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30 Years After the Fall of the Berlin Wall: Trends and the Current State of Communism and Post-communism in Europe and Asia

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The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was a historic milestone, which catalysed the transformation of communist regimes across the world. In the past three decades, we have seen significant reforms take hold in several former communist states, particularly in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet countries, where socioeconomic and political ideals have gradually gravitated towards different forms of democracy and market economy. Meanwhile, in Asia, we have seen astonishing economic growth and a movement from central planning to the market, but few democratic reforms (e.g. in China and Vietnam), and some very specific hybrid regimes (e.g. in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia

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A. Akimov and G. Kazakevitch (eds.), *30 Years since the Fall of the Berlin Wall*,
Palgrave Studies in Economic History, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0317-7_1

such as Azerbaijan), while the unpredictable, isolationist North Korea remains a source of instability for the broader region.

The unfulfilled expectation that the post-Berlin-Wall transformation would lead to the best Western standards of liberal democracy and market economy has stimulated a considerable compendium of research into the history, politics, economics and sociology of transition, which it is impossible to acknowledge in its entirety in the format of a book introduction. Nonetheless, let us start with a review of the most significant recent publications, all of which address the key question: whether and why not all the post-communist countries have been equally successful in their transition.

Five years ago, marking the 25th anniversary of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Berend and Bugaric (2015) argued that, contrary to the view expressed by some researchers and commentators, the post-communist region of Europe has not become 'normal' and is no nearer to its Western neighbours than before. In reality, 'The region still belongs to the periphery of Europe with a mostly dual economy and low level of income' (p. 219). Where some sectors, such as banking, have modernized, they have been subsidiaries of Western multinationals, while the political systems are often authoritarian, and democratic 'form' gives cover to non-democratic content.

Furthermore, Bugaric (2015) claims that Central and Eastern European countries are facing a very serious crisis of constitutional democracy, because the rule-of-law institutions in these countries are less robust than in Western ones. Western democracies have many checks and balances that cope more successfully with attacks on their liberal institutions: Their courts, media, human rights organizations, and ombudsmen have longer and better-developed traditions of independence and professionalism. In contrast, the examples of Hungary and Slovenia (and now Poland too) show that even the most advanced post-communist democracies are not immune to backsliding and reverting, in a relatively short period of time, from consolidated democracies into distinct forms of semi-authoritarian and diminished democratic regimes.

While agreeing with others that no former communist country has been completely successful in catching up with the technologically advanced Western nations, Norkus (2015) distinguishes two

groups: those that have decreased the GDP gap with advanced market economies since 1989–1990, and those that haven't. Rather than comparing general historic and cultural differences, Norkus emphasizes specific causal conditions for their progress or failure in convergence, such as implementation of 'consensus-style' market reforms, neighbourhood with advanced affluent countries, peaceful transition, accession to the European Union (EU), endowment with natural resources, and state sovereignty before post-communism. Bohle (2016) also links the relative success of the post-communist countries in transition to their membership of the EU.

Meanwhile, there is a substantial difference between the evolution of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe and that of China (Roland, 2018). In Central and Eastern Europe, the driver for transition has been the collapse of communist state structures, while in China there has been a determined will to prevent such an outcome: 'This reconceptualization helps to better understand the emergence of bad institutions and corruption in Eastern Europe under the market economy as well as the absence of political liberalization in China and the strengthening of the power of the Communist Party in recent years' (p. 589).

Roland (2012) explains and predicts the success or otherwise of the post-communist transformation by reference to long-term history. He distinguishes between Russia, which during the most recent 100 years was modernizing economically but remained politically very autocratic, Central Europe, which was economically very prosperous and well-integrated into Western Europe but was experiencing nationalistic tensions, and China, which was opening up to the outside world, searching for modern institutions capable of unifying it, but under military command. Even though all these countries have experienced several decades of post-communist regimes, long-running trends in their characters have not changed.

Cooley (2019) suggests that, since 2005, many of the post-communist governments increasingly view Western pillars of liberalism as threatening their domestic authority and regime survival. This has been why they have actively supported Russian-led initiatives to curtail Western influence: 'As a result, the ecology of the post-Communist space has transformed from one where the liberal

order was briefly dominant to one where new illiberal regional organizations, practices, and counter-norms have flourished and now regularly interact with liberal counterparts' (p. 588). Ágh (2016) claims that all of the East-Central European countries have been diverging from the EU mainstream in recent years, especially Hungary, because of the socioeconomic crises these countries have faced. Such backlashes have also been observed in Slovenia (Bugaric & Kuhelj, 2015) and the Czech Republic (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018).

Similar processes of reforms going backwards have been observed in Russia. Among other authors, Becker and Vasileva (2017) trace the history of Russia's political-economic development since the early 1990s as one of initial liberalization and, a decade later, subsequent re-statization. They argue that endemic Russian patrimonialism hindered the rise of economically facilitated state capacity, increasing the proportion of government involvement in the economy and giving rise to excessive regulation. We would, perhaps, include Belarus, as well as the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, in such an analysis.

Graney (2019) introduces a new approach to 'Europeanization' in the post-Soviet world since 1989, which includes political, security and cultural-civilizational aspects. She accepts the failure of the political science premise of the superiority of Europe over other places and spaces in the mentality of most of the political elites and populations of the former Soviet Union space. This gives her a tool for innovative case studies of all the post-Soviet countries.

Aslund (2018) argues that the absence of real property rights, lack of social reforms and institutional development in post-communist judicial systems have been the biggest problems in those post-communist countries not belonging to the EU, even if there has been an initial understanding of the need for comprehensive economic reform programmes.

There is a considerable body of literature looking at corruption as an endemic impediment to successful transition. Skąpska (2009) refers to the famous argument of Max Weber, that there is a strong and direct connection between the rule of law and economic success, and the establishment of the rule of law facilitates the functioning of an efficient economy. These principles are long-lasting and deeply embedded in

Western European and North American legal cultures and mentalities. By contrast, in recent developments in Eastern and Central Europe, especially the privatization of state-owned property, one observes growing corruption, nepotism and clientelism as important mechanisms of law-making. These contribute to the pathologies of post-communist economic transformation following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The historic pretext to corruption was not similar in every communist regime, according to Kostadinova (2012), and this might explain why the levels of corruption among post-communist democracies are different. Thus, Pavroz (2017) discusses a specifically Russian paradox: the combination of high levels of corruption with a strong and relatively effective government. Based upon the concept of corruption as a political and administrative rent, the author considers the formation of the corruption-oriented model of governance in Russia and concludes that it does not have a future, making the point that effective anti-corruption measures in Russia can be carried out only through change of the current regime and the consequent realization of democratic, market and administrative reforms. In a similar vein, Lankina (2012), Libman and Obydenkova (2013) and Ivlevs and Hinks (2018) all report statistical links between the prevalence of corruption and membership of the Communist Party before transition.

To mark the occasion of 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, this volume examines and compares transition outcomes in the countries directly affected by this momentous event. It also looks back at the history of the region and introduces some unique themes as yet unfamiliar to a wider audience. Finally, it brings to the reader's attention contemporary topics affecting individual post-communist countries, such as political discourse in Russia, economic development in Central Asia, and problems of accession to the EU in South-Eastern Europe.

The book consists of four related parts and seventeen chapters. Part I consists of four chapters that focus on broad cross-country analysis of transition economies. Thus, Chapter 2 uses cluster analysis and the Index of Economic Freedom to link economic performance over the last 20 years with the level of development of market institutions. It covers a broad selection of the ex-USSR countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, as well as some communist countries of Asia and

Central America. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the economic transition of some relatively slow reformers, the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. The chapter argues that recent developments in relation to China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' provide a unique window of opportunity to reset their development policies towards greater integration into the global economy. In contrast, Chapter 4 focuses on the South-Eastern European region. The aspirations of Western Balkan states to join the EU seem to have been met with hesitancy on the part of the major players in the Union to accept new members. The chapter argues that the resulting uncertainty around the prospects of EU accession has led to slower democratization and market reform in the region. Chapter 5 provides a cross-country examination of the problem of organized crime in a selected number of communist and post-communist economies, including the regional giants Russia and China. The chapter finds that the problem is equally challenging for both post-communist and communist countries; it argues that with technological transformation and globalization, and the consequent transnationalization of organized crime, the problem might be too difficult to overcome for individual countries, requiring collective efforts and international organizations, such as Interpol, if it is to be resolved.

In Part II, the focus of the book narrows to deal with a range of contemporary policy issues faced by the largest country of the former Eastern bloc—Russia. The section starts in Chapter 6 with a discussion of the relationship between the two military superpowers, Russia and the US. The chapter argues that the traditional approach of confrontation inherited from the Cold War era is outdated and illogical. Modern challenges, such as terrorism, cybersecurity, and space exploration in search of scientific breakthroughs require a concerted effort from these two global players. In contrast, Chapter 7 looks at Russian relationships with a regional player and ally in the Middle East—Iran. The chapter argues that this relationship is tactical rather than strategic and is driven by specific goals such as counteracting American (and other) influences in Syria. With an ever-expanding world population, the growing need for energy resources is often at the forefront of international geopolitical and economic relationships. Chapter 8 examines the energy integration of Russia's neighbours and allies in the Eurasian Economic Union

(EAEU) and concludes that in the absence of an effective energy integration mechanism within the latter, Russia and other regional members have to use existing institutional frameworks, such as the World Trade Organization and the Energy Charter Treaty, to build and diversify their energy cooperation in the areas of renewable energy and energy research and development. Finally, in this part of the volume, Chapter 9 deals with the use of contemporary media tools in Russian political discourse. It focuses, in particular, on the opposition leader Alexei Navalny, and his skilful use of digital instruments to promote his populist agenda based on frames of 'anti-corruption' and 'free and fair elections'.

The 2016 death of the authoritarian leader of Uzbekistan has led to renewed dynamism and cooperation in the Central Asian region. Moreover, it helped to renew interest in the analysis of contemporary problems faced by the country. Part III of this book aims to fill some of the large gaps in the literature in relation to the economic and political developments of Uzbekistan and its neighbours. It starts in Chapter 10 with an assessment of the legacy of the authoritarian leaders of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan—Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbayev, respectively—25 years after independence. The political and economic outcomes are benchmarked against those of the authoritarian leader of postcolonial Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, to whose success both leaders have either openly or implicitly aspired. By way of contrast, Chapter 11 examines the problem of poor fruit and vegetable consumption in Uzbekistan and the resultant micronutrient deficiencies. It finds that despite overall production of fruit and vegetables in Uzbekistan being more than sufficient to cover the nutritional needs of the population, consumption remains inadequate, possibly because of inadequate nutritional education. Chapter 12 focuses on the issue of large-scale migration of Uzbek citizenry in pursuit of seasonal work in Russia and other countries. In particular, it looks at the issue of how the remittances of such seasonal labour workers are used by their families, finding that most of the capital thus generated is used not for productive purposes but rather is lost to conspicuous consumption. Finally, Chapter 13 deals with the sensitive issue of language, ethnicity and citizenship in Central Asia. It finds that although lack of knowledge of the native

language in Central Asian republics has not served as an obstacle to ethnic minorities in obtaining citizenship, it constrained their ability to pursue successful careers in the public sector.

The final section of the book, Part IV, takes us back into history before the last 30 years of transition, providing us with four unique historical themes. Chapter 14 tells the story of the life and research of Zygmunt Bauman, a Polish Jew who had to migrate from Poland to Israel and, eventually, to England as a result of an anti-Semitic purge in 1968. The chapter tracks the trajectory of his views on the politics of migration, in light of changing migration flows into Europe from the 1960s to recent times. Chapter 15 provides a comparative analysis of the 1980s reforms adopted by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China in the light of domestic and international challenges. The chapter seeks to establish why reforms in one have led to collapse while reforms in the other brought economic resurgence. Chapter 16 builds a case for comparison of the legal changes that occurred in post-revolutionary Russia, and those modern Russia has experienced following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It finds that the October 1917 revolution completely dismantled the secondary rules of recognition and adjudication, whereas the post-Soviet transformation brought more gradual replacement of the Soviet secondary rules. In the final theme of the section, Chapter 17 focuses on communist and post-communist migration to Australia, examining the case of post-World War II migration from the former Yugoslavia and comparing it with the post-Vietnam War migration from Vietnam. The chapter finds a significant impact on the latter migration in terms of the dismantling of the White Australia policy.

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