

HYBRIDIZATION OF DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: BETWEEN "IMPORTED" DEMOCRATIC MODEL AND INHERENT POLITICAL CULTURE

Cirila TOPLAK¹

In the last two decades, Central and Eastern Europe has gone through an intensive transformation process in which the adopted global neo-liberal political-economic model, the specifics of the Europeanization and the traditionally non-liberal corporate political cultures in the region merge/d to produce hybrid political systems that bear many features of oligarchies. "Minimal democracies" of Central and Eastern Europe have not only been established on a state-reductive political system that benefits most the corporate economic sector, the author argues, but also represent a sort of a hybrid that emerged from adaptation of an "imported" political model to the political culture in the region. The hybridization is the most visible in, yet not limited to, newly founded sovereign states without prior democratic tradition. Thusly "democratized" specific political culture of Central and Eastern European societies has on the other hand facilitated the efficient implementation of the current global neoconservative economic-political paradigm. In order to support the argument on the hybridization of the "imported" democratic model in Central and Eastern Europe, the author considers more closely the two presupposed key achievements of the political transition in the region, i.e. political parties and free elections. Also included are theoretical insights in political discourses and oligarchisation.

¹ * Cirila Toplak, PhD, political scientist, is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her research interests include political history, political theory, history of Europe, history of the idea of Europe, political communication and political culture. She authored a monograph entitled *Združene države Evrope [United States of Europe]*, Ljubljana: FDV, 2003; and co-authored several other monographs. She published a number of articles, including Toplak, Cirila, Pikalo, Jernej, Lukšič, Igor. Teaching history to political science students: historiography as part of political process. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 44, 4 (2007): 377–386. Address: University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kardeljeva pl. 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; e-mail: cirila.toplak@fdv.uni-lj.si.

I CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD

In late eighties and early nineties of the previous century, according to Croatian political scientist Damir Grubiša, three foundations emerged that have defined contemporary world: global communications, economic neoliberalism or better, neoconservative economic fundamentalism, and global democracy as the “end of politics”.²

While we celebrated “the end of politics”, with democracy scoring a “global victory” and communism landing at the landfill of history (with rare remaining exceptions), it was actually the neoconservative economic fundamentalism that won by optimizing and structurally instrumentalizing national economies and state interventionism at the global level so that both serve the maximization of profit of global corporations.

Three foundations of contemporary world order actually form a pyramid: global communications and state apparatuses are subordinated to neoconservative economic fundamentalism. For most, the states now “act as agencies that submit all social forces to the strongest capitalist interests in their territory and power is therefore increasingly concentrated and out of control as state apparatuses dispose of repressive and ideological instruments to act as substitute capitalists that destitute continuously and in advance the subordinate agents, from small and medium sized companies to public sector and abstract anonymous ‘taxpayers’”.³

Via processes of privatization and deregulation the welfare state has been increasingly reduced to the leanest possible, “minimal” state, with the United States leading the trend, yet Europe not being excepted from it. Since in Central and Eastern Europe the neoconservative economic model was introduced simultaneously with democracy, the result produced are the so called “minimal democracies”. This reductive model of democracy, Damir Grubiša argues, has been limited to party pluralism and free elections, while we are still far from democratic societies where deliberative, direct and participative democracy would be in place.⁴

Grubiša argues for ‘minimal’ Central and Eastern European democracies based

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² Damir Grubiša, excerpts from the round table “Politics in Crisis, Crisis of Politics” at the Slovenian Political Science Days, Portorož, May 2009.

³ Jože Vogrinc, “Leva? Desna! Leva? Desna!,” *Mladina*, 22, (2009). Available at http://www.mladina.si/tednik/200922/leva_desna_leva_desna (December 2010).

⁴ Damir Grubiša, excerpts from the round table “Politics in Crisis, Crisis of Politics” at the Slovenian Political Science Days, Portorož, May 2009.

not only on selective adoption of democratic attributes in the region but also on what he calls "political pathology" in the region: a series of phenomena such as demagoguery, populism, hypocrisy, manipulation, corruption, paranoia and violence.⁵ Soon after independence of the Czech Republic its president of the time Vaclav Havel offered in a text entitled *Paradise Lost* a picture of consequences of the most recent social experiment in the country that corroborates Grubiša's view:

*We are witness to a bizarre state of affairs: society has freed itself, but in some ways it behaves worse than when it was in chains. Criminality has grown rapidly, and the familiar sewage that in times of historical reversal always wells up from the nether regions of the collective psyche has overflowed into the mass media, especially the gutter press. But there are other, more serious and dangerous symptoms: hatred among nationalities, suspicion, racism, even signs of fascism; vicious demagoguery, intrigue, and deliberate lying; politicking, an unrestrained, unheeding struggle for purely particular interests, a hunger for power, unadulterated ambition, fanaticism of every imaginable kind; new and unprecedented varieties of robbery, the rise of different mafias; the general lack of tolerance, understanding, taste, moderation, reason. And, of course, there is a new attraction to ideologies, as if Marxism had left behind it a great, unsettling void that had to be filled at any cost.*⁶

"Minimal democracies" of Central and Eastern Europe have not only been established on a state-reductive political system that benefits most the corporate economic sector, I argue, but also represent a sort of a hybrid that emerged from adaptation of an "imported" political model to the political culture in the region. As Kenney also put it in a recent study of the region, "free elections and democratic leaders cannot increase the level of political freedom by themselves, if the society is incapable of benefiting from these achievements."⁷ Lewis also seemed to support this argument when he stated that "imperfect party democracy that has emerged in Eastern Europe is closely linked with the conditions of what has been termed the minimal civic society ... The context of post-Communism and the broader cultural context of Eastern Europe cannot be ignored."⁸

The hybridization is the most visible in, yet not limited to, newly founded sovereign states without prior democratic tradition. Thusly "democratized"

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⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Norman Jacobson, "Escape from Alienation: Challenges to the Nation-State," *Representations*, 84 (2003): 50.

⁷ Padraic Kenney, *Breme slobode* (Zagreb: Srednja Evropa, 2007), 122.

⁸ Paul G. Lewis, *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 162–163.

specific political culture of Central and Eastern European societies, I also argue, has on the other hand facilitated the efficient implementation of the current global neoconservative economic-political paradigm. Furthermore and rather ironically, as Enyedi⁹ emphasized, the integration of post-communist countries into the “indirect, elitist and depolarized” politics of the European Union of lobbies and interests, has been of no help in implementing the kind of democracy Central and Eastern Europeans were promised two decades ago.

2 MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRATICALLY REPRESENTED POST-COMMUNIST EUROPE

In order to support the argument on the hybridization of the “imported” democratic model in Central and Eastern Europe, let us consider more closely the two presupposed key achievements of the political transition in the region, i.e. political parties and free elections.

Mair stated that party systems are »most impervious to change«¹⁰ Indeed, Central and Eastern European political parties, be it successor ones or newly founded ones, are mostly closed and hierarchically organized associations with a narrow circle of decision makers and controlled internal communication. When any of these parties seize power, the states are dominated by political and economic elites that tend to collaborate, while differences in their programs are minimal and their conflicts frequently turn into mere entertainment for the masses. When these masses go to elections, results are increasingly foreseeable or even changeable. Losers publicly object to legitimate victory of their opponents and as often co-create large coalitions with non-transparent liability. Elected representatives stand for partial interests as often as for public ones. Election procedures are designed in a way that directly elected representatives (for example President of the State) have little actual political power, proportionally elected members of the parliaments are a result of party selection and not of the “people,” while the power of the executive branch is disproportionate compared to the other two branches. Parliaments act as voting machines of political parties, often dominated by charismatic yet autocratic leaders that started their political careers as Communists. As Liebich noted:

In virtually all post-Communist countries, including those which have abandoned old political habits, familiar faces from the communist past dominate the landscape ... Until age attrition takes its toll, the best prospects for success under

⁹ Zsolt Enyedi, “The ‘Europeanisation’ of Eastern Central European Party Systems,” *epsNet Kiosk Plus the NET Journal of Political Science*, 5, 1 (2007), 65–75.

¹⁰ Peter Mair, “The Limited Impact of Europe on National Party Systems,” *West European Politics*, 23, 4 (2000), 28.

*democracy will belong to those who were successful under communism.*¹¹

While the successor parties whose origin could be traced to the Communist era had the advantage of organizational structure, financial resources and substantial membership, they had to adapt to new political rules and standards and overcome the stigma of the past. On the other hand, the newly emerged parties were much more prone to the internal dissent as they for most did not originate from broader social movements but rather from informal groupings of people connected by common ideological and cultural beliefs.¹² (Exceptions to that however, were new parties based on rural interests and/or nationalism.) The disadvantage of new parties has been partially levelled by state subsidies to parties to cover election costs and the fact that party membership no longer translated into proportioned support of the voters.

In general, »the development of institutional structures and establishment of organisational linkages have been the weakest aspects of party development in Eastern Europe.«¹³ Also, all political parties in post-Communist countries have had another issue to deal with in common: a general public distrust of political parties. Gebethener argued that

*Under the conditions that prevailed following the failure of the former political system of 'real socialism' the great majority of Poles distrusted any political party. This was true of new parties as of the old ones. Such anti-party feelings are characteristic of all the post-Communist societies of Central and Eastern Europe.*¹⁴

Gebethener established that in 1996; fourteen years later the distrust appears only greater. Since new politicians have come into the spotlight and age attrition has indeed taken its toll, the increasing distrust is to my view also to be attributed to the behaviour of the political parties. For those that have managed to seize power in particular, it seems that the side effect of their ruling is for most the loss of public trust. As in the past two decades most of the more significant parties have had the opportunity to rule, the distrust has been generalized, regardless of the successor or non-successor origin of the party.

Within the project *Democracy and Enlargement in Post-Communist Europe* Haerpfer contributed an interesting analysis of public (dis)trust in Central and

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¹¹ Stephen White, Judy Batt and Paul G. Lewis (ed.), *Developments in Central and East European Politics 2* (London: MacMillan, 1998), 111.

¹² *Ibid.*, 158–159.

¹³ Paul G. Lewis, *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 94.

¹⁴ Stephen White, Judy Batt and Paul G. Lewis (ed.), *Developments in Central and East European Politics 2* (London: MacMillan, 1998), 162.

Eastern European democratic regimes after 1989.¹⁵ Notwithstanding slight deviations, he detected increasing support for democracy in all considered states until mid-nineties, when the support started to decrease from high starting figures, collected for 1991 (56% of support on average in Central and Eastern Europe, from 49% in Slovenia to 71% in Czech Republic)¹⁶ In Croatia and Slovakia support for democracy decreased in the first half of the nineties. By mid-nineties, the majority of Central and Eastern Europeans lost many illusions about democratic political system. Simultaneously, support for legislative branch of power grew (i.e. the rule of law) as well as the average support for parliaments in Central and Eastern Europe increased from 59% in 1991 to 83% in 1998.¹⁷

In the analysis of the results of the study Haerpfer emphasized that political situation in the region was heterogeneous to the point that four groups could be identified of various patterns of support to democracy. He identified Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary as "consolidated democracies" by the end of the nineties, Slovenia and Slovakia were supposedly close to consolidation, while Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria were "developing democracies". In the north of Europe only Estonia was a "developing democracy"; while Lithuania and Latvia, according to Haerpfer, were still in political transition and democratization was not yet an irreversible process.¹⁸

These conclusions are interesting in particular in the light of further events in the decade that followed the nineties. Except for Croatia all countries considered in the study became Member States of the European Union and therefore acquired a formal confirmation of their democratic character. The differentiation among the Baltic states is also interesting since they have appeared a rather homogeneous group with regard to political history/culture/development. Although assessed relatively unfavourably, Slovenia has since then presided the European Union. As Haerpfer measured the level of democracy by a set of pointed questions addressed at a representative sample of citizens, the results of his study are as much an interesting demonstration of (self)criticism and (self) perception as they are a demonstration of difference between the democratic "climate" in a particular national environment and the presentation of the status of democracy to the outside world via political and media discourse.

Furthermore, Haerpfer designed within the same study a "democracy index"

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¹⁵ Christian W. Haerpfer, *Democracy and Enlargement in Post-Communist Europe – The democratisation of the general public in fifteen Central and Eastern European countries, 1991-1998* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142–143.

in which he considered questions pertaining to the rejection of the Communist regime, support to democratic regime, support to the Parliament, rejection of authoritarian leaders, military regimes and monarchy as well as optimism regarding future of democracy. The results are somewhat concordant with this set of questions related more to what democracy is not than to what democracy is: in the period 1990-98 the democracy index in Central and Eastern Europe increased from 57% to 61%, a rather small change, yet differences between studied states are substantial. Czech Republic registered the most important fall (-12%) in this period, while the most important positive difference was generated by Poles (+19%) and, by comparison, in Belarus (+18%).¹⁹ Twelve years later it appears as if Haerpfer was measuring the status of illusions on democracy and not democracy as such.

3 DEMOCRATIZATION OR RE-OLIGARCHISATION OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE?

The gap between political aspirations and reality of Central and Eastern Europe i.e. the difference between "elective multi-party democracy" and "democratic society" that the attention has earlier been drawn to, has been theorized by Larry Siedentop who identified three discourses on democracy in *Democracy in Europe*: the simplistic discourse, the discourse on democratic authority and the discourse on democratic society.²⁰ The discourse on democracy *simpliciter* rejects the supposed repression in the existing system without developing an alternative proposal and relies in particular on the differentiation between Us and Them, what Siedentop named 'democratic demonology'.²¹ Democratic authority on the other hand, is based on the 'discourse on citizenship' about solidarity and unconditional uncritical belonging of the individual citizen to the community that acquires access to citizenship under specific conditions.

This discourse, according to Siedentop, is rooted in hierarchic and aristocratic pre-modern societal model in which individualism is not an asset, while certain individuals are inflexibly excluded from citizenship or decisions making processes in public affairs. Under a militant democratic authority freedom is a privilege and certainly not an equal right.²²

Discourse on democratic society is set apart from the discourse on democratic authority in that the former is not based on the (ethnic) community but on the individual. Furthermore, it is founded on morally perceived equality, individual

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¹⁹ Ibid., 44–45.

²⁰ Larry Siedentop, *Demokracija v Evropi* (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2003).

²¹ Ibid., 78.

²² Ibid., 87.

autonomy, human rights and social contract.²³

With Siedentop's discursive classification applied to Central and Eastern European democracies today, I would argue that after two transitional decades nation-states in the region and the newly founded ones in particular, continue to base political action on democratic authority, while parties in opposition often resort to Siedentop's 'democratic demonology' without presenting a viable alternative to widely criticized decisions of those in power. Based on a region-wide study in the mid-nineties, Katherine Verdery²⁴ concluded that one of the first visible consequences of democratization in post-Communist Europe was the revival of 'ethno-national identities' that represented the key criterion for redistribution of citizenship and related constitutionally guaranteed rights in newly founded states, especially those issued from Communist federations such as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Soviet Union. In Slovenia for example, decisions by Constitutional Court concerning minority rights and other issues, have not been respected. Constitution, this pillar stone of democracy, has often been revised, while ombudsmen have detected numerous infringements of constitutionally guaranteed rights. Compared to the Communist era, the situation of certain undesirable minorities in the region has worsened (Slovakia) or did not improve (Slovenia, Baltic States). According to Verdery, constitutionally legitimized nationalism (and not democracy) was the ideology to replace Communism, and not as the alternative of the latter, but rather as its prolongation from the perspective of collective identities.²⁵ I would add that the introduction of individualism after the collectivist era was in the region limited to the private and consumerist sphere, while newly legitimized state communities quickly acted on cohesive collective identity by identifying the new Them as opposed to Us, in minorities and migrants and neighbouring countries, a shift in mentality that, compared to the Cold War construction of the Enemy, made this new Enemy much more palpable and visible and closer and therefore more aggressively opposed.

To identify and measure the quality of democracy is not an easy task, especially, if we are not satisfied by mere declarative and discursive reality. Mallet-Prevost wondered in an early 20th century analysis of American democracy, whether "it is suitable to judge democracy according to what people can actually do, as long as they have a right to do it? If democracy gives to all of them equal rights, is that enough? If theoretically, every citizen has a right to participate in government, does that constitute the rule of the people? Does it matter

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²³ Ibid., 89.

²⁴ Katherine Verdery, "Nationalism, Citizenship and Property: Eastern Europe since 1989," *American Ethnologist*, 25, 2 (1998), 291–306.

²⁵ Ibid., 294.

in a democratic system, how a citizen enacts, if at all, his rights?²⁶ These issues remain relevant for formal standards of democracy even today, be it the Huntington criterion that a "functioning and stable democracies must enable for a transfer of democratic authority at least two free and peaceful elections"²⁷ or be it the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession and their actual implementation and internalization. Berg-Schlosser and De Meur on the other hand identified as a democracy criterion the "importance of democratic tradition and conservation of democratic standards."²⁸ Although this criterion bridges the gap between declarative democracy and internalized democratic society, its application to Central and Eastern European societies cannot inspire particular optimism (with the exception of the Czech Republic). Since inherent political culture prevails over "imported" political concepts and since there has been obvious continuity with the previous regimes in the region, considering individual agents of political action as well as structures and institutions, would it not be pertinent to suppose that "the more it changes the more it remains the same" as the French dictum goes? Could the Communist oligarchies have been quickly and easily swept away by a true change or have they rather been replaced by new oligarchies instead?

According to Leach, "oligarchy is a concentration of rooted illegitimate power and/or influence of minority that is sufficiently strong that this minority makes happen what it wants, even if that goes against the (actively or passively expressed) interests of the majority."²⁹ The capacity to control decision making processes in organizations represents a necessary as well as sufficient indication of oligarchic power. If a minority regularly supersedes its competencies to make or influence decisions in order to manipulate issues potentially threatening its interests, if the minority uses information to the same goal and represses the opposing views to the extent that the majority feels intimidated, the minority evidently abused power.

Leach identified three indicators of oligarchisation: lack of rotation of people in positions, control of a minority over resources and low level of political participation. However, although these three criteria demonstrate that the minority has sufficient power to dominate the organization, they also represent a cause or a consequence of oligarchic power and not evidence of oligarchisation.

²⁶ Severo Mallet-Prevost, "United States - Democracy or Oligarchy?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 169 (1933), 163.

²⁷ Max Kaase and Kenneth Newton, *Zaupanje v vlado* (Ljubljana: Liberalna akademija and Znanstvena knjižnica FDV, 1999), 191.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Darcy K. Leach, "The Iron Law of What Again? Conceptualizing Oligarchy across Organizational Forms," *Sociological Theory*, 23, 3 (2005), 329.

Although a lack of change in leadership is a very common sign of oligarchisation, long-term leaders do not necessarily mean abuse of power. They may enjoy trust and popularity. The same people in leading positions however demonstrate of a probable sign of oligarchisation: the more people become specialised in certain activities the harder it is to replace them and the more the membership depends on specialized skills of their leaders, the easier it is for the latter to act illegally without consequences. In consideration of oligarchisation of an organization it is therefore important to establish whether long-term leaders used illegal means to keep their power and influence and whether they enjoyed stable support of the majority. In order to use illegal power by material rewards or sanctions, one needs to have access to resources and control their distribution. The evidence that control of resources within the organization has been concentrated in hands of a small group, indicates therefore the potential of this group for illegal use of power. Yet again, control of resources is not an evidence of oligarchisation *per se*. Evidence must also be brought forward that a minority successfully used the control to adopt or influence decisions that the majority opposed or would opposed knowing of use of illegal means.

Low participation can be a sign that people feel excluded or alienated from the decision making process and that their viewpoints and interests are not being taken into consideration. It could be an expression of an overall fatalism that participation would not change a thing since the leadership decides on everything. It could also be that the majority is content with the exercise of power of the minority until the latter is responsible and does not threaten the interests of the majority. With long-term leaders however, people often start to feel incompetent or disinclined to intervene in decision making processes after a while, despite suspicions that their interests are being threatened, especially since they don't participate in the decision making process to begin with. The minority in such cases often imposes an unpopular decision so that the majority feels guilty for first having let the leaders do all the work and doubting in it afterwards. Once again it is important to consider the means of enactment of competencies and influence in the organization very carefully in order to establish whether there is a pattern of illegal control on behalf of the minority.³⁰ Necessary contextualization regarding demographic, technological etc. evolution since the invention of democracy makes it impossible to consider the classical model of the rule of the people as a referential concept. After all, the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in 20th century declared themselves democratic as well. The delegate self-management system in Yugoslavia from the seventies on facilitated a much greater participation in decision-making processes than it was actually implemented in any Western democracy.

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³⁰ Ibid., 330–332.

Democracy and oligarchy have aspects in common that make it difficult to differentiate them. Considering the Aristotelian differentiation of moderate and extreme oligarchies, contemporary Central and Eastern European "ethnocracies"³¹ with their constitutional citizenship criteria based on ethnic affiliation and with examples of "bureaucratic ethnic cleansing" could even be classified as extreme oligarchies, where rule of the law is applied, while citizenship is accessible only by birth. Similarly to ancient oligarchies, contemporary Central and Eastern European political regimes display a disproportion of power between branches that benefits the executive (council, government) and harms the deliberative i.e. legislative branch (agora, assembly, parliament), while the judicial struggles for independence. Here and now the mandate of decision makers is also short, which bears negative impact on their liability. Re-election is limited, in smaller countries however, rotation of the same persons in important functions is perceivable. Delimitations between branches of power are unclear, while mutual control is seldom mutual and consistent.

When considering the iron rule of oligarchy that every organization eventually turns into an oligarchy, it needs to be emphasized that the rule also applies to the state albeit Michels argues that the rule is applicable to every voluntary organization.³² Not only his thesis is relevant for large political communities such as states, the question is also relevant who monitors such large non-voluntary organizations, in accordance with the Casinelli's thesis that oligarchy of a particular organization is limited by other, equally influential organizations or, applied to states, that states can prevent collapsing of other states into oligarchy.³³ After all, we have witnessed interventions of other states into internal affairs of sovereign states such as former Yugoslavia or Iraq, while there are international organizations such as the United Nations that also have instruments at disposal to intervene. However, the interventions have been limited only to certain states, leaving out obvious oligarchies, such as North Korea or Myanmar.

Returning to Central and Eastern Europe and political parties there, it can be concluded from available data that all parties, regardless of political orientation, are prone to internal oligarchic organization. Lipset namely established that democracy was ensured by a selection of various party programs on the elections, however oligarchic the internal structure of subordinate groups, interests and values,³⁴ yet indistinctiveness and irrelevance of political programs

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³¹ Katherine Verdery, "Nationalism, Citizenship and Property: Eastern Europe since 1989," *American Ethnologist*, 25, 2 (1998), 297.

³² Robert Michels, *Political Parties: a sociological study of oligarchical tendency of modern democracy* (Illinois: Free Press, 1958), 365.

³³ C. W. Cassinelli, "The Law of Oligarchy," *The American Political Science Review*, 47, 3 (1953), 19.

³⁴ Martin Seymour Lipset, "Steady Work: An Academic Memoir," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22 (1996), 7.

happens to be one of the principal criticisms addressed at contemporary Central and Eastern European parties. Mallet-Prevost states that media are the most important guarantee against excesses of American oligarchic elites for example and yet, the media situation in Central and Eastern Europe can be a source of concern as media only exceptionally act as the fifth branch of power and critique of the authorities. When they do, they often face persecution and at least self-censorship and editorial censorship, but mostly – with a few more intermediaries than under Communist regime – they are becoming propaganda for partial political and capitalist interests. “Exploitation of the media and the maintenance of political monopoly on their use had, indeed, been one of the characteristics of the communist rule and was, in its time, one of the innovatory features of the communist approach to political life.”³⁵

Leach warns from oversimplified comparison and identification when he establishes three indicators of oligarchy that do not represent evidence by themselves for such tendencies. In the past two decades in Central and Eastern Europe we witnessed long-term popular leaders that were not accused of abuse of power such as Czech Vaclav Havel or Slovenian Milan Kučan. On the other hand, there have been leaders that kept powerful political positions in spite denunciations of abuse such as Slovak Vladimir Meciar and Croat Franjo Tudjman.

Two particular factors in Central and Eastern European politics come into play with this oligarchy indicator: political hygiene in the region is such that resignations from positions are rare exceptions (such as those of Hungarian Ferenc Gyurcsany or Croat Ivo Sanader) and the particular vulnerability to oligarchic rotation of the same people in key positions of small society such as Slovenia, Estonia or Slovakia where there insufficient critical mass of politicians.

Control over resources (be it finances, information or people) could be measured via reports of national financial courts or information ombudsmen, if information of public interest is in question. Media reports demonstrate that control over financial resources and information is an issue with political elites all over Central and Eastern Europe, while disclosures of abuse of power in that respect does not result in sanctions for political careers of oligarchs involved. “Finance has been a critical dimension of party development. As in other countries, parties in Eastern Europe tend to be secretive about the financial resources they control and the sources of their funds even if parties are legally bound to make such details public. Such prescriptions are rarely observed in full and, where accounts are publicly registered, by no means all sources of funds are acknowledged. There is plenty of scope for financial scandal to erupt and undermine apparently

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³⁵ Paul G. Lewis, *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 113.

stable processes of party government ... the role of the state in the funding of party activity is one prominent feature."³⁶

Low political participation is a matter of concern in Central and Eastern Europe. In Slovenia for example the participation in parliamentary elections decreased from 85,6% in 1992 to 63,1% in 2008. It is yet much lower in local elections and referenda. However, in parliamentary elections it remains relatively satisfactory compared to many other countries; if nothing else it is sufficient for legitimization of political parties that then decide who is going to represent the voters in the Parliament. Considering participation within the parties, Lewis states that

»The conditions of modern party activity, elitist attitudes on the part of many party leaders in eastern Europe, and the reluctance of the public to join them combined to give the members that parties have enrolled a relatively marginal role within the organization as a whole. This has also been reflected in the weak structural development of the east European parties.«³⁷

4 CONCLUSION

In the last two decades, Central and Eastern Europe has gone through an intensive transformation process in which the adopted global neo-liberal political-economic model, the specifics of the Europeanisation and the traditionally non-liberal corporate political cultures in the region merged to produce hybrid political systems that bear many features of oligarchies. In other, simple words: regardless of their ideological orientation, political parties in the region transpose their inner oligarchic organization and decision-making procedures to the government and state administration when they seize power. Without making the connection with Michels' theory on oligarchisation, Lewis saw the situation similarly:

"Throughout Eastern Europe, ..., questions of inner party democracy were not just ignored but were rarely perceived to be an issue at all. Post-communist politics and the practice of liberal democracy was understood to operate at national level and within the narrow confines of the political elite – which might indeed be internally differentiated and in these terms pluralist, but that involved little conception of broader political participation or a more active form of mass democracy. It involved a very limited conception of the political party and provided few incentives for developing party's organization or sub-national structure.«³⁸

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³⁶ Ibid., 107.

³⁷ Ibid., 103.

³⁸ Ibid., 104.

What is then to do in order to at least approach the democratic ideal? In theory, several solutions are observable: amidst the last comparable global crisis, Mallet-Prevost suggested that declarative, apparent democracy be replaced by actual democracy by setting criteria of electiveness and enhancing the liability of the elected by longer mandates. Mallet-Prevost's justification of these measures followed the line of argument that the ruling oligarchs would continue to lean on the most servile collaborators in order to perpetuate the oligarchic structures, while only the greediest would be interested in ruling in order to abuse of the system to their benefit. According to Mallet-Prevost, reduction of the fundamental democratic right to be elected would not translate into a less democratic system, but ensure the government of the most capable to govern. If we only consider the fact that at the last EP elections, the Slovenian Social-Democrat party currently in power was represented by two candidates that were selected exclusively by the leader of the party and were not even its members, the representativeness has already been reduced to a minimum. Another argument to back that suggestion is the existing limitation of electiveness by quotas. If the judicial branch of power is equal to the executive and the legislative ones and can only be accessed via strict qualifications and a lengthy education, the other two branches require no qualifications at all, argues Mallet-Prevost.³⁹ Longer mandates would indeed possibly enable parties in power to carry out certain vital mid-term projects in the domain of the environment, energy etc. that they are now not interested in because their time plans are limited to the length of the mandate. However, these modifications would have to be adopted by oligarchs in power that have the least interest in them. Furthermore, suggested solutions, if implemented and abused, could strengthen the existing oligarchies. More recently, Alford suggested institutional innovations while remaining sceptical:

Today we tend to put less trust in the institutions, we trust less our abilities to conceive of them and we probably trust less in our reason, at least when solutions to social issues are in question. Catastrophic failure of numerous brave new worlds justifies such scepticism. (...) Political scientists should design new institutional solutions to reduce oligarchy, based on comparative studies of institutions that at least partially succeeded in such endeavour.”⁴⁰

Alford's suggestion could not be more logical; considering all of the above however, political scientists should not look for such innovative, anti-oligarchic institutions to learn from in Central and Eastern Europe.

³⁹ Severo Mallet-Prevost, "United States - Democracy or Oligarchy?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 169 (1933), 167.

⁴⁰ Fred C. Alford, "The „Iron Law of Oligarchy“ in the Athenian Polis . . . and Today", *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*, 18, 2 (1985), 310–312.

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