

Looking Back: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Legacies

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The 1989 regime changes in East-Central Europe (ECE) have been heavily discussed and debated. Many agreed that in 1989 the countries of “actually existing socialism” in ECE experienced a revolutionary situation. Some, however, maintained that the 1989 events do not qualify as a genuine revolution on the model of the great modern revolutions such as the French or the Russian. Violence, they argued, is the fundamental characteristic of a revolution and therefore the 1989 regime changes in ECE were not “true” revolutions because violence was almost non-existent, with the obvious exception of Romania. When analyzing the revolutions of 1989, one should address three fundamental issues related to their inception, unfolding and outcome, and provide a convincing answer to the following questions: (1) Why those revolutions occurred precisely in 1989? (2) Why the communist regimes in ECE collapsed in that particular order? and (3) Why some of the 1989 regime changes were negotiated, others were non-negotiated but non-violent, and only one of them was violent? This author contends that the collapse of communist rule in ECE was provoked by an intricate and sometimes unexpected interplay of structural, conjunctural and nation-specific factors, which ultimately determined the timing, sequence, and nature of those events.

Modern vs. Post-Modern Revolutions

As Krishan Kumar has suggested, a way of understanding 1989 is “by analogy.”¹ The “great,” “classic” revolutions of the modern age – such as the French or the Russian revolutions, displayed three fundamental features related to: revolutionary ideology, class character and violent nature. In her classic study of revolutions, Hannah Arendt has argued that the modern concept of revolution is “inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, a story never known or told before is about to unfold.”² Arendt also argues that a key element in understanding modern revolutions is that “the idea of freedom and the experience of a new beginning should coincide.”³ Looking at the claims by 1989 revolutionaries in ECE, one finds out that the forces that stayed behind the regime changes did not want to engage in new utopian experiments. As Gale Stokes puts it, what happened in 1989 was “not a revolution of total innovation, like the great classic revolutions, but rather the shucking off of a failed experiment in favor of an already existing model, pluralist democracy.”⁴ The year 1989 in ECE was marked by a clear tendency of rejecting grand, utopian projects. As Samuel N. Eisenstadt observes: “There was no totalistic, utopian vision rooted in eschatological expectations of a new type of society. The vision or visions promulgated in Central and Eastern Europe, calling for freedom from repressive totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, relied on various pragmatic adjustments.”⁵

¹ Krishan Kumar, *1989: Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 39.

² Hannah Arendt, *On Revolutions* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 28.

³ Arendt, *On Revolutions*, 29.

⁴ Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 260.

⁵ See S. N. Eisenstadt, “The Breakdown of Communist Regimes,” in Vladimir Tismăneanu, ed., *The Revolutions of 1989* (London: Routledge, 1999), 93.

A second issue concerns the class character of the 1989 events. One should ask oneself to what extent the events in 1989 constituted a social revolution. The concept of social revolution has been employed by Theda Skocpol in her comparative analysis of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions. According to Skocpol, social revolutions are “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.”⁶ Mass mobilization was a fundamental pre-condition for the 1989 regime changes in ECE. Nevertheless, in the case of the 1989 events in ECE, the class character of the revolts from below is seriously questionable. In this respect, Eisenstadt notes: “It would be difficult to say whether these were bourgeois or proletarian revolutions. Even in respect to the classical revolutions, these definitions are not always helpful or enlightening; in respect to the events in Eastern Europe they are meaningless.”⁷ The same author further asserted: “If there were specific social sectors predominant in bringing down [the communist regimes], they included some intellectuals, certain potential professionals, sometimes abetted by workers, who did not appear to be the bearers of any very strong class consciousness.”⁸ To sum up, one can speak of determined crowds that poured into the streets of the major cities in ECE and thus contributed to the breakdown of communist rule in the respective countries, but not of a particular, self-conscious class that carried out the 1989 transformations.

Third, one has to examine the issue of revolutionary violence. Charles Tilly stresses the use of force as intrinsically linked with the idea of revolution. According to Tilly, a revolution is: “A *forcible transfer of power* over a state in the course of which at least two distinct blocs of contenders make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant portion of the population subject to the state’s jurisdiction acquiesces in the claims of each bloc [emphasis added].”⁹ If violence represents an indispensable ingredient of a “true” revolution, then none of the 1989 regime changes that took place in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia or Bulgaria could be termed as revolutions. Ironically enough, only the events in Romania could be described as a “genuine” revolution. Timothy Garton Ash, wrote at the time: “Nobody hesitated to call what happened in Romania a revolution. After all, it really looked like one: angry crowds on the streets, tanks, government buildings in flames, the dictator put up against a wall and shot.”¹⁰ However, what happens after a certain event could change dramatically our perspective on that event, and this also happened with regard to the 1989 events in Romania. In his concluding remarks to a major international conference celebrating ten years from the “miraculous year” 1989, Garton Ash stated bluntly: “Curiously enough the moment when people in the West finally thought there was a revolution was when they saw television pictures of Romania: crowds, tanks, shooting, blood in the streets. They said: ‘That – we know *that* is a revolution,’ and of course the joke is that it was the only one that wasn’t [original emphasis].”¹¹ To conclude this part, it may be argued that a majority of the authors who addressed the 1989 regime changes in ECE agreed more or less to the idea that those events constituted revolutions, but a special kind of revolutions.

There are at least three main differences between the 1989 events in ECE and the “great” revolutions in the sense that the revolutions of 1989 were neither utopian, nor violent, and did not have a class character. Garton Ash confessed that there is indeed a problem of assessing “in what

⁶ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 4.

⁷ Eisenstadt, “The Breakdown of Communist Regimes,” 91.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492-1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 8.

¹⁰ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 20; orig. publ. 1990.

¹¹ Timothy Garton Ash, “Conclusions” to Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismăneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 395.

sense this was a revolution” and aptly observed: “In fact *we always have to qualify it*; we call it ‘velvet,’ we call it ‘peaceful,’ we call it ‘evolutionary,’ someone ... calls it ‘rebirth’ not revolution, I call it ‘refolution’ [emphasis added].”¹²

The first phase of the 1989 revolutions consisted of the “peaceful revolutions” in Poland and Hungary. It should be stressed from the outset that the crucial element of the Polish inception and the subsequent Hungarian ensuing of the 1989 wave of political changes in ECE was the *roundtable principle* observed in both countries by the communist power elites and the opposition groups. The Polish Roundtable Talks, which lasted from February to April, concluded with an agreement that recognized the legal right of Solidarity to exist and thus inaugurated the revolutionary year 1989. As Adam Michnik noted: “The Round Table signified a willingness to transform what had been a policeman’s monologue into a political dialogue.”¹³ The term “negotiated revolutions” is perhaps the most appropriate to characterize the 1989 regime changes in Poland and Hungary. As Rudolf L. Tökés pointed out in his analysis of the Hungarian case, the term “negotiated” characterizes best the process of political bargaining that led to a regime change in that country.¹⁴ According to Tökés, the term “negotiated revolution” has a twofold meaning: “Is both a descriptive label and a metaphor to call attention to the political ambiguity of the outcome.”¹⁵ The idea of political bargaining within the constitutional framework of the Hungarian state was also emphasized by Béla K. Király, who argued that in 1989 Hungary experienced a “lawful revolution” that occurred peacefully “within the constitutional framework of the state.”¹⁶ Former dissident János Kis has proposed the term “regime change,” understood as a “peculiar type of rapid social transformation.” According to Kis, the particularity of such a social transformation resides in the fact that has elements pertaining to both revolution and reform.¹⁷

The second phase of the 1989 revolutions was characterized by the non-negotiated, i.e. not based on the roundtable principle, but non-violent breakdown of communist rule in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, as well as by the palace coup in Bulgaria. The major feature of these non-negotiated non-violent revolutions was that political bargaining regarding the transition to a new political order occurred only after massive mobilization from below. The respective regimes, although did not open roundtable talks with the political opposition previous to the wave of mass mobilization, refrained themselves from ordering a bloodbath in order to suppress the street protests. Kitschelt et al. have put forward the term “regime change by implosion,” which can be applied to the regime changes in East Germany and Czechoslovakia: “Where implosions take place, the former elites have the least bargaining power in the transition and are shunted aside by opposition forces that quickly gain organizational and ideological predominance.”¹⁸ For the particular case of East Germany, the scholarly literature has retained the term “spontaneous revolution.” As Karl-Dieter Opp observed: “The revolution in the GDR is so fascinating because it

¹² Garton Ash, “Conclusions” to Antohi and Tismăneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future*, 395.

¹³ Adam Michnik, “A Specter Is Haunting Europe,” in idem, *Letters from Freedom: Post-Cold War Realities and Perspectives*, ed. by Irena Grudzińska Gross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 117; orig. publ. in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 9 May 1989.

¹⁴ Rudolf L. Tökés, *Hungary’s Negotiated Revolution: Economic Reform, Social Change, and Political Succession, 1957-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7-8.

¹⁵ Tökés, *Hungary’s Negotiated Revolution*, 439.

¹⁶ Béla K. Király, “Soft Dictatorship, Lawful Revolution, and the Socialists’ Return to Power,” in idem, ed., *Lawful Revolution in Hungary, 1989-94* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1995), 5..

¹⁷ János Kis, “Between Reform and Revolution: Three Hypotheses About the Nature of the Regime Change,” in Király, ed., *Lawful Revolution in Hungary*, 53.

¹⁸ Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski and Gábor Tóka, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31.

both occurred spontaneously and ensued nonviolently.... A revolution is *spontaneous* if the protests are not organized [original emphasis].”¹⁹ In the case of former Czechoslovakia, the most utilized term was that of “velvet revolution.”²⁰ The cases of Bulgaria and Romania differed in the sense that the regime change in Bulgaria was non-violent while Romania witnessed a bloody revolution. In Bulgaria, the day after the fall of the Berlin Wall a coup was initiated from within the inner circle of power and resulted in the replacement of the supreme leader of the Bulgarian communists with a younger apparatchik. The Bulgarian palace coup was aimed at initiating a “preemptive reform” meant to ensure the survival of the communist power elite into the new political order.²¹ However, the coup initiated the non-violent revolution: the change at the top of the communist party triggered a massive and unprecedented mass mobilization under the lead of the united opposition, which opened the way towards a real change of system in that country.

The communist regime in Romania was the last in a row to collapse in 1989, and its collapse was marked by bloodshed and violence. The Romanian revolution was violent and contradicted therefore the non-violent character of the rest of the 1989 revolutions in ECE. Since the opponents of the regime could not organize themselves politically under communism and thus pave the way for the systemic changes of the year 1989, there was no organized dissident group that could fill the power vacuum generated by the sudden demise of the regime. Instead, there were ultimately those who learned politics by doing it, that is, the second- and third-rank communist bureaucrats, who, in those moments of general confusion, took over the provisional government. Although violent, Romania’s exit from communism was perceived as being the least radical from among the former Soviet bloc countries because of the obvious continuity between the communist regime and the successor regime in terms of political elite recruitment. As Linz and Stepan aptly put it, Romania was “the only country where a former high Communist official was not only elected to the presidency in the first free election, but re-elected.”²² Consequently, the Romanian revolution was characterized as “doubtful,” “entangled,” “diverted,” “unfinished,” “stolen” or “gunned down.”

When looking for a definition of 1989, one could start from the fact that the 1989 events in ECE took power elites and populations by surprise. True, revolutions are generally unexpected and perhaps this is why they represent a fascinating research topic. Still, in the case of the 1989 events in ECE one could also employ a term that was originally used by Paul Kecskemeti to characterize the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, and call them the “unexpected revolutions.”²³ The revolutions of 1989 did not initiate a “new beginning” because they did not seek for one. What was at stake was the departure from a project that aimed at solving a crisis of modernity by serving the cause of freedom and equality which proved to be an utter failure. Consequently, violence, utopian dreams and class struggle were not on the agenda of a majority of the revolutionaries of 1989 and thus one may advance the idea that the revolutions of 1989 were the first revolutions of the postmodern age. As Jürgen Kocka perceptively argued, the communist regimes, like the fascist ones, were “modern dictatorships” because the causes they served, as well as their scopes and means, were intrinsically

¹⁹ Karl-Dieter Opp, “Some Conditions for the Emergence of Spontaneous, Nonviolent Revolutions,” in Karl-Dieter Opp, Peter Voss and Christiane Gern, *Origins of a Spontaneous Revolution: East Germany, 1989* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 225.

²⁰ John F. N. Bradley, *Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution: A Political Analysis* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1992), 105.

²¹ Kitschelt et al., *Post-Communist Party Systems*, 30.

²² Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 344.

²³ Paul Kecskemeti, *The Unexpected Revolution: Social Forces in the Hungarian Uprising* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961).

modern: "For the communist and fascist dictatorships of the twentieth century the rule was: the modernity of their methods and goals corresponded to the modernity of their causes."²⁴

There was something new that made the 1989 revolutions in ECE not only different from the "classic" revolutions, but also unique. In this respect, Eisenstadt's discussion on the "postmodern" features of 1989, seen as an upheaval against the failed project of modernity in Sovietized Europe is perhaps the most appropriate to characterize those events. In Eisenstadt's view, one could identify similarities between 1989 and the "classic" revolutions with regard to: "The close relations among popular protests, struggles in the center, and the intellectual groups that developed; the place of principled protest; [and] the emphasis on the legitimacy of such protest, central in all of them."²⁵ Nevertheless, the same author identifies a series of elements present in the revolutions of 1989 that could be compared with certain developments in Western societies that have been described as "postmodern." Regarding the revolutions of 1989, Eisenstadt points towards some elements that might be defined as "postmodern," such as: "The decharismatization of the centers, the weakening of the overall societywide utopian political vision and of the missionary-ideological components." As he further states: "Even when the belief in democracy and the free market sometimes evince such elements, there is a concomitant disposition of many utopian orientations to disperse; 'daily' and semi-private spheres of life become central."²⁶ Thus, drawing on the argument put forward by Eisenstadt, it might be argued that the revolutions of 1989 were simply "postmodern" because they were non-utopian, non-violent – the Romanian exception notwithstanding, and were not carried out in the name of a particular class.

Explaining the Collapse: Culture, Structure, and Contingency

The changes initiated in 1989 in East-Central Europe involved not only a transition from communist authoritarian rule to a political democracy, but also a structural change from a centrally-planned economy to a functional market economy, with enormous social costs. After the communist takeovers, the newly installed regimes engaged in a process of decisive "breaking through." As Jowitt aptly demonstrated, such a process meant the elimination of those structures, values, attitudes and behaviors that were perceived by the communist revolutionary elite as major obstacles to the fulfillment of its agenda of political, social and economic change.²⁷ The revolutions of 1989 undertook the monumental task of restoring the structures, values, attitudes and behaviors the communist regimes strove to eliminate for almost fifty years.

Drawing on Eisenstadt's analysis, this work proposes the generic term "postmodern" revolutions when referring to the 1989 breakdown of communist rule in ECE. Another theoretical challenge is to provide a working definition of such a revolution. Numerous authors have argued that violence should be considered an essential ingredient of a revolution. According to such a criterion, only the 1989 events in Romania could be characterized as a "true" revolution. However, what characterized the 1989 revolutions was the immediate potential for open and fatal violence, and not necessarily the actual recourse to it. One should thus consider two main issues when devising such a working definition. First, mass mobilization and protest should be regarded as an important precondition of this kind of revolutions. Second, the revolutionary situation in ECE in 1989 differed

²⁴ Jürgen Kocka, "The GDR: A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship," in Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 22.

²⁵ Eisenstadt, "The Breakdown of Communist Regimes," 100.

²⁶ Eisenstadt, "The Breakdown of Communist Regimes," 101.

²⁷ Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 7-8.

from the classic revolutionary situations in the sense that although an immediate potential for open and fatal violence did exist, violence was rather the exception and not the norm.

The following three definitions of a revolution have been considered in order to coin the definition of a revolution employed by the present work: (1) "A revolution is a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies" (Samuel P. Huntington); (2) A revolution is: "A rapid and fundamental change of system" (Leslie Holmes); and (3) A revolution is: "The replacement of the elite and the introduction of a new political or economic order after (violent or nonviolent) protests by the population" (Karl-Dieter Opp).²⁸ From these, it has been devised the following working definition of a revolution which is utilized throughout the rest of the present work: *A revolution is a rapid and fundamental domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies, following violent or non-violent mass protests.*

The next step is to provide a theoretical model able to explain the demise of communist regimes in six countries with different cultural-historical and socio-economic backgrounds, and characterized by distinct political cultures. This work introduces the *1989 sequence of collapse of communist dictatorships in ECE*. In other words, it considers that the communist rule in the six countries under scrutiny collapsed during the year 1989 in the following order: Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Further explanation is nevertheless required with regard to the place occupied by Bulgaria within the 1989 sequence of collapse. One might ask why Bulgaria is placed after Czechoslovakia in the aforementioned sequence of collapse since, on 10 November 1989, the Secretary General of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov was forced to resign and was replaced by the sitting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Petar Mladenov. The present analysis considers that the political transformations in Bulgaria gained momentum from early December 1989 onwards, especially after the creation of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) on 7 December.²⁹

To paraphrase Garton Ash, the six communist dictatorships that collapsed throughout the year 1989 need qualifying as much as the revolutions that brought them down. Since variations among the Soviet bloc countries did exist, one has to specify what kind of "modern dictatorships" were the communist dictatorships in the six countries under discussion. The 1989 sequence of collapse, i.e. Poland – Hungary – East Germany – Czechoslovakia – Bulgaria – Romania, consisted in fact of the demise of three types of communist dictatorships: (1) "national-accommodative" (Poland and Hungary); "welfare" (East Germany and Czechoslovakia); and (3) modernizing-nationalizing (Bulgaria and Romania). The term "national-accommodative" communist dictatorship employed by this author for Poland and Hungary has been coined by Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski and Gábor Tóka who have distinguished between "bureaucratic-authoritarian," "national-accommodative" and "patrimonial" communist regimes.³⁰ One can easily observe that the initiation of the 1989 sequence of collapse originated in the camp of "national-accommodative" communist dictatorships, where the 1989 revolutions took the form of "negotiated revolutions" based on the roundtable principle. To characterize the communist dictatorships in East Germany and

²⁸ See Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 264; Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 131; and Karl-Dieter Opp, "Some Conditions for the Emergence of Spontaneous, Nonviolent Revolutions," in Opp, Voss and Gern, *Origins of a Spontaneous Revolution*, 225.

²⁹ Duncan M. Perry, "From Opposition to Government: Bulgaria's 'Union of Democratic Forces' and its Antecedents," in Wolfgang Höpken, ed., *Revolution auf Raten: Bulgariens Weg zur Demokratie* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1996), 34. See also R. J. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 212-13; and Ivan Ilchev, *The Rose of the Balkans: A Short History of Bulgaria*, transl. from Bulgarian by Bistra Roushkova (Sofia: Colibri, 1995), 402-403.

³⁰ Kitschelt et al., *Post-Communist Party Systems*, 39.

Czechoslovakia – although the term applies more to the Czech lands than to Slovakia, this author follows Konrad H. Jarausch who has coined the concept of “welfare dictatorship.” As Jarausch has aptly shown in his analysis of former GDR, such regimes were characterized by a fundamental contradiction between “care and coercion.”³¹ The demise of the “welfare dictatorships” in East Germany and Czechoslovakia occurred through non-negotiated non-violent revolutions, and was influenced by the “negotiated revolutions” in neighboring Poland and Hungary. As far as Romania and Bulgaria are concerned, it is this author’s opinion that the communist dictatorships established in those countries can be termed as *modernizing-nationalizing dictatorships*. The emphasis on the “dynamic political stance” in this respect is crucial: the communist regimes in both countries perceived their party-states in the making as not completely modern *and* national, and therefore devised policies aimed at spurring industrial development and creating ethnically homogenous “socialist” nations.³² Having defined the 1989 sequence of collapse of state socialism in ECE, let us turn now towards presenting a theoretical model aimed at providing a causal explanation for the inception, unfolding and outcome of the 1989 revolutions in ECE.

To explain the collapse of communism in ECE, this paper employs a model-building approach. The main assumption is that the 1989 revolutions were determined by a complicated aggregation of *structural, nation-specific* and *conjunctural* factors. These factors operated and interacted in various ways in each of the countries analyzed, but they were nevertheless present in each case. Such a model is able to accommodate issues of path-dependency, patterns of compliance and contestation under communist rule and questions of interdependence at both international and Soviet Bloc level. The particular way in which the above-mentioned factors aggregated determined eventually the nature of the revolution in each of the cases discussed, i.e. negotiated or non-negotiated, peaceful or violent, as well as the order in which the six communist dictatorships were overthrown. Such an analysis has been inspired by Ole Nørgaard and Steven L. Sampson who, in their 1984 study “Poland’s Crisis and East European Socialism,” have explained the birth of the Polish Solidarity as an outcome of social and cultural factors.³³ Let us examine the way Nørgaard and Sampson have defined the three categories of factors, i.e., “structural,” “conjunctural” and “specific” in their pioneering work.

Structural factors refer to “the relations between society’s economic and political organization on the one hand, and the expectations and demands of key social groups on the other. *Structural factors are relevant to all the socialist countries* [emphasis added].” As for the conjunctural factors, their examination aims at explaining: “Why the structural crisis appears at a certain point in time.” As the two authors point out, “conjunctural factors are neither intrinsically socialist nor particularly Polish in origin.” Finally, Nørgaard and Sampson introduce the nation-specific factors, whose role is “to explain why contradictions are expressed differently from one country to another.” They also note: “These *nation-specific factors* (not to be confused with nationalism) determine the precise nature of the social response to the structural and conjunctural factors [original emphasis].”³⁴

Structural factors are common to all societies in which “state socialism” came into being by the imposition of the Soviet model from “above and abroad,” and whose exit from communism occurred during the same year 1989. In the terms of the present analysis, two structural factors are of prime importance: (1.1) economic failure; and (1.2) ideological decay. *Economic failure* refers

³¹ Jarausch, “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” in idem, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience*, 59-60.

³² Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5, 63.

³³ Ole Nørgaard and Steven L. Sampson, “Poland’s Crisis and East European Socialism,” in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (November 1984), 773-801. See also Michael D. Kennedy, *Professionals, Power and Solidarity in Poland: A Critical Sociology of Soviet-Type Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 60-62.

³⁴ See Nørgaard and Sampson, “Poland’s Crisis,” 773-74.

primarily to the perceived failure of state socialism to offer a living standard similar to that of the more advanced Western, capitalistic societies, and not necessarily to the absolute failure of those regimes to achieve a certain level of economic development. Nevertheless, in the countries of “actually existing socialism” economic performance was an essential source of legitimacy for the regime. At the same time, the economies of the Sovietized countries in ECE were transformed in accordance with the Stalinist model of “command economy,” which meant that the party-state in the making was both proprietor and conductor of the economy.³⁵ The slogan “Heavy industry at all costs” epitomized the developmental pattern imposed by the communist parties in power through central planning.³⁶ However, the resources available did not permit a simultaneous accelerated growth of primary and secondary sectors. Since the decision regarding which sectors were to be further developed was primarily political, the central planners favored, especially until the death of Stalin in 1953, the “producer goods” sector. Therefore, the “consumer goods” sector was consistently neglected throughout the entire period of communist rule in favor of heavy industry. Thus, the policy of sustained investments in heavy industry resulted in increasing shortages of consumer goods that affected directly the population.³⁷ Thus, the constant deprivations to which consumers throughout ECE were subjected to – though to different degrees, depending on the epoch and country, contributed to the final demise of the communist regimes in ECE. As Aldcroft and Morewood have observed: “The consumer was asked to endure innumerable deprivations which would have been intolerable in the West and which ultimately sparked revolution in Eastern Europe.”³⁸

The way economic failure was perceived by the populations living in each of the six countries discussed deserves further examination. For instance, in the case of Romania, and to some extent in that of Poland, the economic situation led to increasing dissatisfaction with the regime by significant strata of the population. Communist Romania represents perhaps the most telling example of the economic failure of state socialism. A timid attempt to reform the command economy in that country was made in the late 1960s. Its main proponent, however, did not succeed in face of the supporters of a centrally planned economy of which the most prominent was the supreme leader of the party himself, and was marginalized beginning in 1968. Although the first signs of a deep economic crisis appeared in the mid-1970s, the party took the political decision to pursue the pattern of extensive development of steel and heavy industries. In the early 1980s, another political decision put a considerable strain on the already declining economy of the country: Ceaușescu decided to pay back Romania’s external debt, which in late 1981 rose to over \$ 10 billion. In order to achieve this goal, the regime took the measure of drastically reduce imports. Thus, beginning with 1981-1982 Romania entered a period of chronic shortages of foodstuffs and other basic things such soap, toothpaste and detergents. Thus, during the 1980s, that country witnessed a decline in the standard of living “unmatched since the famine of the postwar period,” as an informed observer of Romanian affairs put it.³⁹ As a consequence, in 1989 the situation in Romania was significantly different from that in the rest of the Sovietized Europe, with the possible exception of Albania: due to the miseries of everyday life, the potential for protest of a majority of the population was appreciable.

³⁵ Moshe Lewin, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates: From Bukharin to the Modern Reformers* (London: Pluto Press, 1975), 113-14.

³⁶ Derek H. Aldcroft and Steven Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe since 1918* (Aldershot, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1995), 110.

³⁷ George Kolankiewicz and Paul G. Lewis, *Poland: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1988), 102.

³⁸ Aldcroft and Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe*, 106.

³⁹ Michael Shafir, *Romania – Politics, Economics and Society: Political Stagnation and Simulated Change* (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1985), 117.

In the Polish case, the relationship between economic performance and the outbreak of social protest has been addressed by numerous authors. As Bartłomiej Kamiński has aptly shown, the Polish communist economy went through four major “investment cycles,” as follows: (1) 1949-1957; (2) 1958-1971; (3) 1972-1982; and (4) 1983-1988.⁴⁰ Each of these cycles ended up with a deep political crisis. The first three cycles concluded with the crises of 1956, 1970 and 1981, which were in turn followed by a “normalization” period that ensured the survival of the regime. All these crises led to a change at the top of the hierarchy of the PUWP. The fourth cycle, 1983-1988, ended up with a crisis that brought down the communist regime in Poland and initiated the 1989 “snowball effect,” that is, the chain reaction that led to the demise of communist regimes throughout ECE.

In other cases, such as that of communist Hungary, where the attempts at reforming the command economy bore some fruit during the 1970s, it was rather the relative dissatisfaction felt by major segments of the population that undermined the regime. In the late 1960s, Hungarian communists engaged in a systemic change of the command economy and thus in 1968 the Kádár regime introduced a set of economic reforms, known as the New Economic Mechanism (NEM). Economist János Kornai argues that the Hungarian reform, which consisted in the “radical abolition of short-term mandatory planning,” proved its viability in spite of a partially developed market mechanism.⁴¹ Although some analyses have showed that the NEM failed in terms of macroeconomic results, it succeeded in initiating a timid institutional devolution of the regime and developing an enterprise culture. People engaged in supplementary working hours in the second economy, in addition to the job they had in the first economy, in order to increase their income.⁴² Towards the late 1980s, the performance of the economy started to diminish. If one applies the theory of short-term setbacks to the Hungarian case, the situation in the late 1980s can be explained as follows: after the “golden period” of high consumption and rising expectations, the period of relative economic stagnation during the 1980s led to a rise of societal dissatisfaction with the regime.

In terms of absolute or relative dissatisfaction with the economic performance of the command economies in ECE, one should be reminded the words of sociologist Daniel Chirot: “No East European country, not even Romania, was an Ethiopia or a Burma, with famine and a reversion to primitive, local subsistence economies.”⁴³ As Chirot pointed out, Romania and to some extent Poland were experiencing economic difficulties, but they were still far from being in a situation that would allow a comparison with the troubled countries of the so-called Third World. In this respect, Chirot further argues: “Other economies – in Hungary, but even more so in Czechoslovakia and East Germany – were failures only by the standards of the most advanced capitalist economies. *On a world scale these were rich, well-developed economies, not poor ones* [emphasis added].⁴⁴ Thus, one should stress once again that in terms of economic development, the difference between the developed countries of the First World and the developing communist countries of the Second World, although appreciable, proved to be surmountable in the aftermath of 1989 as compared to the wide gap that separated the Second World from the underdeveloped countries of the Third World.

The present work is concerned with the 1989 collapse of communist rule in ECE, and thus the problem of real or perceived economic failure in each of the six cases should be discussed in the context of the strategies put forward by those regimes in order to achieve economic legitimacy.

⁴⁰ Kamiński, *The Collapse of State Socialism*, 120-21.

⁴¹ János Kornai, *Evolution of the Hungarian Economy, 1848-1998; Volume II: Paying the Bill for Goulash-Communism* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2000), 19.

⁴² Kornai, *Paying the Bill for Goulash-Communism*, 41-42.

⁴³ Daniel Chirot, “What Happened in Eastern Europe in 1989?” in idem, ed., *The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left: The Revolutions of 1989* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 4.

⁴⁴ Chirot, “What Happened in Eastern Europe in 1989?” 4.

Being imposed from without and thus having a fundamental legitimacy deficit, the issue of increasing prosperity and raising the living standards of the population as a means of achieving legitimacy became central for the power elites in Sovietized ECE. Thus, the analysis of the economic factors that contributed to the 1989 demise of the communist regimes examined concentrates on the economic policies adopted by those regimes and their efforts aimed at reconciling their political goals with the social and economic realities. Consequently, issues such as planning mechanisms, organization of production and labor, formation of prices, financial control, and the like are not the main focus of this work.⁴⁵

Ideological decay or the overall erosion of the revolutionary ideology refers to the fading away of the utopian goal of building a radically new, classless society.⁴⁶ As far as the present analysis is concerned, this is common for the six countries under discussion, where state socialism was fully institutionalized only through a “second revolution” or a “revolution from above.” The “revolutionary struggle” of the local communists did not encompass either a “first revolution” on the model of the Bolshevik Revolution, or a mixture of revolution and independence war on the model of Tito’s partisan war in Yugoslavia. Consequently, the communists in the six countries under scrutiny were confined to carry out solely a “revolution from above,” which represented the major guiding principle for the relationship between the communist parties in power and the respective societies in the aftermath of the communist takeovers. The concept of “revolution from above” is understood in the terms of Robert C. Tucker’s analysis of the “second” Soviet revolution of 1928-1941. As Tucker puts it: “The revolution from above was a state-initiated, state-directed, and state-enforced process State power was the driving force of economic, political, social, and cultural change that was revolutionary in rapidity of accomplishment, forcible methods, and transformative effect.”⁴⁷ A series of events that followed Nikita Khrushchev’s “secret speech” in the front of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, most prominently the Hungarian revolution of October-November 1956 indicated that ideology undeniably lost its strength in Sovietized Europe.

Ideological decay describes, to use Andrzej Walicki’s inspired term, the post-1956 situation in which communism gradually ceased to represent a “unifying Final Goal.”⁴⁸ Thus, it may be argued that ideology ceased to be a driving force in regime’s relationship with the Hungarian society in the aftermath of the 1956 revolution. The same happened in former Czechoslovakia after the suppression of the Prague Spring by the August 1968 Soviet-led invasion of the country by the Warsaw Treaty Organization troops. In other cases, anti-fascism or nationalism acted for a while in support of the respective regimes and thus alleviated the undermining effects of ideological decay. For instance, in the case of East Germany, anti-fascism provided a sort of ideological support for the regime. However, after the suppression of the June 1953 revolt it became quite clear that the bulk of the population did not pay much attention to the GDR propaganda machine that demonized the allegedly “imperialistic” Federal Republic of Germany. On the contrary, the increased migration to West Germany over the period 1953-1961 forced the regime in East Germany to erect the Berlin Wall in August 1961, which underlined the “moral, political, and economic” failure of state socialism in that country.⁴⁹ In the case of Romania, ideological decay was alleviated to some extent by the

⁴⁵ Włodzimierz Brus, *Histoire économique de l’Europe de l’Est, 1945-1985* (Economic history of Eastern Europe, 1945-1985) (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1986) orig. publ. 1981; and János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁴⁶ András Bozóki, “Introduction” to idem, ed., *The Roundtable Talks of 1989: The Genesis of Hungarian Democracy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, Budapest, 2002), xix.

⁴⁷ Robert C. Tucker, “Preface” to idem, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1990), xiv-xv.

⁴⁸ Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 517.

⁴⁹ Stefan Wolle, *DDR (GDR)* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Verlag, 2004), 46.

communist elite's post-1956 return to traditional values and gradual instrumentalization of nationalism. After 1968, under the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the communist regime in Romania engaged in a sustained policy of assimilating the ethnic minorities, of whom the first target was the Hungarian one. An outburst of ethnic nationalism also occurred in neighboring Bulgaria, where the communist regime under Todor Zhivkov took the decision to accelerate the forced assimilation of the ethnic Turks – a policy that is known as the “revival” or the “regenerative” process – in order to mitigate the popular discontent with regime's economic performance.⁵⁰

Conjunctural factors. Contingency also played a role in the unfolding of the 1989 events in ECE. Consequently, the present analysis stresses the role of conjunctural factors in the inception and unfolding of the revolutions of 1989. Conjunctural factors are of two kinds: (1) internal; and (2) external.⁵¹ With regard to the 1989 collapse of communist rule in ECE, one can mention the following internal conjunctural factors: natural catastrophes (earthquakes, floods, drought or unusually mild weather), coming of age of a new generation, etc. In the case of Romania, a major internal conjunctural factor was the coming of age of the 1967-1969 baby boom resulted from the policy of forced natality launched by Ceaușescu after his coming to power in 1965. As many participants to the 1989 events in Timișoara and Bucharest pointed out, the exceptionally mild weather for the month of December also played a role in the way the 1989 events unfolded in Romania.

External conjuncture had a direct impact on the breakdown of all the six communist regimes in ECE. International media, Radio Free Europe most prominently, contributed heavily to the initiation of the chain reaction throughout ECE. By broadcasting continuously the news about the initiation of the 1989 changes in Poland, these radio stations prepared the opposition groups and the populations in neighboring countries for a possible similar change. Three other external conjunctural factors have been invoked in relation to the 1989 revolutions: (1) the Vatican; (2) the Regan; and (3) the Gorbachev factors. For instance, the 1978 election of a Polish Pope had a direct influence on the development of dissident stances in Poland in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. This factor has to be considered especially when discussing the initiation of the 1989 revolutions in Poland. Similarly, one has to consider the project of the American President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) of establishing a high-tech spatial weapon system that weakened the Soviet Union both economically and militarily, and thus influenced the Soviet politics in ECE. Also, one cannot explain the chain reaction that took place in 1989 in ECE without considering interdependence and focusing on the “snowballing effect.” Of all these factors, the Gorbachev factor and the “snowballing effect” deserve further discussion.

Mikhail S. Gorbachev became secretary general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985. The launch of his domestic *perestroika* had an immense impact on the communist regimes in ECE. As Leszek Kołakowski notes: “Among the many factors, the personal contribution of Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev cannot be omitted, though it is evident that he both shaped events and was shaped by them.”⁵² Gorbachev's insistence on the need for “renewal” and “new thinking” revealed the crisis of the Soviet system. As Kołakowski further notes: “Still, by repeatedly insisting that fundamental though ill-defined changes were urgently needed, he revealed the empire's lack of self-confidence.”⁵³ The Soviet policy of non-intervention during the year 1989 eased the way towards non-violent revolutions in ECE, with the notable exception of Romania. As Archie Brown aptly puts it: “The key to change in Eastern Europe was Gorbachev's decision in principle to abandon Soviet foreign military interventions and his refusal to contemplate resort to them, even when the

⁵⁰ Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 204-205.

⁵¹ Nørgaard and Sampson, “Poland's Crisis,” 780.

⁵² See Leszek Kołakowski, “Amidst Moving Ruins,” in Tismăneanu, ed., *The Revolutions of 1989*, 56; orig. publ. 1992.

⁵³ Kołakowski, “Amidst Moving Ruins,” 56.

Soviet Union was faced with an utterly changed relationship with the area it had controlled since the end of the Second World War.”⁵⁴

After 1968, the relations between the USSR and the Sovietized countries of ECE stayed under the sign of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which asserted that the USSR had the right to intervene in any country in which the communist government was threatened. After Gorbachev’s coming to power, things changed fundamentally but the leaders of the Sovietized countries in ECE seemed not to understand that. As Aleksandr Yakovlev confessed in a book-length interview with Lilly Marcou: “The former leaders of the East European countries did not take seriously, did not want to believe what Mikhail Sergeyevich kept telling them: ‘From now on, the political choice in these countries belongs to their peoples, everything is going to be done in accordance with their options.’”⁵⁵ Thus, under Gorbachev, the Sinatra Doctrine replaced the Brezhnev Doctrine and this was made clear by the Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman, Gennady Gerasimov, on 25 October 1989. Gerasimov defined the so-called Sinatra Doctrine by stating that every country must decide for itself the path to be pursued and referring to Frank Sinatra’s song “I did it my way.”⁵⁶

The collapse of the communist regimes in ECE cannot be discussed apart from the events in neighboring countries. The “snowball” effect, namely the unfolding of events during the year 1989, had a decisive role in creating a special state of mind throughout the region, at both the level of the communist ruling elites and the level of the populations. It was, obviously, a regime that did not collapse because of the snowball effect, and this was that of communist Poland. In the case of Poland, the election of a Polish Pope in 1978 was a major conjunctural factor that contributed in the long run to the collapse of communism. The Polish Roundtable Agreements, concluded on 5 April 1989 initiated the “snowballing effect” which lasted until 22 December 1989 when the Romanian communism was brought down by a violent revolution. For reasons that are explained below, it was Hungary that followed suit. The “negotiated revolution” in Hungary was influenced by the Polish Roundtable Talks. As András Bozóki puts it: “The political use of the phrase ‘Roundtable’ entered the vocabulary of the Hungarian opposition after the Polish Roundtable talks.”⁵⁷ The Hungarian democratic opposition successfully applied the Polish model of Roundtable talks to their country and thus completed the first, “negotiated” phase of the 1989 revolutions. In the Romanian case, witness accounts show that the breakdown of communist regimes, from Poland and Hungary to the neighboring Bulgaria, created a special state of mind among Romania’s population. Furthermore, the true meaning of the 1989 events in ECE could not escape to those who served the regime, first and foremost to the secret police agencies. Due to the “snowballing effect,” a large number of the secret police commanders and party activists remained mostly passive during the revolutionary events of 1989.

Nation-specific factors. As shown above, the 1989 revolutions were non-violent (the Romanian exception notwithstanding), non-ideological and were not carried out in the name of a particular class. However, the particular aspects related to the inception, unfolding and outcome of those events need further explanation. For instance: Why it was exactly in Poland that the 1989 chain reaction was initiated? Why only Hungary emulated the Polish model of a “negotiated revolution”? Why it was only in Romania that the communist regime went down violently? In order to answer such questions one should identify a set of nation-specific factors that would enable us ascertain the intricate relationships between regime and society in ECE, focusing on patterns of compliance or conflict with authority. Thus, the present analysis considers that the 1989 sequence of

⁵⁴ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 249.

⁵⁵ Alexandre Yakovlev, *Ce que nous voulons faire de l’Union Soviétique: Entretien avec Lilly Marcou* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991).

⁵⁶ Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe’s Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 4.

⁵⁷ Bozóki, “Introduction” to idem, ed., *The Roundtable Talks of 1989*, xvii.

collapse came into being due to the particular way in which regime and society reacted, in each of the six countries under scrutiny, to the structural and conjunctural factors discussed above. Therefore, the place each of the six countries eventually occupied in this sequence was determined by the particular ways in which power elites and social actors responded to economic failure and ideological decay and to the external or internal conjuncture. The solutions for solving the crisis of state socialism conceived by power elites and social actors in each particular context also determined the occurrence of a negotiated, i.e., peaceful or of a non-negotiated, i.e., violent type of revolution.

The quest for specific patterns of interaction between regime and society brings us to the study of cultural values, attitudinal patterns and behavioral propensities. It may be argued that culture provides a framework through which incumbents – political leaders or power elites – tend to understand the claims and actions of their opponents and react to them, and vice versa. Thus, as Marc Howard Ross puts it: “Culture offers significant resources that leaders and groups use as instruments of organization and mobilization.”⁵⁸ This author employs the concept of *political culture* in order to analyze the specific relationships between political structures and cultures, as well as the particular patterns of interaction between regime and society for the six countries under scrutiny. The purpose of such an analysis is to explain the nature of change, i.e., violent or non-violent, as well as the reason why each country occupied its particular place in the aforementioned sequence of collapse, i.e., Poland-Hungary-East Germany-Czechoslovakia-Bulgaria-Romania. In their 1963 classic work, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba define the concept as follows: “The term ‘political culture’ thus refers to the specifically political orientations – attitudes towards the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system.... It is a set of orientations toward a special set of social objects and processes.”⁵⁹ Subsequent definitions did not depart much from the initial understanding of the concept. For instance, Almond and Bingham Powell Jr. proposed a brief definition that reads as follows: “A political culture is a particular distribution of political attitudes, values, feelings, information and skills. As people’s attitudes affect what they will do, a nation’s political culture affects the conduct of its citizens and leaders throughout the political system.”⁶⁰ Verba provided an insightful and easily remembered definition of political culture by stating that it explains how “people respond to what they perceive of politics and how they interpret what they see.”⁶¹

Numerous authors have emphasized the importance of political culture theory for explaining the intricate relationship between attitudes and behaviour under communist rule. Archie Brown aptly pointed out: “The peculiar relevance of the study of ‘political culture’ in relation to change and continuity in Communist states lies in the fact that the goals of total political, economic and cultural transformation have been pursued by ruling Communist Parties in societies with the most diverse historical and cultural traditions.”⁶² Archie Brown’s scholarship on political cultures in communist regimes deserves a particular attention. According to Brown, political culture is: “The subjective

⁵⁸ See Marc Howard Ross, “Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis,” in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 52, 60.

⁵⁹ Gabriel A. Almond and Sydney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989), 12.

⁶⁰ Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell Jr., *Comparative Politics Today: A World-View* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 39.

⁶¹ Sidney Verba, “Comparative Political Culture,” in Louis J. Cantori, ed., *Comparative Political Systems* (Boston: Holbrook Press, 1974), 227.

⁶² Archie Brown, “Introduction” to Archie Brown and Jack Gray, eds., *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 1.

perception of history and politics, the fundamental beliefs and values, the foci of identification and loyalty, and the political knowledge and expectations which are the product of the specific historical experience of nations and groups.”⁶³

As Jowitt perceptively observed, numerous analyses of communist regimes “tended to discount or neglect the role of culture, largely because the relationship between regime and society was viewed simply as a pattern of domination-subordination.”⁶⁴ The same author insists on the necessity to analyze “the visible and systematic impact society has on the character, quality, and style of political life” in order to explain the nature of communist political structures and cultures. According to Jowitt, political culture is: “The set of informal, adaptative postures – *behavioral and attitudinal* – that emerge in response to, and interact with, the set of formal definitions – ideological, policy and institutional – that characterize a given level of society [emphasis added].” By focusing on both attitudes and behavior, as Jowitt suggests, the present work discusses the patterns of conduct of power elites and social actors throughout the communist period, thus acknowledging that, in their quest for creating radically new polities on the Soviet model, the party-states in ECE engaged in a sustained effort of imposing from above new political values. The process of political socialization under the communist regimes displayed two contrasting facets. New, official and “sound,” values were inculcated during adolescence and adulthood through schooling and socialization within official organizations, as well as by the centrally controlled mass media. At the same time, old, traditional values proved to be more resilient than previously thought and were handed down to younger generations within the family environment and contributed to the development of oppositional stances towards the regime.

This paper draws on the three types of political culture defined by Jowitt: elite, regime and community political culture. “Elite political culture” is defined as: “A set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge as response to and consequence of a given elite’s identity-forming experiences.” “Regime political culture” is understood as: “A set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge in response to the institutional definition of social, economic, and political life.” Finally, “community political culture” is defined as: “A set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge in response to the historical relationships between regime and community.”⁶⁵ Of the three types of political culture discussed above, two – regime and community political cultures – are essential in explaining the collapse of communist rule in ECE. Instead of a classless society, in the Sovietized countries of ECE a dichotomous, adversarial picture of society gradually emerged. Those societies became increasingly polarized and divided into *us* (the population, including those members of the elite who turned against the regime) and *them* (the regime, i.e., the nomenklatura and the secret police, as well as those members of the elite – be it cultural, technical or military, who chose to remain faithful to it).

Two political (sub)cultures – regime and community – which became truly adversarial by the end of the 1980s, are crucial in explaining the 1989 phenomenon in ECE. One should examine, however, both beliefs and actions, and addresses both attitudinal *and* behavioral patterns that emerged during the communist period at the regime and community levels. The interplay of these attitudinal and behavioral patterns determined the specific nature of the 1989 revolutions in each of the six countries discussed. In the terms of the present analysis, the regime political culture is understood as the official political culture, i.e., the political culture of the respective communist regime (Polish, Hungarian, East German, Czechoslovak, Bulgarian or Romanian). As of community political culture, the most significant are its sub-cultures that are defined as the political cultures of resistance against the regime. Thus, the two nation-specific factors that determined the nature (violent or non-violent), as well as the outcome of the 1989 revolutions in ECE are: (1) *the political*

⁶³ Brown, “Introduction,” 16-18.

⁶⁴ Kenneth Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 51.

⁶⁵ Jowitt, *The Leninist Extinction*, 51-52 and 54-56.

culture of the respective communist regime; and (2) the political culture(s) of resistance against that regime.

On the Nature of the 1989 Revolutions

The nature of the 1989 revolutions in ECE, i.e., negotiated or non-negotiated, violent or non-violent, was primarily determined by two important aspects of regime and, respectively, community political cultures: (1) the monolithism of the power elite and the problem of its subordination to, or emancipation from, the Soviet Union; and (2) the existence of political alternatives to the ruling power within society. Where the power elite was compelled to offer a “tacit deal” to the society at large due to an intricate interplay between path dependence, agency and contingency, political bargaining became a major element of both regime and community political cultures. As already mentioned, the revolutionary changes of 1989 originated in the camp of “national-accommodative” communist dictatorships, i.e. in Poland and Hungary. Looking back at the moment of the communist takeovers, one can establish a relationship between the degree of destruction suffered by the countries under analysis during World War II and the level of violence applied by the Stalinist elite during the “revolution from above” carried out in the respective countries. If one looks at capital losses suffered by a series of countries in ECE during the war, relative to their national incomes in 1938, one finds the following figures: Poland – 350 percent; Yugoslavia – 274 percent; Hungary – 194 percent; Czechoslovakia – 115 percent; Bulgaria – 33 percent; and Romania – 29 percent.⁶⁶

Poland and Hungary, which initiated the 1989 sequence of collapse, were the countries that suffered the most, alongside former Yugoslavia, during World War II. In these two countries, the power elite proved to be less monolithic and splits at the top did take place. Thus, in Poland splits at the top of the Polish United Workers Party (PWUP) occurred in 1956, 1970 and 1981. In Hungary, a split at the top of Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party’s (HSWP) permitted the 1956 Revolution to unfold instead of being brutally repressed immediately. Furthermore, the division between “softliners” and “hardliners” within the power elite made possible the “negotiated revolutions” in Poland and Hungary. In 1989, the solution of opening the negotiations with the political opposition was perceived at the time by the moderates within the ruling communist elites as the most appropriate way of surviving politically into the new order. The initiation of the Roundtable Talks in Poland marked the “strategic compromise” that led to a negotiated transition in that country and influenced the course of events in Hungary.

In the former GDR, the task of economic recovery was not only huge due to the high level of war destruction, but was also complicated further because of the Soviet dismantling of production facilities. For its part, Czechoslovakia ranked only the fourth in terms of capital losses relative to its 1938 national income, as shown by the figures mentioned above. Therefore, when the communist takeovers occurred a significant discrepancy existed between the two countries in terms of initial economic conditions. In spite of such discrepancy, one can note a striking similarity between GDR and Czechoslovakia in terms of cohesion of the power elite and its subservience to the Soviet Union. In both countries, the ruling elites displayed a high degree of unity and when more or less significant splits at the top nevertheless occurred, emancipation from to the Soviet Union never became an issue. The Stalinist power elites in Bulgaria and Romania, which did not face the enormous task of postwar reconstruction, proceeded to their “revolutions from above” by making extensive use of random terror. However, the difference between the two communist dictatorships was that the Romanian communists gradually emancipated themselves from Moscow after 1956, while the Bulgarian communists did not. These two countries were the last in row to exit from communism during the revolutionary year 1989. Thus, one should note that in those countries where the power elites proved to be monolithic, either because of a higher degree of institutionalization of the ruling communist party (like in East Germany and Czechoslovakia) or due to a “patrimonial” type of state

⁶⁶ Quoted in Aldcroft and Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe*, 92.

socialism (Bulgaria and Romania) the regime change was non-negotiated and occurred only in the favorable context determined by the “negotiated revolutions” in Poland and Hungary. The non-negotiated revolutions in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria were also non-violent. It was only in Romania, where the communist power elite emancipated itself from the Soviet Union, that the repressive apparatus was given the order to fire at the anti-regime protesters and provoked a bloodbath in 1989.

Another major factor that determined the nature of regime change was the development of political alternatives to the communist power within the respective societies. Communist regimes in ECE did not collapse because of dissident actions or because of working-class protests. As Pollack and Wielgohs put it: “It is widely uncontroversial in the academic literature that dissidence, opposition, and even the mass protests in the fall of 1989 were not the decisive causes for the collapse of the system.”⁶⁷ As Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan aptly observed, in comparison with opposition parties in Spain, Uruguay and Chile, which articulated alternative political programs before the regime change, the opposition groups in Central Europe did not devise alternative political programs before 1989.⁶⁸ Dissident networks that developed in Poland and Hungary prior to the revolutionary year 1989 did contribute to the negotiated nature of the regime change because the structured opposition became a major political actor during the roundtable talks in both cases. In peasant societies that were practically modernized by the communist regimes, such as Romanian and Bulgaria, opposition to the communist rule developed slowly. Clientelism and cooptation functioned quite well until the economic crisis made large segments of the population think in terms of biological survival. Dissident networks did not appear and cross-class alliances did not emerge in such societies. As a consequence, communist successor parties emerged as the most powerful contenders for power in post-communism both in Bulgaria and Romania.

Two fundamental features of the regime political culture determined practically the nature of the 1989 revolution in each of the six countries under discussion: (1) the cohesion of the power elite; and (2) the degree of emancipation of the respective elite from the Soviet Union. The communist regimes that experienced early, though failed, attempts at emancipating themselves from Moscow by establishing a national “path to socialism” and were confronted with major mass protests from below, adopted a negotiated solution in 1989. Those communist regimes whose power elites proved to be monolithic, but did not emancipate themselves from Moscow, went through non-negotiated but non-violent revolutions in 1989. In the Bulgarian case, however, it was a palace coup that preceded the 1989 revolution. Where the power elite was monolithic, but emancipated itself from Moscow, and this happened only in the case of communist Romania, the revolution was not only non-negotiated, but also violent, since the regime felt confident enough as to order the repression apparatus to shoot to kill and had its orders obeyed in the first stage of the revolution.

To conclude, there were three configurations linking the monolithism of the power elite with the degree of structuring of societal opposition and the level of emancipation from Moscow that emerged in 1989 and determined the nature of the respective revolutions, as follows: (1) factionalism of the power elite that provoked major splits at the top of the communist hierarchy and a structured societal opposition, in the conditions of a failed emancipation from Moscow led to “negotiated revolutions” (Poland and Hungary); (2) monolithism of power elite and a less structured societal opposition, in the conditions of a lack of emancipation from Moscow led to non-negotiated non-violent revolutions, i.e. regime “implosion” or palace coup followed by unprecedented popular mobilization in support of the opposition (former GDR and Czechoslovakia; Bulgaria); and (3) monolithism of power elite and a less structured societal opposition, in the conditions of the

⁶⁷ Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs, “Introduction” to idem, eds., *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), xv.

⁶⁸ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 247.

emancipation of the power elite from Moscow led to a non-negotiated and violent revolution (Romania).