



## Book Review

### **Developments in Central and East European Politics**

Stephen White, Judy Batt and Paul G. Lewis (eds.)

Palgrave, Houndmills, 2007, i–xxi + 310pp, £21.99, ISBN: 0-230-51738-2.

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Some of the successor states of the Soviet Union are still in different phases of democratic transition, and face the possibility of a democratic backlash. For these countries the huge transitology literature that came to the fore in the course of the 1990s remains relevant. By contrast, in the case of the ‘big bang’ entrants (i.e. the eight Central and East European (CEE) countries which entered the EU on the 1st of May 2004; to a lesser extent this also applies to Romania and Bulgaria which entered the EU on the 1st of January 2007) we have to move towards a second generation of ‘post-communism and enlargement’ literature. This is by and large still a would-be literature. If the first generation focused on the course of the double transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and on the role played by the EU’s leverage, now we have to necessarily turn to issues like the quality of democracy in new member states and the success of further socio-economic convergence within the context of full single market integration (and imminent membership of EMU). The actual enlargement or consummation of membership implies the start of a new phase for one important reason: The EU’s direct leverage has come to an end, both in practical and psychological terms. This may have relevant consequences for the way we (used to) theorize the external/internal dimension of democratization and the role of regional organizations under conditions of post-communist change, but it may have equally important consequences for the way the enlarged EU is functioning (and more particularly the way in which the EU is able to overcome its present institutional impasse). This in turn may have an impact on the way in which the EU is now reconsidering its approach to candidate members like Croatia, Serbia and Turkey, on the one hand, and important (new!) neighbours like the Ukraine, on the other.

The editors of the new, fourth edition of *Developments in Central and East European Politics* seem well aware of the need to rethink the politics of CEE. In slightly more than one page they introduce the volume, singling out three issues that are pertinent to the region: the balancing act between efficient executive leadership and democratic accountability, in short the shift from democratic transition to consolidation; the return of economic growth after the radical transformation from state-led to free market economies, and the way in which the new democracies manage to reconcile economic transformation with social



cohesion; and, finally, the impact of full EU membership on both democratic consolidation and ongoing economic adjustment. The purpose of this review is to find out whether the subsequent chapters live up to these promises. The editors self-confidently claim that this fourth edition is substantially a new book (actually, six out of the total of 16 chapters are written by new contributors and most of the 'old' chapters are, to a more or lesser extent, rewritten) and that every chapter takes account of developments up to the start of 2007 (i.e. up to the latest enlargement round). As I understand it, the entirely new situation created by the enlargement of the EU from 15 to 27 members is the very *raison d'être* of this new edition (the previous one was published in 2003).

Unlike the 2003 edition, there is no explicit subdivision of the chapters in different parts. The editors point out however that they have a clear ordering structure in mind. The book starts with two chapters of a more general nature, one chapter written by one of the editors, Judy Batt, who attempts to define the entire region of CEE and another one written by Mark Pittaway (who is not figuring in the Notes on the Contributors), who seeks to cover the decay and collapse of communism and the challenge of post-communism immediately after the 1989-revolutions. Both chapters are well written and highly accessible and clearly intended for undergraduate students with little or no prior knowledge about the region. Next, four chapters cover four different groups of countries. Whereas the third edition included separate chapters on Poland and Hungary, and one on the Czech Republic and Slovakia, this edition brings more countries together in chapters covering larger periods. I cannot say that this is an improvement. The first chapter covers 17 years of post-communist political developments in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in less than 16 pages plus a current issues section of two-and-a-half pages covering economic and social developments. Foreign policy gets 10 lines. The next chapter covers the rest of the new EU entrants from CEE, that is, seven countries, in 16 pages. The absence of a guiding and organizing problematic makes these two chapters sometimes difficult to swallow. On the other hand, Frances Millard's chapter on the three Central European countries includes a number of very useful tables on governments from 1989 till 2007 and election results. The two other chapters deal with the Western Balkans, written by Judy Batt, and the East European countries Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, by Andrew Wilson. These chapters are much more focused and organized around central questions, such as how to explain the different roads to EU membership in the Western Balkans and how to characterize common features in East European countries in their difficult road to democracy.

The book moves on to consider the EU enlargement strategy and its effects on the applicant countries. Unfortunately, this is by and large condensed in one single chapter, which is, however, authoritatively written by Heather Grabbe,



advisor to the EU's Commissioner for enlargement and author of an important study on the transformative power of the EU. With the abovementioned *raison d'être* in mind, this is the dreamed-off rewritten chapter by an author who is capable of smoothly updating her written work with ongoing research. Her analysis of the opportunities and limitations of the EU accession process and her assessment of what may happen after accession are worthwhile to read even for specialists. Too bad that other chapters are not speaking to this one (see below).

In a way, Grabbe's chapter (which is not introduced in the 11 lines on the one-page preface where the three (!) editors overview their volume) is the start of the second and best part of the book. The remaining nine chapters focus on 'the framework and process of politics' across the region. There is a chapter on executive leadership in the region, written by Ray Taras, on legislative power by Petr Kopecký, on electoral systems by Sarah Birch and on constitutional politics by Kataryna Wolczuk. The contents of these chapters are of course interrelated, but the authors hardly communicate to each other. Next, we find three chapters (on the 'process of politics') about political parties (written by Paul Lewis), the role of citizens in CEE politics (Krzysztof Jasiewicz) and civil society (Cas Mudde). These are excellent chapters that try to capture the dynamism of CEE politics by *inter alia* looking at the Europeanization of party formation in CEE, the different roles of citizens in the process of consolidating democracy and the strength of self-regulating civil societies in post-communist CEE. The book ends with two chapters on post-communist economic transformation (by D. Mario Nuti) and the quality of democratic consolidation (Dirk Berg-Schlosser), respectively.

This book should be essential reading for students not familiar with (but interested in) the region. Some chapters are more challenging and could be of use to more specialized scholars (the chapters written by Kopecký, Jasiewicz and Mudde come to mind). But there are some important flaws too.

First, the value-added of edited volumes is the grouping together of chapters, written by specialists in the field, which really speak to each other, either directly or indirectly (through an editor's introduction and/or conclusion). Since this volume is without general conclusions or without a synthesizing introduction, the authors have to do the job themselves. Without strong editorial leadership this remains an illusion. The post-communist reframing of institutional structures (dealt with in at least four chapters) can serve as an example. In his chapter on executive leadership, Taras points out that the executive-legislative balance has shifted in favour of the legislative. In his chapter on structures of representation, Kopecký comes to an opposite conclusion. He argues that the post-communist years have seen a gradual strengthening of executive power relative to national parliaments. The authors do not offer any substantive evidence for their opposite claims, but Kopecký is



more convincing. That is, if we look at the period between the late 1990s and the 1st of May 2004. Here a cross-reference to the chapter of Grabbe would have been useful. She is suggesting that the decline of EU's leverage after enlargement may result in a weakening of executive leadership and indeed produce an anti-reform and anti-elite (and anti-EU) backlash in the new member states.

Second, the book understands *developments in politics* in a rather narrowly defined way. On the one hand, it takes politics as national politics, covering the European dimension of regime change in a chapter apart. On the other hand, many chapters (the better ones I would say) implicitly or explicitly show a remarkable convergence among the new CEE member states in terms of institutional designs and socio-economic policies. The two other sub-regions, the Western Balkans and the non-Baltic former Soviet states, are clearly lacking behind. EU conditionality seems to have played a vital role. But will political and economic discipline be maintained without the direct leverage of prospective membership? To what extent will *developments in politics* (the quality of consolidated democracy, for instance) be determined by social and economic developments? The editors are clearly aware of the importance of this and related questions, hence a separate chapter on economic management, but a second generation of 'post-communist and enlargement' literature should go beyond national politics and develop a more integrated approach towards political and socio-economic developments in the setting of transnational governance structures in Europe.

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