

THE TRANSITION OF THE EUROPEAN WORLD. THE POST-COMMUNIST CHALLENGES

Mădălina Laura CUCIURIANU¹

ABSTRACT: *THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES THE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE EUROPEAN TRANSITION PROCESS AFTER THE COMMUNIST EXPERIENCE. ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES OF THIS TRANSITION IS THE FACT THAT EUROPE WILL BECOME A TERRITORY OF MILITARY AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS FOR ITS MEMBER STATES AND FOR OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. THE PERIOD OF 1989-1991 WAS FULL OF REVOLUTIONARY EVENTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND THE MAIN REASON WAS THE COLLAPSE OF SOVIET UNION AND THE COMMUNIST BLOC. AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THIS SITUATION, THE EUROPEAN STATES PASSED THROUGH A DRAMATIC PROCESS EXPERIENCING THE TRANSITION CHALLENGES AND THE GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES WHICH AFFECTED ALL LEVELS OF EUROPEAN LIVE, SUCH AS POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND MILITARY SYSTEM AND ALSO THE RELATIONS BETWEEN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THE REST OF THE WORLD.*

KEYWORDS: EUROPEAN WORLD, POST-COMMUNIST CHALLENGES, TRANSITION PROCESS, EUROPEAN UNION, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the transition period of the European world, with focus on the challenges of this process and on the consequences for the European countries during this process and after it. As we well know, after 1989, the European world encountered a dramatic process experiencing the transition challenges and the geopolitical changes which affected all levels of European live, such as political, economic and military system and also the relations between European countries and the rest of the world.

The article is structured in three parts and all of them are focused on the effects of the transition process on the European world. Primarily, there is a discussion on the consequences and challenges of the post-communism transition process for the European countries, and after that there will be analyzed some of the most important regional and global consequences and challenges of the transition process. In this part we will see also what is the context of the transition process and the theoretical approaches of this process. The second part of the paper is concentrated on the political choice of the european countries in the period of the transition process and after it. The last part of the paper examines the european integration process in and after the transition period. The process of integration is the most important in the history of European Union and also of the Europe and that's why we focus our analysis on it.

¹ PhD Candidate in Political Science, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania, laura.cuciurianu@gmail.com

There are some lessons that can be learned from the transition period, lessons important, especially for those countries which were affected at all levels. In the economic field, there were some differences in the transition economies because the economic performance in Central and Southeastern Europe in 1989 was seriously affected. After the transition period, some countries have progressed faster than others and have strengthened their economy. Other countries remained in the middle of the transition process and still need to be sustained from the economic perspective by the developing countries.

CONSEQUENCES AND CHALLENGES OF THE POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION

The post-communist transition period is considered to be the one after the collapse of the Soviet Union and also the fall of the Communist bloc in 1989, and also the end of the Cold War with the conflict of the two biggest powers in the world, the United States and the Soviet Union. The European countries, which were under the soviet influence, needed to reorganize their institutions and to redefine their identity and their own territory. As a result of this process, there are some consequences of the post-communist transition, and the most important are the fact that Europe will become itself a scene of military and political conflicts, not only for its member states, but also for all the European countries and for its neighbors. Some of these conflicts which affected the European world are: the Romanian Revolution (1989), the Ten-Day War (1991), the Georgia war against Russo-Ossetia Alliance (1992), the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995), the War of Transnistria (1992), the Bosnian War (1992-1995), the Rebellion in Albania (1997), the Kosovo War (1996-1999) and the list continues. Another consequence of the transition period can be the crisis of the European integration process because the European Union was not ready for new waves of integration and the instability of the post-communist countries affected the process of European integration, especially on economic and political levels. The biggest wave of European integration was in 2004, when the European Union decided to integrate 10 post-communist countries because they realized to fulfill the criteria. Beside the conflicts in Europe in that period of transition and beside the crisis of European integration, the transition period brought another consequence like the transformation of Russia's identity and the instability of Eastern Europe in the international relations and the erosion of the political and military importance of NATO and the aggravation of transatlantic relationships. This is due to the end of the Cold War and to the rise of the United States as a single global power.

The collapse of the communist regime across Eastern Europe in 1989 represented the end of a particular type of political and economic system and a particular type of welfare state². The so-called bureaucratic state collectivist system of welfare, which was established by the Soviet Union under the Stalinist system in the Eastern Europe countries after the World War II is no longer functioning. This represents the end of the communist era in some european countries and the beginning of the transition period.

The period of transition brought consequences and also some challenges for the European world. First challenge that Europe faces is the fact that European Union's strategic goal is not so well defined and this could lead to taking difficult political decision. The European Union passed also through some identity crisis in the economic and political levels and the lack of a stable foreign policy affected the decision-making. After the collapse of the Communist bloc, other countries arised and made from the international system a global competition of the EU with the United States, China and Japan for the influence and power of the world. The European Union was created with a clear purpose, and that was to maintain a

² B. Deacon ed., *The New Eastern Europe. Social Policy Past, Present and Future* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 1.

democratic and secure world but the incapability of European Union to reform its institutions in order to harmonize the interests of all its member states and to readapt, represents a big challenge that must be solved.

The context of the transition period

After the end of Cold War, the bipolar system has no longer divided the European continent and the Europe had the chance to reorganize itself. There was the perfect time for the liberal democracy and it was possible to imagine a Europe that would be peaceful, dynamic and progressive.³

We could wonder why the process of transition for the European world is so important and in order to answer to this question we should think on the Europe, as a continent, before and after 1989 to see the differences and the changes. The transition process can be considered an important phenomenon in the modern economic history and there is a major difficulty for standard economic theory to build a pattern and to explain the evolution of centrally planned economies in transformation. That's why is not easy to explain and to analyze the process of transition because it implies a lot of processes of changes the European society.

The creation of Soviet bloc in the Eastern Europe was possible with some political shocks. In 1989 the history was repeating and a socio-political upheaval was at the basis of the process of returning back to market economies. These events created the context for the transition period of the European world.

The transition period: theoretical approaches

The transition process implies the political, the economic and the social levels, so our analysis concerns the connection between these areas and their effects on the European world. The economists sustain that the shape and incentives of the institutions have a big influence on economic growth so the specialists should find the solution to have a stable economy and efficient institutions.⁴

An important theoretical approach for the transition process is the Washington Consensus⁵. This theory is based on the neoclassical theory and on the standard micro-economic approach of stabilization or shock therapy. In order to create an appropriate legal framework, there is an assumption that the markets will be developed spontaneously through the trio method of liberalization-stabilization-privatization.

THE POLITICAL CHOICE IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD

Europe must rely on itself and must be stronger to face the problems encountered along the time. The United States was a serious enemy for Europe in some situations and this has changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union because Europe needed an ally to become a stronger global power and the most suitable partner in this context was the US. But to become a global power Europe should promote an European will, identity and goals, should rely on a democratic system, should be capable to defend itself and to have a prosper economy and a

³ P. M. Heywood et al., *Developments in European Politics* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1.

⁴ K. Hoff and J.E. Stiglitz, "The Transition Process in Postcommunist Societies: Toward a Political Economy of Property Rights" in *Toward Pro-Poor Policies-Aid, Institutions and Globalization*, B. Tungodden, N. Stern, and I. Kolstad (eds.), World Bank/Oxford University Press, 231-245. 2004. Also circulated under the title "The Transition from Communism: A Diagrammatic Exposition of Obstacles to the Demand for the Rule of Law," World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3352. 2004.

⁵ J. Williamson, *A Short History of the Washington Consensus*, Institute for International Economics, Paper commissioned by Fundación CIDOB for a conference "From the Washington Consensus towards a new Global Governance," Barcelona, September 24–25, 2004.

stable foreign policy⁶. We will see if this will happen and if Europe is capable to sustain its position in the international relations.

In the transition process there are a lot of levels in which the citizens and the society are affected. The most important changes are the in economic level, in the political and in the social one. In the political field the citizens suffer because of the severe regimes from their countries (authoritarianism, totalitarianism, post-totalitarianism, and sultanism).⁷ From the history experience we found out that these different regime types can influence the paths of democratic transition. The recommended regime for the European world is the democratic one but what about the countries in which there are other regimes types? There is one path of democratization and this is the transitions to democracy⁸. What does it mean? Because of the severe measures of the other regimes, the democratic one will have priority and will be chosen by people who want to be free and to build a political society with democratic basis.

After the collapse of Communist bloc, European countries, ex-communist, need to redefine their identity and the liberal orientation seems to be a good solution. The aim of the liberal orientation is a European integration based on the Copenhagen criteria (the candidate countries need to achieve a functioning market economy and to able to face the competitive pressure of the European Union single market. Furthermore, even if liberalization seems to be necessary in the context on transitional process, it represents, in the same time, a risk of market power which is captured by some groups of interest and by the incapacity of the European countries to build a competitive economic framework.

A fundamental difficulty in the transition process can be the institutional reform because it must support a real market economy. An institutional reform refers also to a structural reform which can be understood through restructuring institutions to promote integrity and legitimacy, by building independence, ensuring representation and respect for human rights. In the economic field, the problem is difficult and the transitional process is long because the underdeveloped countries which were influenced by the Soviet Union needed time to adapt and to rebuild their economy, their trust in a democratic regime and also in each other.

We are discussing about democracy in the transition period because it should be analyzed the regimes types from the european states after the fall of the Communist bloc. But, what does democracy mean in term of governance? Democracy is a form of governance in a modern state.⁹ Without a state, a modern democracy cannot exist. To have a theoretical background we should take into consideration the definition of the state given by Max Weber, who provides a classic and also an important discussion of the most important attributes of the state in the modern societies :

The formal characteristics of the modern state are as follows: It possesses by legislation an administrative and legal order to change, to which the organized corporate activity of the administrative staff, which is also regulated by legislation, is oriented. This system of order claims authority not only over the members of the state (the citizens, most of the them have obtained membership by birth) but also to a very large extent, over all action which are taking place in the area of its jurisdiction. It is thus a compulsory association with a territorial basis. Furthermore, today, the use of force is regarded as legitimate only so far as it is either accepted by the state or recommended by it...The claim of the modern state to monopolize the use of force is as essential to it as its character of compulsory jurisdiction and of continuous organization.¹⁰

⁶ L. Barzini, *The Europeans* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 23.

⁷J.J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 45.

⁸ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 47.

⁹ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 17.

¹⁰ M.Weber, "The Fundamental Concepts of Sociology", in Talcott Parsons, ed., *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1964), 156.

The definition of Max Weber for the state is very important because it describes the principal attributes of the modern states and it is essential for the state in the transition period because it is institutionally affected by the political, economic and social crisis.

THE TRANSITION OF THE EUROPEAN WORLD

The enlargement of the European Union represents the most important part of the transition process because it offers a chance for the institutional manifestation of the new post-Cold War Europe.¹¹ The European Union's instruments needed to respond to common challenges with common policies and this provides also the management of the interdependencies between the European countries.

The European integration is based on some measures and on some criteria that the candidate countries should fulfill. The process of integration is not only about economic measures, but is also about developing a coherent European policy for the global challenges in the foreign policy. The motivation of the European integration process is based on some assumptions such as: the political identity crisis in the region of Europe may be solved with the integration of new countries, especially the ex-communist ones; through the creation of the European Union and the progress of the European integration, the territory of Europe may achieve the necessary stability, peace and progress. To solve the European economic, political and social crisis it was needed an important transformation and the solution can be achieved through the process of European integration. The enlargement of the European Union can be seen as a positive sum game because it offers the perspective of more growth in the frame of market opening and globalization of the economy.

European integration: some problems

At the beginning of the twenty century, the Europeans believed that Europe has dominated the globe because of its unity, but at the beginning of the twenty-first century the world has started to believe that globalization is the one who dominated the Europe and also the rest of the globe. This happened because some countries from Europe turned on one-another in the two world wars and their global dominance was diminished.

Globalization is seen like a challenge and the European countries still preserve their identity. The term of globalization become a leitmotive of the contemporary debate¹² and it can be defined like a process of increasing the speed of communication, the spread of mass-media all over the world, the spread of internet connections, the growth of trade, jobs, capital and services.¹³ For Europe, the main global challenge is not the process of globalization, but its effects on the European integration. The problem of economic trade, understood in terms of movement of goods and services across national borders, it's very important because it influences the basic economic structures. The new way of doing trade implies trade necessitates adjustment.¹⁴

The European Union enlargement was built as a policy initiative for the globalization process so the global changes played an important role in shaping the European integration agenda. A problem of the enlargement process is the fact that it promised an economic growth and some economic advantages for the European integration from West to East, but it will also stimulate the flow of migrants from East to West¹⁵.

¹¹ Heywood et al., *Developments*, 2.

¹² Heywood et al., *Developments*, 15.

¹³ A.T. Kerney, "Measuring Globalization: The Top 20", *Foreign Policy* (May/June), 2005, 52-60.

¹⁴ A.S. Millward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe: 1945-1951* (London: Routledge, 1984).

¹⁵ M.A. Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration after Communism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

To resume the problems implied by the process of integration, we can say that there is a fundamental question after a number of waves of integration: what governance is needed for a European Union with 28 member countries? To respond to this question we should have in mind some aspects: the authorities of the European Union have limited powers and here we can bring in discussion the debate of enlargement vs. deepening; the problem of the Convention and the future of the European Constitution is not solved and, in some cases, former European political elite has perpetuated under a modern capitalist form, allowing money laundering and capital drain – reforms are thus deviated in a more or less visible way.

The main consequences of the European integration

The European integration has brought some consequences in different level of the European society: on the economic level, there is the developing of the internal market, the perspective of extended growth and prosperity in the region. But with what costs of the integration and who will pay for it? On the political level there is the main perspective of the European Union which goes to the East. Here it is recommended to analyze the concept of “Mitteleuropa” and the role of Germany. Finally, on the social and cultural levels it is observed a high educational level of the new member states, great diversity of cultures, but the European unity is still in question.

CONCLUSIONS

It is believed that the political and the economic transition is related¹⁶ and there is an interdependent relation between them and it's recommended that both, the economic and political transitions, to be analyzed together in order to understand the transition process fully. By doing this it can be observed that the political transition, which is considered an important move from dictatorial rule to democracy, cannot be enough for a successful economic transition. But it is also possible that a simple move to democracy will lead to relatively poor long-run performance due to the dynamics of policy determination.¹⁷

Besides changes in the economies and in the institutional framework, in the transition period there were also some changes of perceptions on the situation¹⁸ because of the institutional instability and the social problems of the society. The transition process was based on a strategy of transition¹⁹ which included some measures like liberalisation of prices and foreign trade, economic stability and institutional reforms. It was thought that this measures could lead the countries from the transition economy to a stable one, with economic growth. But the problem encountered was in the perception of the citizens on the transition process because their lives were affected and they needed stability in the economic, social and political fields.

Analyzing the process of transition in the European space, we should have in mind some objectives such as: to examine the regional and global consequences of the European transition process after the communist experience; to understand the global context and the future of Europe (from its position of a major political actor, the European Union has the main responsibility to protect its member states and need to face the challenges of the transitional period) and to analyze the major challenges of the european tranzition process (after the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union has encountered some challenges.

¹⁶P. Krusell and J.V. Rios-Rull, *Politico-Economic Transition*, Institute for International Economic Studies, and CEPR, December 2001, First version, August 1995, 1.

¹⁷ Krusell and Rios-Rull, *Politico-Economic Transition*, 3.

¹⁸ D. M. Nuti and M. Uvalic, *Post-Communist Transition to a Market Economy. Lessons and Challenges* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2003), 11.

¹⁹ Nuti and Uvalic, *Post-Communist Transition*, 12.

The period of 1989-1991 was full of revolutionary events in Central and Eastern Europe and that was because of the collapse of Soviet Union and the Communist bloc. Analyzing the effects of the fail of Communist bloc and of the transition process on European world, we can conclude that the the major problems of the post-communist period are the global crisis (on economic, political and social levels) and also the institutional disorganisation of the states.

REFERENCES

1. **Barzini, L.**, *The Europeans*, London: Penguin Books, 1983.
2. **Deacon, B.**, ed., *The New Eastern Europe. Social Policy Past, Present and Future*, London: Sage Publications, 1992.
3. **Heywood, P. M.**, et al., *Developments in European Politics*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
4. **Hoff, K., and Stiglitz, J.E.**, “The Transition Process in Postcommunist Societies: Toward a Political Economy of Property Rights” in *Toward Pro-Poor Policies-Aid, Institutions and Globalization*, B. Tungodden, N. Stern, and I. Kolstad (eds.), World Bank/Oxford University Press, 231-245. 2004. Also circulated under the title “The Transition from Communism: A Diagrammatic Exposition of Obstacles to the Demand for the Rule of Law,” World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3352. 2004.
5. **Kerneay, A.T.**, “Measuring Globalization: The Top 20”, *Foreign Policy* (May/June), 2005.
6. **Krusell, P. and Rios-Rull, J.V.**, *Politico-Economic Transition*, Institute for International Economic Studies, and CEPR, December 2001, First version, August 1995.
7. **Linz, J.J., and Stepan, Alfred C.**, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore: MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
8. **Millward, A.S.**, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe:1945-1951*, London: Routledge, 1984.
9. **Nuti, D. M., and Uvalic, M.**, *Post-Communist Transition to a Market Economy. Lessons and Challenges*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2003.
10. **Vachudova, M.A.**, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration after Communism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
11. **Williamson, J.**, *A Short History of the Washington Consensus*, Institute for International Economics, Paper commissioned by Fundación CIDOB for a conference “From the Washington Consensus towards a new Global Governance” Barcelona, September 24–25, 2004.
12. **Weber, M.**, “The Fundamental Concepts of Sociology”, in Talcott Parsons, ed., *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, New York: Free Press, 1964.