe as “post-communist” is up for debate. What is clear is that legacies of World War Two and the Communist system continue to shape contemporary Eastern European society.

To understand all this, as always, remember the context: fifty years of Communism meant that for over two generations, a single authoritarian economic and political system dominated all aspects of society. What happened after 1989 is truly radical social change: every aspect of society was impacted, and in some cases, had to be created from virtually nothing. Economically and politically, post-communist society turned their heads from the glare of Russia to the glow of the West. Eastern Europeans chose to build a modern capitalist democracy borrowing elements from Western Europe and the United States, and fit these elements into their country-specific culture. There are commonalities across the region of Eastern Europe, but there are also local peculiarities.

Economy

Eastern Europe moved from a centrally-planned economy to a “free-market” economy; they moved from “supply and luck” to “supply and demand.” Many problems arose, and basic questions needed to be answered quickly: Basic knowledge of how to start and maintain a business was lacking under Communism; which businesses run by the state should be privatized, and which should be kept under state ownership? How will pensions be honored? How will taxes be collected? How will the government redistribute wealth so as to create a social welfare safety net? How generous should social welfare programs be? How will the economy link to the rest of the world? Who has the knowledge, expertise and connections to run private businesses?

A variety of economic approaches were discussed. There were two main camps: “Shock Therapy” and the “evolutionary approach.” In shock therapy, the state withdraws quickly and wholesale from the economic market, and allows the market to dictate immediately what is needed to produce and for how much. Shock therapists favor radical economic liberalization as the means to generate investments, accumulate capital and grow the economy, opposing heavy state regulation of the economic market and privileges the private sector. The evolutionary approach slows down this process, with the state slowly, gradually allowing the market to evolve and correcting problems along the way. Both have problems. In shock therapy, the conditions for an efficient market are largely absent: there is little information about the market and the economic institutions that assess and manage risk are not in place. Therefore, the quality of life, especially in the short run, is dramatically changed for the worse, as people are forced to make quick and uninformed economic decisions, resulting in mass unemployment and high-turnover in fortunes. Economic inequality is high as the post-communist economy quickly separates “winners” from “losers.” In the evolutionary approach, the economy is slow to change, and cannot quickly adapt to the rapidly changing, globalized economy. On advice from the West, many countries, including Poland, chose the shock therapy approach. Initially, the economies of Eastern Europe were poor. Unemployment,

11 Most scholars hyphenate this word and, in contrast with Archie Brown (2009), use lower case letters.
which previously did not exist, was very high. Countries that chose the evolutionary path, such as Belarus, are slow – even to this day -- to relinquish centralized control. The result of the evolutionary approach is a poor economy with low economic inequality.

Out of the economic restructuring came two main economic philosophies: statists and economic liberals. Statists are favored by former nomenklatura members and current leftists who advocate for a strong welfare state that approximates the relative economic security of the Communist era but does not include a centrally planned economy. Economic liberals favor reliance on market forces and limited government interference in economic affairs, arguing that economic security is best handled by a laissez-faire government.

Government leaders, and that of the citizenry, were disappointed in the slowness and pain of the early reforms. In the early 1990s, the Polish Foreign Minister, Andrzej Olechowski, had told The New York Times:

"If you compare the current situation with our expectations in 1989-1990, I would say we are not satisfied, because we thought things would go faster... If you press politicians in the West, they say yes, you can join us, at the turn of the century, but there is no agreement on a calendar to get there. Perhaps we were naive."

In the analysis of 1990s and early 2000s post-communist economy, many use the term, “winners and losers.” Winners successfully navigated and even prospered in the early stages of the economic restructuring; losers did not. Reality is never a simple dichotomy, but the winners and losers divide points to (a) the growing economic inequality and (b) that those who were winners during the Communist era became losers afterward.

Who are the winners? Let’s think about what people needed to jumpstart a modern capitalist economy: high education, experience in how to manage people and ideas, connections with investors and contacts with key government officials, and experience with Western ideas. Those in the best position to capitalize on the new opportunities had all of these traits, namely, the nomenklatura and the managers of Communist-era factories. Although it varied by country (for political and cultural reasons discussed below), the Communist-era economic, managerial and political elite were the winners of the post-communist transition.

Who are the losers? Losers in post-communism were those who benefited from the generous social safety net provided by the Communist system: low and unskilled workers, women, the youth and the elderly, and the peasantry.

A couple of stories illustrate the problem. In 1994, Jan Rusin, was a jobless coal miner who worked for 27 years until he was laid off. He was a father of 10. "I meet most of my old colleagues at the unemployment office," he said. "I never thought there'd be such unemployment. All the years before 1989 were great. We didn't have to worry about a job."

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In that same year, Krzysztof Prosowski, was a 43-year-old steelworker at a plant outside Warsaw that lost nearly 2,000 jobs after an Italian company bought majority shares. He said, "Five years ago, I could put money from my salary aside in savings. Now, I live from paycheck to paycheck, but there's not much hope of finding another job under these conditions."

Solidarñosc’s gradual defeat had the unintentional effect of bringing in a statist, post-communist party to power while decreasing the ability of the lower class, communism’s proletariat, to regain any lost status. Unemployment is high for all disadvantaged groups, but the lower class in particular. Women lost labor market protection, though their labor-force status was always second to that of men and traditional gender roles remained throughout the communist and post-communist contexts. Women in Poland have higher unemployment rates than men and experience occupational segregation similar to that of other women in Western Europe. Introduction of and rising unemployment, coupled with the reduction of a strong welfare state had an impact on the age structure of Poland’s stratification system, where young adults looking for a job had difficulty finding one. As for the elderly, pension systems have recently been reformed, usually toward private accounts, with the effect of lowering pension guarantees. Together, youth and old became members of the disadvantaged. Forced urbanization reduced farmer status, and post-communist economic restructuring has exacerbated urban-rural stratification. During the Communist-era, farmers had semi-private ownership of their land. Contracts with the state provided protections from the global agricultural market and economic downturns caused by bad weather. After state breakdown, farmers were exposed to market forces and due to funding and ideological shifts on what to do with the agricultural sector, farmers lost the security of statist attitudes toward the peasantry. These problems were exacerbated when Eastern European country became a member of the European Union.

Politics

The entire political system had to be rebuilt, from the Constitution to civil society. The constitution had to banish the phrase “the Communist Party is the leading party” and institute rules on how the parliament works, the powers and roles of the country leader (e.g. President, instead of General Secretary of the Communist Party), what citizenship means, and how the judicial system functions. Whole new political parties -- now legal -- were to be formed and a new electoral system needed to be installed. The result was a proportional representation system and an alphabet soup of party names. For example, in the 1991 elections in Poland, 111 parties stood for election, each with their own unique (Polish) acronym. Over fifty years of Communist rule had decimated civil society, such that the very idea of political organizing outside of the Communist Party had a difficult time becoming popular. Civil society is designed to advocate and lobby for the losers of the post-communist transition, but civil society is slow to develop.

Although it varied by country, in general many members of the former political elite had the expertise to help run the new political system. They formed “post-communist parties,” which were statist in orientation. Classic post-communist parties advocated for a strong welfare state and economic protections for the losers of the transition. They were very successful in the early elections. After the early 21st Century, as the economy stabilized, economic liberal

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parties became more popular. It is unclear as to the effect of the economic crisis on the fortunes of political parties, but so far in Poland, the economic liberals (led by PO) are dominant.

Immediately after the fall of Communism, many Western scholars and politicians fretted over whether political systems in Eastern Europe would achieve stability. Some thought that decades of authoritarian rule would condition Eastern Europeans to reject modern capitalist democracy. During the 1990s, political systems in Eastern Europe were somewhat chaotic, with limited democratic accountability and low levels of political participation. Some nations, especially those from the former USSR, have yet to become fully functioning democracies (Ukraine, Belarus, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan and, to a certain extent, Moldova and some countries of the former Yugoslavia, with the exceptions of Slovenia and, eventually, Croatia). Over the last twenty years, most of the countries immediately adjacent to the European continent have developed stable democracies, including the former Soviet states in the Baltic. Across Eastern Europe mass political participation remains sparse, however. Nonetheless, some groups adversely affected by the transition pine for the Socialist past, and support for democracy, while high overall, is lower than that of the West.
Chapter Six: Eastern Europe in the European Union Era

Democracy

Establishing democracy was the main goal of the transformation. Below is a graph of the level of democracy in Belarus, Poland, Sweden and the U.S. from 1989 to 2007. (note that Belarus was part of the USSR in 1989) Data is from Freedom House, and is the average of political rights and civil liberties, where the higher the number, the worse the level of democracy. Sweden and the U.S. have scores of 1, meaning that the level of democracy is very good. Some countries, like Poland, have successfully democratized. Some countries, such as Belarus, have not.
Economy

How close are the CEE countries to the West in terms of state of the economy? The GDP of CEE states are systematically lower than in other parts of Europe.
Income Inequality

Below is a comparison of Eastern Europe and the West in terms of income inequality\textsuperscript{15}. The Gini Index is from 1 to 100, where the higher the score, the greater the income inequality. A score of 1 means that there is perfect equality, i.e. no gap between rich and poor; a score of 100 means that there is perfect inequality, i.e. the largest possible gap between rich and poor. The data are from 1981 to 2007.

In all countries depicted – Belarus, Poland, Sweden and the U.S. – from 1981 income inequality rises. It is largest in the U.S., smallest in Sweden.

Lower income inequality is not strongly correlated with the level of democracy. While Belarus has a lower level of income inequality than Poland, their level of democracy is much worse.

\textsuperscript{15} Data from SWIID database.
http://thedata.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/fsolt/faces/study/StudyPage.xhtml?studyId=36908&tab=files
Gender and Politics

During the postwar Communist-era, officials thought that one of the most important principles of Communist ideology was to empower groups that had been historically disadvantaged. Women were among the disadvantaged groups that the regime sought to liberate. This meant an increasing participation of women in all spheres of public life, from university education and occupational attainment to parliamentary membership. As such, Communist ideology – in which the Party played the “leading role” -- idealized descriptive political representation, which can be defined as the extent to which the composition of the political elite resembles the demographics and experiences of the citizenry. In the Soviet Union, Poland, and Romania, the Communist Party both praised women and actively sought to maintain traditional gender relations. Throughout the Communist era, as political equality was extolled, gender traditionalism remained the norm of the land.

During the transition (1989 – 1991), Poland and Romania focused on democratization and economic reform, and gender and descriptive representation was not prominent on the agenda. The immediate post-1989 drop in Polish and Romanian women’s parliamentary representation was a result of the political resurgence of pre-existing gender traditionalist attitudes and the new priorities of the young governments that struggled with the transformation and consciously relegated the inclusion of women and women’s interests to some unspecified future date. As the post-Communist era got underway, the gender-politics relationship that emphasized equality of the Communist-era was viewed by many of the political elite and the public as artificially and forcefully imposed by illegitimate rulers, and thus viewed with resentment. For some, the new democratization meant that political recruitment would be blind to demographics and against policies of positive gender discrimination. As Poland and Romania prepared for entry into the European Union, their public stance was to align their gender policies with EU gender policies, e.g. gender mainstreaming, and has been influenced by the international women’s movement.

Examination of trends in women’s representation in the national parliaments of the USSR/Russian Federation, Poland and Romania from 1947 to the early 21st century reveals that women’s representation has always lagged far behind that of men, and never reached close to 50 percent. For most of the Communist era, USSR, Poland and Romania managed to keep the percent of women in parliament below 35 percent. Romania rose quickly to 35 percent in 1985. The high was short-lived as the transition of 1989 brought a radical decline in women’s already low political representation. In the outcome of the partly open National Assembly elections of 1989, Polish women took only 13.5 percent of seats in the Sejm and 6 percent seats in the Senat. Romania represented the worst-case scenario, dropping to below five percent in the first democratically free election. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the parliamentary representation of women remained low. Trend-wise, Poland and Romania are best characterized as slow rising with frequent plateaus.

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16 The emphasis on legislative priorities is illustrated well by a quote from Olga Krzyżanowska, MP during the years 1989-2001, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament and then Senator: “First, it was too early for women’s rights, and then it was too late. Immediately after 1989, many MPs were of the opinion that the economy and politics were more important. I thought so too, in spite of being a woman. Because the problems of the transformation concerned everybody, regardless of sex.”

Comparable data on the national level reveals that, on average, throughout the Communist era, women’s representation in parliament in Eastern Europe was higher than the West (Figure 2). Immediately after the late 1940s, when there was no substantial difference between East and West, the average percent of women in Eastern Europe (measured here by Poland, Romania and the USSR) rose dramatically. This gap remained wide, and got even wider during the 1980s. Meanwhile in the West, after the 1960s, when the feminist movement in the West gained considerable strength, the West inched steadily upwards. The spectacular shift occurred in 1989, when the East fell sharply and the West continued its slow rise. By the early 21st Century, the gap was reversed.


18 We define the West as: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the United States of America.
In studying Eastern Europe, it is important to make the distinction between descriptive and substantive representation. Substantive representation refers to advocacy and policy that reflects the diverse interests of the citizenry; such representation of interests comes from having one’s voice heard in the legislature and translated into action. Women had lesser representation because (a) the parliament of which they were a part had very limited effective control over the legislative and policy process and (b) few women were members of the Communist party central committee, which was the main decision-making body under Communism.

To explain dynamics of representational inequality, we must make the distinction between formal rights, and the fulfillment of those rights. A story from the Soviet era, as first told by Field (1968), begins to illustrates this point. On the eve of an election in March 1958, Khrushchev, General Secretary of the USSR Communist Party, gave a speech to prospective voters. In this speech he remarked on foreign visitors’ amazement at seeing women engaged in snow and ice removal on the streets of Moscow.

“On this basis they maintain that our women are not honored… It is hardly necessary to prove that Soviet women are held in great esteem, that they have not merely in words but also in fact equal rights with men in all areas of social and political life, as well as in production” (Field, 1968: 7, quoting from Pravda).

Khrushchev was likely paraphrasing Article 122 the USSR Constitution from 1936: “Women in the USSR are accorded all equal rights on an equal footing with men in all spheres of economic, government, political and other social and cultural activity” (Field, 1968: 11). Khrushchev displayed either wishful or delusional thinking, for at the time (or any time after), women were not politically equal. True, by 1946, almost all countries of Eastern Europe had granted suffrage to women. However, legal political equality is far different from the actions taken to fulfill the promise of those rights.

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Author’s calculations based on data from Paxton Paxton, Melanie Hughes, and Jennifer Green (2009). Women in Parliament Dataset, 1893-2003, ICPSR data repository.
In the Communist and post-Communist eras, legal political equality was enshrined in the constitution (Table 1). Due to Soviet domination of the region, the Romanian and Polish constitutions reflected the Soviet constitution, especially in the early versions. In all, at some point during the Communist era, women were guaranteed equal political rights, where the word “political” was specifically mentioned. This guarantee must be understood in the context of Communist ideology, which guarantees not only equal opportunities, but equality of outcomes: Women and men were to achieve perfect parity in all aspects of life, including politics. In the post-Communist era, the constitutions reflected those of Western Europe. Political equality in terms of outcomes was no longer guaranteed; instead, these constitutions’ only guarantee was that men and women have the same opportunities for equality.

### Constitutional Mentions of Women’s Political Equality in Romania and Poland, from Communist to Post-Communist Era

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<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>“Women have equal rights with men in all areas of the state, economic, social, cultural, political and private.” (Art 18, 1948; similar to Art 83, 1952) Changed to: “Citizens of the Socialist Republic of Romania, without distinction of nationality, race, gender or religion, are equal in rights in all economic, political, legal, social and cultural areas.” (Art 17, 1965)</td>
<td>“Romania is the common and indivisible homeland of all its citizens without distinction of race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, opinion, political affiliation, wealth or social origin.” (Art 4, 1991) Changed to: “Public office or dignity, civil or military, may be filled by people who have only Romanian citizenship and domicile in the country.” (Art 16, 1991) Changed to: “Public office or dignity, civil or military, may be occupied, according to law, persons who have Romanian citizenship and residence in the country. The Romanian State guarantees the equality of chances between men and women to occupy such positions and dignities.” (Art 16, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>“Women in the Polish People’s Republic have equal rights with men in all spheres of public, political, economic, social and cultural life.” (Art 66, 1952)</td>
<td>“All persons shall be equal before the law. All persons shall have the right to equal treatment by public authorities. No one shall be discriminated against in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever.” (Art 32, 1997)</td>
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Female parliamentarians across Eastern Europe hope that greater exposure to European pressures, especially that of gender mainstreaming, will encourage pro-gender equality attitudes. Former Chair of the Women’s Parliamentary Group, Senator Dorota Kempka, said that Polish ascension to the EU pressured Polish parliamentarians to seriously consider gender equality initiatives:

I think that the European Union has played an enormous role in raising many issues and the preparation of many solutions in Poland. The European Union knows that women have the right to make decisions concerning their lives. . . . I think it’s great that the period of preparation to join the European Union was parallel to activity of the Parliamentary Group of Women, which won more support thanks to this fact. (Kempka and Majcher 2009: 220)
Epilogue 1: Promises of Utopia and the European Union Future

“In the vanguard of the struggle for peace and security marches the Soviet Union, which played an outstanding part in smashing fascism and fulfilled its great mission of liberation. The peoples liberated by the Soviet Union from the fascist yoke received an opportunity of building their state life on democratic principles, of realizing their historical aspirations. On this road they find fraternal assistance on the part of the Soviet Union. The entire world has had an opportunity to convince itself, not only of the power of the Soviet State, but also of the character of its policy based on the recognition of equality of all peoples, respect for their freedom and independence. There is no reason to doubt that in the future the Soviet Union will be true to its policy—the policy of peace and security, the policy of the equality and friendship of the peoples.”

-- Josef Stalin, May 1, 1946

“RESOLVED to mark a new stage in the process of European integration undertaken with the establishment of the European Communities, DRAWING INSPIRATION from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law, RECALLING the historic importance of the ending of the division of the European continent and the need to create firm bases for the construction of the future Europe, CONFIRMING their attachment to the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and of the rule of law, DESIRING to deepen the solidarity between their peoples while respecting their history, their culture and their traditions… HAVE DECIDED to establish a European Union...”

-- Preamble to the Consolidated Version of the Treaty of the European Union, 2010

From 1945 to now, for the peoples of Eastern Europe, come promises of a better future: without war and with human respect, without division and with freedom. Eastern Europe once had no choice but to look towards the Soviet Union. Now, they have a choice, albeit one that all seem to want to make, of joining the European Union. It is hoped that voluntary cooperation among countries will establish lasting peace and freedom. Some Eastern European countries have joined the EU (Poland, Hungary and Romania, for example, but not only), others are close (Croatia), and still others are far away (Moldova, Ukraine). For Eastern Europe, joining the EU is seen as the ultimate privileged step toward the democracy and prosperity historically enjoyed by the West. But, for Eastern Europe, they have heard promises of utopia before. In Communism, a better future was guaranteed, and ultimately denied; for the European Union future, a better future is possible, but not guaranteed. After a 20th Century full of war and despair, how bad can the 21st Century be?

20 http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1946/05/01.htm

Epilogue 2: The Global Economic Crisis

The global crisis began in 2008. It was a result of both the crash of the U.S. housing market and the density of the economic networks that connect the U.S. and Europe. Across Europe, the impact of the crisis was felt objectively, in terms of falling incomes and rising unemployment; and subjectively, in terms of everyday anxiety over how to cope with economic insecurity. Across Eastern Europe the global economic crisis wreaked havoc. Unemployment jumped, governments fell, and faith in the European Union weakened. According to the World Bank, in 2009:

“In a short period of time, property values plummeted, the value of retirement accounts shrank, household savings evaporated, and general consumer and producer confidence disappeared. Deteriorating macroeconomic conditions led to deteriorating household welfare, as unemployment increased and as workers who kept their jobs took home smaller paychecks. Households were forced to cope, but sometimes those coping strategies put households at a higher long-term risk, e.g. by reducing spending on health care.”

Poland became the exception. In 2010, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk held a press conference at the Warsaw Stock Exchange. Behind him was a color-coded map of Europe, in which red indicated decline in GDP, and green indicated growth. Poland stood out in green, an “island” of economic growth amidst a sea of red countries. Tusk’s press conference came to be known as the “green island” speech, a point made in stark terms and primary colors: at the onset of the crisis, Poland was the only European country to post positive economic growth. The government of Poland has since used the term, “green island,” to promote itself as a bastion of economic security.

The Green Island thesis is that the Polish economy, as a whole, survived the crisis. The government’s promotional materials on this point are free from nuance, leaving scholars to imagine the broader impact of the economic crisis across the citizenry. In 2012, scholars from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences fielded a special edition of the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN) on the twin topics of unemployment and economic insecurity to a sample of the unemployed and economically insecure. One open-

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24 Poland.gov.pl, self-billed as the “Official Promotional Website of the Republic of Poland,” published an internet article with the title, “Poland defies global crisis.” They write, “Poland is the only country within the Continent to have confidently withstood the widespread financial and economic crisis that appeared on the horizon in 2008. No wonder global investors are beginning to perceive Poland as a ‘green island’ amid economically challenged states all around.” Finance Minister Jacek Rostowski, who told reporters after Tusk’s press conference that, “We want to be a green island of low debt in a Europe which, unfortunately, may become awash with red ink.” http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aCK1mK0Yd8kw Accessed January 2014.
ended item in their questionnaire was on the social and political activity of the unemployed. Of her predicament, an unemployed respondent said:\n
“How can I be active? Even me, I have to stay at home, without Internet, without anything, because one would have to pay bills. One who doesn’t pay the bills is cut off from world. One goes to the town, to the constituency office and the doors are always closed. So why get involved, why get upset. Would this help? No. One should stay at home and look at ads [job offers], one may find something. Or pack your stuff and go abroad, work like a slave 12, 14 hours a day, save a bit, change the Euro into Polish Zloty in a change point. And then our Prime Minister will say, ‘Wow, Poles live so well! Green island!’”

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25 NonWork interviews, interview #330-101, when asked about the relationship between unemployment and social and political activity.