

Democratization Without Decommunization in the Balkans

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Abstract: *Since recent U.S.-led democratization projects having led in some cases to the election of Islamist movements, the old democratic theory that structural preconditions are key determinants of successful democratization has apparently been bolstered. This article examines the democratization experience in postcommunist Europe to assess which matters more, a society's "givens" favoring democracy or the institutional imports that a democracy-minded elite can borrow. In particular, it compares the experience of the Southeast Europe countries, which presented poor prerequisites for successful democratization and yet in at least two cases (Romania and Bulgaria) are far along on the path to democratization to the experience of Central Europe and the former Soviet Union as a whole.*

The extensive experience of various state entities with democratization after 1989 put a considerable strain on democratic theory. The explosion of democratic transitions that followed the fall of Berlin Wall seemed to suggest that human agency is crucial to the process of democratization and that structural preconditions matter less than was previously thought. But today, with the United States' recent democratization campaign having led to election victories by Islamist movements in some cases, the old idea has returned that not every society provides the raw material out of which democracy can be shaped. The relative importance of a society's "givens" favoring democracy and the institutional imports that each democracy-minded elite can borrow remains a debated issue. Which matters most? And are some constraints so important that, unless they are resolved, democracy cannot simply take hold?

The European Union divides postcommunist Europe into three regions:¹ (1) the eight countries that joined the EU in 2004; (2) Russia and most of the successor states of the Soviet Union, whose future seems divergent from Europe's;

¹ "Regions," of course, are often artificial constructs. University of Michigan sociologist Ronald Inglehart suggests that the postcommunist states, both European and non-European, make up one cultural region. Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Post-Modernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

and in 1999 it invited them to pursue membership (they are expected to join in 2007). Serbia has been on a democratic path since the fall of wartime dictator Slobodan Milošević, despite periodic threats of the return of nationalists. Croatia and Macedonia have signed stabilization and accession treaties, a preliminary step to joining the EU. Croatia hopes to join by 2009, while Macedonia has not yet begun negotiations. Albania is on its way to becoming a member of NATO and the EU, with which it signed an association treaty.

Those of the other countries that have serious state-building problems, like Bosnia and the Yugoslav province of Kosovo—both of which are still international protectorates—face greater difficulties. Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* scores continue to be far worse for Balkan countries, even for Romania and Bulgaria, than for Central Europe, especially due to the Balkans' early 1990s history. However, they do score better than the former Soviet Union (FSU) countries.

Explanations for Differences

What explains the difference between Central European and Southeast European political transitions? Two sets of theories are generally offered to explain why a country is a democracy or an autocracy. One set refers to structural components, on the theory that a country's present is best explained by its past. The best synthesis of this approach is found in Zbigniew Brzezinski's claim that to explain the divergent paths of Soviet successor states, "we must look primarily to history and culture."² In 1993 Samuel Huntington argued along the same lines with his clash of civilizations theory, although in *The Third Wave* he had allowed for nonstructural explanations. Huntington predicted that Central European countries, due to their closeness to the West in history and religion (Protestant and Catholic), would be more likely to develop stable democratic regimes.³ Another structural explanation concerns geography. Democracy spreads by diffusion, and the closer a state is to the democratic and prosperous West, the more likely it is thought to become developed and democratic.⁴ A country's place in the world system—core vs. periphery—is also assumed to play an important role in democratization.⁵

The second set of explanations focuses on political actors. Based on the seminal work of the authors of *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (1986),⁶ this

² Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Primacy of History and Culture," *Journal of Democracy*, July 2001, p. 22.

³ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, pp. 30–31; and *The Third Wave* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

⁴ See Jeffrey Kopstein and David Reilly, "Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Post-Communist World," *World Politics*, October 2000.

⁵ On core vs. periphery, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 1979). See also Renske Doorenspleet, "The Structural Context of Recent Transitions to Democracy," *European Journal of Political Research*, May 2004.

⁶ Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, vols. 1-4 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

approach looks at the specific conditions under which democratic transitions are initiated. As Michael McFaul wrote, “Inert, invisible structures do not make democracies or dictatorships. People do.”⁷ We may, however, find different factors relevant for the *consolidation* of democracy than for its initiation.⁸

The main traditional difference invoked when comparing Central Europe to the Balkans is the Balkans’ Ottoman, as opposed to Central Europe’s Habsburg, legacy. Political scientists such as Huntington interpret this *historical difference* as cultural (the Balkans are Orthodox and Muslim, Central Europe Catholic and Protestant), while others see it as social and economical, a legacy of backwardness. A second group of explanations refers to the *type of communism* and its political legacy, with political scientists like Valerie Bunce arguing that the national communist path is distinctive from Soviet communism. Finally, a third influential set of explanations argues that *external factors* account for much of the variation across Eastern Europe, arguing that the incentive to join NATO and EU and more generally the special Western interest play the largest role in explaining the successful transitions of Central European countries as opposed to the Balkans.

The importance of being a nation-state

In order to have a democracy, one must first have a state, which requires agreement on who makes up the political community and where boundaries should be drawn.⁹ For a polity to democratize, it must first be acknowledged as one by its entire population and granted the same recognition by the international powers. To meet these two conditions simultaneously has proved exceedingly rare in Southeast Europe. As Barrington Moore Jr. put it in the 1960s, small East European countries should not be included in discussions on social and political change, as “the decisive causes of their politics lie outside their own boundaries.”¹⁰ In one form or another, it is fair to say that Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia were each finally able to decide their own course after 1990, but by then they were so burdened by legacies such as border disputes that this freedom was considerably reduced. Nowhere did the warning of John Stuart Mill sound truer than when the Balkans were finally liberated in the early nineties:

It is, in general, a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of

⁷ Michael McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Non-Cooperative Transitions in the Post-Communist World,” *World Politics*, January 2002, p. 214.

⁸ See Adam Przeworski, *The Sustainability of Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); also Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Towards Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

⁹ See Dankwart Rustow, “Transition to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics*, April 1970.

¹⁰ Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. ii.

government should coincide in the main with those of nationality. . . . Where the sentiment of nationality exists in any force, there is a prima facie case for uniting all the members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart. This is merely to say that the question of government is to be decided by those governed.¹¹

The demography of the Balkans is an Ottoman legacy, perhaps the most important one. It was the Ottomans' forced settlements that induced the large-scale demographic transformation of the area, the consequences of which still determine the relationship of its peoples to each other.¹² Ottoman rule intentionally manipulated, and in so doing in some ways actually prevented, the natural process of ethnic homogenization that took place in most of Western Europe before modern times.

After obtaining its independence from the Ottomans in 1878, the Balkans remained heavily influenced by the Great Powers until at least the end of World War I, the end of which divided the region into polities that bore a strong Western mark. These borders were not the organic creation of history, shaped more or less naturally by centuries of wars and bargaining, as in Western Europe, but rather reflected a poor balance between historical evolution and the interest of the war's winners and losers. This is still strongly felt in the whole region, with East Europeans in general perceiving their borders as "wrong" compared to West Europeans. Even Kosovars, who do not yet have a state, believe that Albanian-inhabited territories in Macedonia should belong to them. Bulgarians have to cope with Macedonians next door speaking the Bulgarian language, and Romanians with Moldovans and other Romanian-speaking peoples lost to Stalin's Soviet Union through the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and ending up in Ukraine.

¹¹ John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government, in Essays on Politics and Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 547.

¹² Peter Sugar, *South-East Europe under Ottoman Rule 1354-1804* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), p. 283–8; Maria Todorova, "The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans," in Carl L. Brown, ed., *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 46.

Table 1. East European Public Opinion on Borders (%)

Agreement with the following statements:	Romania	Bulgaria	Kosovo	Serbia	Central Europe
“There are parts of neighboring countries which belong to us.”	67	45	81	50	Hungary 60
“Minorities are a threat to sovereignty and borders.”	44	43	78	75	Slovakia 72

Source: Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, “Milosevic Voters: Explaining Grassroots Nationalism in Postcommunist Europe,” in Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Ivan Krastev, eds., *Nationalism after Communism: Lessons Learned* (New York and Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004).

Nationalist attitudes are widespread in postcommunist Europe, with Hungary and Romania leading in territorial nationalism. However, Hungary and Romania have not fought each other or their neighbors during their postcommunist transition, as Serbia did. What differed in the Balkans were not peoples’ feelings, but opportunities to challenge borders and states. The former Yugoslavia simply had “subversive institutions.”¹³ For Serbia, still struggling to cope with Montenegro’s and perhaps Kosovo’s secessions, the story is not yet over, and this explains why a country that was so advanced among the communist states in the 1970s is now lagging behind. By 2006, only nation-states seemed to have succeeded in the European integration project. After the first eight Central European countries became EU members in 2004, the next three entrant candidates—Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia—have shared a similar profile. As the EU avoided candidates with ethnic problems, it actually contributed to the selection of such candidates. However, Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia all had their share of ethnic problems during their transitions. Unlike the former Yugoslavia, they were able to solve them peacefully. From these examples it is clear that the states with successful transitions were those that were able to give a clear, agreed-upon answer to the fundamental question of who was to become a member of the national political community in the new postcommunist state.

Postcommunist Europe’s success stories are the ones where the state itself was not at stake, even if ethnic minority issues were prominent. What worked in postcommunist Europe were formulas to make unitary states more inclusive and more accountable, through the adoption of international legal standards for minorities, strong external pressure to ensure that these laws were implemented, and national cooperative politics. Individuals, however, not communities, remained the constituents of the state. This is the package that has produced successful states and fair political societies. Representations of minorities through proportional electoral

¹³ Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

systems and reserved seats for smaller groups in national parliaments have also worked well. In Romania and Bulgaria (like Slovakia in Central Europe), the largest parties of ethnic minorities have become constant participants in government coalitions.

By contrast, ethnofederalism increased the likelihood of both ethnoconstitutional conflict and violence.¹⁴ Ethnofederalism was an indispensable ceasefire strategy in Bosnia, for instance, but successful state-building does not necessarily follow such ceasefires. Once in place, institutions tend to stick if they provide incentives for groups, so ceasefire institutions usually turn into permanent institutions. It is difficult to rebuild a state after a ceasefire between conflicting ethnic groups grants a federal unit to each of them. Their main concern will remain competing for the largest possible share in the state, the fragmentation of which across ethnic lines weakens it and endangers the prospects for democracy and EU integration.

Any institution that emerged from local bargaining worked far better than imported institutions. Where the development was organic, proportional systems and external conditionality have helped make ethnic bargaining a permanent component of the political process. In Romania and Bulgaria (again, like Slovakia), this installed minorities in the kingmaker's seat. Gains for minorities in such countries may seem minor compared to what Albanians in Macedonia won in one rebellion, but unlike in Macedonia, in the other three countries such gains were accepted by the society and are therefore more sustainable. The three former countries were considered fit to join the EU largely on account of their political processes that included minorities while leaving the state unchallenged. Macedonia is sustainable as a state only within the EU, and this is why, despite the country's lacking many entry conditions, its application was not explicitly rejected.

The Path of Political Dependency

Besides the poor match between borders and states, other Ottoman and even Byzantine legacies of the Balkans were often invoked to explain the current shape of these democracies.¹⁵ The Ottoman Empire adopted many Byzantine political practices. This means that Balkan societies were left behind in two major ways: first, they passively followed the Ottomans in their stagnation and decline, being both politically and economically subordinated; second, even in those "autonomous" societal sectors like the Church, they remained attached to the late Byzantine Empire, an abstraction beyond time, and therefore beyond evolution.

The Balkans have never enjoyed a social structure favoring democracy. Due mostly to sharing the Ottoman landholding pattern, the Balkans emerged from premodern times with small peasant holdings as the main form of property in rural

¹⁴ See Philip G. Roeder, "National Self-Determination and Postcommunist Popular Sovereignty," in Mungiu-Pippidi and Krastev, *Nationalism after Communism*.

¹⁵ Todorova, "The Ottoman Legacy," p. 46.

areas, and with no autonomous cities, as the Ottoman city was state-centered and state-managed. Unlike Bulgaria and Serbia, the Romanian principalities enjoyed limited autonomy, so they had large estates. At the end of World War I, populism and the example of neighboring countries forced what was by then Romania (the principalities merged in 1859) to adopt the small-holdings property model, which led to large-scale subsistence farming.

This relative poverty and lack of urbanization is a historical legacy that the Balkans have yet to shake. On the eve of World War II, the national income per capita was \$81 (1937 dollars) in Romania, \$80 in Yugoslavia and \$71 in Bulgaria, compared to \$120 in Hungary, \$170 in Czechoslovakia and \$440 in Britain. The percentage of the population depending on agriculture was another historical similarity: Yugoslavia's was 74 percent, similar to Romania's and Bulgaria's 71 percent (1930), while Hungary's was 51 percent and Greece's 50 percent. The World Bank today classifies the first three as "lower-middle-income economies," the same category as Maghreb countries, Central America, China, Russia, and Turkey, but tellingly, not Central Europe.

The Balkan states' economic performance was uneven during the last century. Romania enjoyed its best economic times in the late thirties, while throughout communism Yugoslavia managed to grant its citizens standards of living considerably superior to those in other communist countries. Bulgaria, though, has yet to hit its economic peak, and after experiencing a financial collapse in 1996, it has actually entered the twenty-first century with the Central Bank of Hungary/MNB regulating its currency and macroeconomic policy. The transition to democracy after independence hit hard in all three countries, with some economists estimating that Romania and Bulgaria's economic contraction was equivalent to the former Yugoslavia's economic destruction caused by war. Additionally, the Yugoslav war negatively impacted the economies of every Balkan country, particularly trade and Danube transportation. The World Bank estimated the 2001 GNI per capita to be \$1,710 for Romania and \$1,560 for Bulgaria, compared to \$3,700 for Slovakia, \$1,760 for the Russian Federation, and \$940 for what was left of Yugoslavia.

The Balkans have also always had a scarce civil society and poor separation between private and public spheres. The historical control of the Orthodox Church by the ruler, a structure inherited from the Byzantine model, meant the absence of the corresponding tension among the two that created the first source of power pluralism in Western Europe. Not only did the ruler pick the candidate of his liking for the highest position in the church, but also the prelates could be deposed at the ruler's will. A flock of Balkan rulers also copied the autocratic mode of Byzantine despots long after the empire had fallen. While the separation of executive and judicial power eventually became the norm in Western monarchies, the traditional Byzantine way of gathering them in the hands of the monarch continued up until the nineteenth century in the Balkans.¹⁶

The lack of autonomous cities and the subordination of the church to the

¹⁶Nicolae Iorga, *Le caractere commun des Institutions du Sud-Est de l'Europe* (Paris: J. Gamber, 1929).

state prevented the formation of civil society as a counterweight to the power of the landowners in the Romanian principalities. The absence of a domestic aristocracy throughout the Balkans precluded any equilibrium between the central government power and the periphery. The arbitrariness of appointments and dismissals by the Ottoman *Porte*, often regulated by cronyism alone, led to the subversion of any tradition of sound government—the principality of Wallachia alone had 34 different reigning princes in the eighteenth century. Elites and commoners alike were influenced by this strong and often arbitrary central interventionism, and developed informal devices to keep themselves and their families afloat. The hyper-regulatory state led to a generalized behavior of rule-avoidance. The need to act evasively, if not dishonestly, became a necessity when the well-organized and well-governed Ottoman state was transformed into a chaotic and corrupt polity. For close to two hundred years, economic and even physical survival depended on the ability of the people, and especially of their leaders, to outwit the superior authorities.¹⁷

There was scarcely an autonomous society to start with in the Balkans after independence in 1989; communism had suppressed what little of it existed. A country like the Czech Republic, with its large urban population, proved more resilient than the dependent peasant societies of the Balkans. A church fully autonomous from the state and answering to the Vatican, as in Poland, was clearly a better resistance tool against communism than the Orthodox Church, with its tradition of subordination to secular rulers. Demography and development both mattered for how these countries were treated by their communist regimes. Albania's population is still only 39 percent urban, compared to 52 percent in Yugoslavia, 56 percent in Romania, and 69 percent in Bulgaria (Hungary's is 64 percent and Poland's 65 percent). The destruction caused by communism, ranging from social engineering to forced industrialization, went deeper in poor rural economies, where the underdevelopment provided the necessary alibi for strong social intervention. Poland was the only Central European country with an important rural population comparable to the Balkans, and unsurprisingly, the patterns of Polish political transition are the closest to patterns in the Balkans. Bulgaria has the largest urban population of the Balkan countries, and the Bulgarian transition showed the most balance between communists and their challengers.

Patterns of Transition

Three distinct communist systems operated in the region, with differing implications for postcommunist reform: an essentially Stalinist, totalitarian regime in Romania and Albania; an orthodox communist regime in the Soviet-bloc state of Bulgaria; and a reformed communist system in Yugoslavia that had incorporated some liberal elements and shared a number of features with Central European states. Yugoslavia's particular brand of communism, combined with devolutionist

¹⁷ Peter Sugar, *South-East Europe under Ottoman Rule 1354–1804* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), pp. 193–4.

pressures from its constituent republics, gave that country the most autonomous society, and made it the most open to Central European influences. The other countries had monolithic parties and few and isolated dissidents, a crucial difference from Central Europe, with its liberal communist parties and large dissent groups. Unlike in Poland, where martial law was needed to maintain order, control of society by communist parties was very high in the Balkans by 1989. With the partial exception of Yugoslavia, challenger elites practically did not exist, again in contrast to Central Europe. It was widely perceived that communism was a total failure as a regime, and there was a sense of urgency about reforming on a Western model.

Oppositions began to emerge once it became clear from Central European examples that repression was no longer working. At first their manifestation was anarchical, because the political police, far more effective and aggressive than in Central Europe, prevented any form of organization. Yet this was grassroots opposition, based on the total lack of legitimacy of communism at the time of its demise. This explains why these oppositions included intellectuals, workers, minorities, Communist Party members, and a constellation of social groups. Even the communist power establishments finally had to accept the bankruptcy of the system.

The Balkan transitions share many similarities, even allowing for the breakup of former Yugoslavia. Croatia and Slovenia alone differed from the pattern and seem closer to the Central European model, mostly because their transformations were initiated long before the total collapse of communism. Slovenia's economic integration with Carinthia, the neighboring Austrian region, had started in the sixties and was very advanced by 1989. The rest of the Balkan countries shared a common pattern consisting of demands for liberalization only after communism was already breaking up in Central Europe, popular mobilization to make up for the absence of any organized opposition groups, and manipulation of nationalism by the Communist Party, which was under threat of losing its political monopoly. This pattern led to anarchical transitions, often fought in the streets. President Ion Iliescu of Romania asked the coalminers, one of the regime's most indoctrinated constituencies, to deal with the students' opposition; Albanian riots included many elements of the former secret services.

"Predatory elites," as Moore called them, with a political project of "extraction" (taking advantage of privatization for their benefit) are an important feature of Balkan transitions. This can be measured by the World Bank measurement of "state capture" based on business surveys. Agents of the communist secret services evidently made themselves very busy in Albania, Serbia, and Romania during these transitions, and it was often difficult to distinguish a spontaneous riot from a planned diversion. Former communist power establishments were stronger and more dedicated to protecting their advantage in the Balkans than in Central Europe, where they had less to fear (as they could blame the worst of communism on the Soviet armies present). In the national communist Balkans, unlike Central Europe but like in the Soviet Union proper, thick "national" networks of power linked the secret services with the army, party figures, opinion

leaders, and the managers of state companies. There could be no doubt communism in the Balkans might have started as Soviet affair, but it had grown into a domestic business.

These networks worked hard to maintain and benefit from their influence, even if that meant sacrificing the Communist Party itself, as in Romania, and creating an opportunistic one (the National Salvation Front, which later changed its name four times to keep up with the times). The “corruption” and “organized crime” that the EU still is concerned about in Romania and Bulgaria is actually due to this entrenchment of interest networks, a sign of their unfinished revolutions. Iliescu managed to stay in power for ten years (with an interruption between 1996 and 2000), while Milošević ruled up until 2000 and left only due to a popular riot. Bulgaria had the most balanced transition, with milder communists and a stronger opposition, but the former regime managed to control essential institutions, such as courts. Bulgaria’s Constitutional Court, as well as Romania’s after 2004, fought hard to preserve the old structures of power and influence in the society and judiciary. Competition for control of the future transformation was strong, and initially tough for oppositions who lacked the resources of the former regime elites. However, the former regime elites finally agreed to give up their monopoly on power precisely because they expected that by doing so they would win the elections, stop the challenge from the streets, and gain international legitimacy.

Popular mobilization mattered enormously in the Balkans, and for a longer time than in Central Europe, as political opposition needed years to achieve a reasonable degree of institutionalization. Once communism fell, discontent manifested itself as open opposition, unorganized and street-based at first, but becoming more and more structured later. Balkanites, encouraged by the changes in Central Europe, emulated anticommunist movements there. From the students’ well-organized and nonviolent protests to the violent movements of marginal groups, these transitions were fought in the streets not for months, as in Central Europe, but for years. During this time a more organized, civilized, and peaceful civil society developed that should receive credit for unseating Petr Mladenov in Bulgaria, Ion Iliescu, and Slobodan Milošević.

So actors mattered, but one can hardly call “elites” the Romanian coalminers, the Serb paramilitary troops who sought their fortunes from war spoils, and the taxi drivers who protected student demonstrations in Belgrade. Few democratization leaders existed in the anticommunist oppositions, who struggled for years to find suitable presidential candidates. The consolidation of a politically institutionalized alternative came later in the Balkans than Central Europe. The capability of opposition parties in postcommunist rule was below the Central European level in Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania, due to the intolerance their communist regimes displayed towards any opposition. However, these countries’ political party systems stabilized rapidly into two camps, socialists and anticommunists, despite the lack of consolidation of the parties themselves.

Due to their societies’ complicated state-building problem, Balkan communists discovered an alternative way to reform their parties, besides the social

democratic path of Central European countries: *national-communism*. Nationalism and socialism combined proved to have a stronger appeal than socialism alone, providing former communist elites with a remarkable tool of survival. To reinforce their mass appeal, the communist successors in Serbia and Romania turned more and more nationalistic, which proved to their electoral advantage. They also repeatedly allied themselves with nationalist rightwing parties. What kept the ethnic conflict in a peaceful framework in Romania and Bulgaria was the combination of a unitary state, proportional representation, and openness to cooperation across ethnic lines from every party. The reverse proved true for the former Yugoslavia. (The only Central European state with similar problems to the Balkans was Slovakia, with its important Hungarian minority. Slovakia had a trajectory similar to Romania and Bulgaria, lagging for the first part of the transition in both democracy and EU integration.)

To explain the achievements of the new democratic regimes, the behavior of postcommunist parties in transition (in the Balkans, authoritarian and nationalistic; in Central Europe, compromising and ready to transform) is far more important than the behavior of the anticommunists, as the latter in all postcommunist countries behaved similarly. The policy distance between incumbent and challenger political elites was initially smaller in Central Europe than in Romania, Bulgaria or FSU. The more the elites agree on essential issues such as privatization, the smoother and faster the transition. The Central European case is special, because the consensus there was for a different regime from the onset of those countries' transitions in 1989. This was because the communist parties there had already exhausted the possibilities of reforming the socialist economy prior to 1989. In contrast, in Serbia and Romania, where they had not done so, they tried a compromise approach in the first years of the transition and failed. However, in the second part of the transition, policy distance decreased considerably between the postcommunists and challengers of the Balkans, very much like in Central Europe. The main force behind this was European integration.

Politics changed in the Balkans after Romania and Bulgaria applied for EU membership, especially after their applications were accepted in 1999. External conditionality became an important factor aiding democratization. Accepting the tutelage from Brussels became acceptable even for socialists. It was the prospect of European integration that fully converted the former communists. The publics, inspired by the Central European example and driven by increasing poverty, wanted their countries to join Europe. Due to the mismanagement of the early transition, their countries had attracted little foreign direct investment. Therefore, after securing their domestic power, communist successor parties in Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania made European accession their next important objective, as did their successors. But the structures that had played an important role in the repression and manipulation of ethnic conflict remained largely untouched.

Popular Attitudes about Democracy vs. Dictatorship

Based on World Values Survey data on democratic attitudes, Romania and Bulgaria do not differ significantly from the Central European countries in political attitudes. Democratic constituencies in both Central Europe and the Balkans comprise the employed population (who are independent from state social welfare) and young, educated urbanites. Comparing the employed population to pensioners, the unemployed, and peasants living on subsistence agriculture, this variable becomes powerful in explaining support for democracy. As the percentage of active urban populations varies across Eastern Europe, the model accounts for some of the differences among countries. Contrary to Huntington's theory, religion does not appear to be a significant determinant.

By the late 1990s the political culture in the Balkans was democratic. But still, as in Central Europe, parties are not trusted, parliaments are the least popular of all democratic institutions, trust in courts is low, and citizens would prefer experts over "rotten" politicians in government (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2. Satisfaction with Democracy in the Balkans (%)

Agreement with the following statements:	Romania	Bulgaria	Serbia
"Democracy is best, despite its shortcomings"	74	61	76
"We should have experts running the country instead of political governments"	81.2	56.8	89.7
"The country would be better off run by the military"	15.6	10.9	15.4

Source: 1999 survey by CURS in Romania, Center for the Study of Democracy in Bulgaria, and Center for Policy Studies in Serbia Romanian Academic Society, at Romanian Academic Society website, www.sar.org.ro.

Attitudes towards corruption are also not very different from Central Europe, despite ratings of these countries as far more corrupt by Transparency International or Freedom House (see Table 3), as respondents complain of corruption and resent particularism. The administration and law and order agencies are slowly changing from behaving as agents of authority and repression to becoming the providers of public services. The public identifies the new politicians as responsible for the persistence of the culture of privilege favoring certain groups, and in fact they include them among the profiteers of corruption. The deficit of accountability is shown in the public perception that some groups, especially politicians, are untouchable by the law.

Table 3. Attitudes Towards Rule of Law in the Balkans (%)

Agreement with the following statements:	Rom.	Bul.	Serbia	Mont.	Mac.	Alb.
“Only good laws should be respected”	42	31	41	48	57	56
“Some people are above the law”	68	87	81	69	85	60
“Politicians are above the law”	88	93	90	78	92	66
“Corruption of officials is widespread”	70	63	63	-	-	75
“I bribed a civil servant last year”	15	14	18	16	10	45

Survey year 2002. Source: Survey designed by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi for the IBEU Fifth Framework EU Research Project, “Functional Borders and Sustainable Security: Integrating the Balkans in the European Union.” Athens: ELIAMEP, www.eliamep.gr.

Conclusions

The foreign environment proved to be all-powerful in the Balkans’ transition, as it had been in their past: from Gorbachev’s decision that East Europe, too, must liberalize, to NATO’s bombing Milošević out of Serbia, to Europe’s commitment to include Romania and Bulgaria in the enlargement process, foreign influence has remained the irresistible factor behind democratic transformation of the Balkans. These countries and Albania are clear examples of the regional diffusion effect.

While the transitions to democracy are not yet complete in these countries, there is a clear positive trend in the process. Neither Albania nor Romania is likely to become a Belarus. The formidable incentives for joining Europe gives them a clear direction towards further improvement of their democracies. Just as an external factor—the general fall of communism—triggered their transition, another external factor, accession to the EU, has been a crucial factor in democratic consolidation.

Democratization in the Balkans progressed by spreading the pockets of autonomous political choice from urban areas to the rest of society. As the number of democratic entrepreneurs slowly grew, and the share of the private sector as an employer rose slowly above the state’s share, an electoral equilibrium emerged matching that of Central Europe (where anticommunists won from the onset of independence), and anticommunists in the Balkans eventually won elections. Their only resource was the continuous mobilization of constituencies in favor of change, which enjoyed Western support, while the communist successors sought to manipulate democracy by drawing on the dependent part of the population (also the poorest and least educated) and to keep this constituency in its sorry state through their social and economic policies. This is the model of the Balkan transition, and it differs sharply from the tough reforms that Central Europeans pursued in the first

years after 1989.

Clearly there are numerous elements of unfinished revolution in each of the Balkan countries fifteen years after independence. Revolutions, however, have never been won in a few years. As Alexis de Tocqueville put it,

Seen as a whole from a distance, our history from 1789 to 1830 appears to be forty-one years of deadly struggle between the old regime with its traditions and men, meaning the aristocrats, and the new France led by the middle class. 1830 would seem to have ended the first period of our revolution, or rather, of our revolutions, for it was always one and the same, whose beginnings our fathers saw and whose end we shall in all probability not see.¹⁸

¹⁸ From Alexis de Tocqueville, *Recollections: The French Revolution of 1848*, J. P. Mayer and A. P. Kerr, eds. (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1986), pp. 61–62.