

Dissidents and the Dilemmas of Transformation in East Central Europe
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The theoretical conceptualizations of totalitarianism evolved in tandem with the history of totalitarian regimes. (Gleason 1995) Political theorists focused on different aspects of totalitarianism as definitive, for different pragmatic or analytic purposes. I am no different. For me here, a totalitarian state has only a single elite with no competition and this elite has total control over stratification, entrance to the elite. A society became post-totalitarian and within the scope of this book when the total hegemony of single elite over a single social hierarchy ended. By the end of totalitarianism, there was severe scarcity of alternative elites that could replace the single late totalitarian elite. If the elite- maintained monopoly over political power, even if it discarded the discredited totalitarian ideology and carried out a reshuffle at the top, late-totalitarianism persisted. If the *political* elite were replaced, society turned post-totalitarianism. Though post-totalitarian societies displayed new post-totalitarian political elites, especially in new democratically elected institutions, the new free media, and the employees of foreign companies and organizations, there was elite continuity in other hierarchies and institutions. This continuity is a major reason for grouping post-totalitarian states together for the purpose of social and political theoretical analysis.

Totalitarianism ended only when the late-totalitarian *political* elite were replaced, in 1989 in višegrad countries (Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary), the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and Slovenia. Late totalitarianism continued for a while longer in countries with elite continuity (with some reshuffling at the top), in the southern European post-Communist countries, in the Balkans, Georgia, and Ukraine. Despite geopolitical re-alliance, the opening of borders, and the privatization of parts of the economy by the late-totalitarian elite, these were still late-totalitarian societies. Totalitarianism in this sense, ended gradually in Southern Europe when factions within the elite created alliances with non-elite sections of society that were not part of the regime, as was *eventually* the case in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, and at least for a while in Ukraine. Russia presented for awhile a borderline case. The Putin Restoration marked the return of late-totalitarianism with a single externally unified elite in all political and economic institutions, and an attempt to generate and then control a single social hierarchy. Levitsky & Way (2010) characterized such states as “competitive authoritarian.” Putin preferred “managed democracy” and I like most “Potemkin democracy.” Irrespective of the label, these countries maintain the outer façade of a multi-party democracy, though in fact the elite in power eliminates alternative centers of political power and elites, controls all the mass media, maintains high correlation between political and economic status through control of resources and mobility, and uses state resources to affect election results through various types of fraud, media controls and harassment of opponents.

Like Garton-Ash (1999, 26-27), I find the distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism indispensable for understanding the differences between post-totalitarianism and post-authoritarianism. Normatively, I endorse Adam Michnik’s position: if forced to choose between General Jaruzelski and General Pinochet, I choose Marlene Dietrich. (Michnik 1998, 99) Michnik accentuated the absurd humor of the dilemma on several levels: it is absurd to talk of citizen’s choice between two types of regimes whose very non-democratic essence is in denying political choices. It is also absurd to offer a citizen a political menu with only two indigestible dishes to choose from. Michnik exposed these absurdities by undermining the

bivalent either/or framework and opting for an even more absurd third alternative. Still, in arguing that the distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism matters for understanding post-authoritarianism and post-totalitarianism, one is bound to raise the specters of the debates about U.S. foreign policy circa 1980, Kirkpatrick's (1982) advocacy of American support for third world authoritarian regimes as lesser evils than their totalitarian alternatives, as well as the contemporary debates about détente, *Ostpolitik*, and the Western response to the dissident movements in Communist Europe and the military coup in Poland. (Brier 2011) From the vantage point of hindsight it is possible to make new facile but determined judgments. It seems that both sides were partly right and partly wrong: Kirkpatrick was right about the significant differences between authoritarianism and totalitarianism and why the scope of authoritarian atrocities is narrower and less irreversible than those of totalitarian regimes. Kirkpatrick distinguished totalitarian regimes "by its rulers' determination to transform society, culture, and personality through the use of coercive state powers." (1982, 99) Since authoritarianism did not attempt to overhaul the culture, economy or social status quo, it had no significant ideology. It did not centralize the economy and it largely left civil society such as it was alone. Still Kirkpatrick did not consider that revolutionary totalitarianism had already mutated in Eastern Europe by 1980 to become late-totalitarianism, distinguishable by its mission of maintenance, of resistance to change, of freezing the consolidated social system that resulted from revolutionary transformation. The KGB has become a conservative rather than revolutionary social force. (Voslensky 1984, 282) Though the rhetoric of revolutionary transformation was retained as ritualistic ideological chatter, radical terror and transformation ended. The late-totalitarian regime ceased attempting to change human nature. Instead, it attempted to encourage egoism and manipulate opportunism.

Kirkpatrick's critics to the left shared her conflation of totalitarianism with late-totalitarianism, and then conflated the result further by adding authoritarianism, to construct *autocracy*, a conceptual amalgam of all non-democratic regimes that is too cumbersome to do much analytical or explanatory work. They failed to distinguish late-totalitarian regimes that exercised *extensive low intensity* oppression over the whole population from authoritarian regimes that exercised *narrow but intensive* oppression over a small, politically active, section of the population, while tolerating alternative non-political (e.g. economic or religious) elites.

Post-totalitarian societies shared the following properties:

- * Elite replacement in politics and the media. Non-political elite continuity.
- * End to single party rule, differentiation between political parties and the state.
- * The late-totalitarian elite was disinterested in power as an end by itself, rather than a mean for property rights and personal security.
- * The transformation of political power into economic wealth, the privatization of the state by the late-totalitarian elite.
- * Ineffective government control of the executive bureaucracy.
- * Feeble civil society.
- * High levels of corruption.
- * Weak rule of law.
- * Ironic detachment from any ideology as an effective mobilization tool.
- * Low levels of retribution and reparation; victims receive low compensation and perpetrators are rarely punished.
- * Members of the former secret police continue to be powerful and their status is a political issue.

By contrast, post-authoritarian societies display:

- Elite heterogeneity.
- The late-authoritarian elite maintained interest in political power as an end in itself.
- The economy was not controlled by the authoritarian elite, though it has had privileged access to state funds and subsidies.
- Continuous existence of independent civil society.
- Independent Judiciary.
- Ideologies continue to mobilize voters.
- Eventually victims are compensated and sometimes perpetrators persecuted even if it takes a generation.
- Continued special role and power for the military and military veterans whose status is a political issue.

I explain the end of totalitarianism and some of its enduring legacies in the post-totalitarian era as the adjustment of the rights of the late-totalitarian elite to its interests. The rights of the late-totalitarian elite were misaligned with their interests because they were inherited from a very different group of people, the revolutionary totalitarian elite. The late-totalitarian elite had many privileges in the form of negative liberties, but its members were dissatisfied with mere privileges. They did not want to be dominated by superiors who could arbitrarily deprive them of the privileges they were granted. They wanted rights, most notably property rights that they could bequeath to their families to form a class. Theoretically, my argument emphasizes the heuristic significance in the post-totalitarian context of the republican criticism of liberalism, the limited usefulness of negative liberties as a political category, as distinct from non-domination protected by rights. The late-totalitarian elite had many negative liberties. They wanted rights.

The active agents in the project of transmutation of negative liberties into rights were not the dissidents, and certainly not a non-existing civil society, but the late-totalitarian elite. The unintended consequences of this transmutation included democracy, some rights, and more negative liberties to the people. Ordinary people won the rights to exit the state, to elect their representatives, and to express themselves publicly. They acquired negative liberties to participate in the economy and to affect government policies. The old elite dominated the economy and government policies in continuity with late totalitarianism.

Totalitarianism was born in revolution, grew and was sustained by terror, matured into a bureaucracy, corrupted with age, and finally fell apart, scattering around its constituent parts. Yet, like the phoenix that rises from its ashes, the late-totalitarian elite were reborn as the post-totalitarian elite. The persistence of the late-totalitarian social stratification is crucial for understanding not just the legacies of totalitarianism in post-totalitarian societies, but also why totalitarianism imploded as it did. I argue that the end of totalitarianism was a manifestation of a long liberating process of adjustment of rights to interests undertaken by the late-totalitarian elite.

The revolutionary totalitarian avant-garde established itself as the only elite in society by eliminating all existing, potential, possible, imaginary, and phantasmal chimeric alternative elites. Without the elimination of alternative elites, there could not be *total* control of society by single, hierarchically united, elite. "Objective enemies" in Marxist jargon included any person of actual or potential distinction who was not part of the revolutionary elite, including imaginary and phantasmal members of elites like Bolshoi ballet ballerinas and Jewish doctors who were not threatening or political by any stretch of the imagination. The totalitarian revolutionary elite

eliminated roughly ten percent of the population, by killing, imprisoning, or exiling it. Higher rates of totalitarian mortality resulted from the death of the poorest and weakest members of society in hunger as a result of the expropriation of their means of subsistence in the collectivization of agriculture or from ethnic genocide, against the Ukrainians in the Soviet Union and the Jews in Germany. (Snyder 2010) *Totalitarian* elites eliminated almost anybody who could possibly replace them.

Schematically, the *revolutionary* totalitarian elite that became the only elite was divided into idealists and thugs. In the totalitarian revolution, the thugs had to gain control of the Ministry of the Interior and through it of the secret police, the ordinary police, and the party-civilian militia. The secret police then seized, consolidated, and protected power. After eliminating all alternative elites, the thugs eliminated the idealists because they were weaker, cognitively disoriented about the actual totalitarian reality they helped to create, and depended on the thugs for their power. Then, thugs fought among themselves to secure and protect power in the absence of a political mechanism that allowed regulated competition within the unified monolithic elite. The surviving totalitarian elite suffered from constant insecurity, purges, arrests, and revenge killings against their families as well as themselves. During the revolutionary stage, totalitarian regimes did not have stable elite; did not develop a *ruling class* and stable class structure, rather than temporary coalitions of thugs in power. The purges system kept bureaucrats young, without a seniority system, and insufficiently long in power to develop cliental relations between senior and junior bureaucrats. (Arendt 1973, 431)

At the end of the *revolutionary* stage, the end of the Stalinist purges in Eastern Europe, the surviving elite reached a rational tacit pact to lower the stakes, rein in the secret police and rule collectively. Between 1953 and 1956, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party subordinated the Secret Police by purging it; its head, Beria was killed; and a desk within the Central Committee was created to supervise the secret police. (Voslensky 1984, 86-88) The Party elite ruled the secret police by dividing the security services, charging them with controlling each other in the service of the nomenklatura. (Voslensky 1984, 107-108, 277) The secret police could not recruit informers from within the Communist Party without the approval of the higher echelons of the Party. (Stan 2009, 7) Since the source of control and power in totalitarian states was the network of secret informers, being unable to have clandestine informers in an organization meant its independence. The Communist Party was the only independent institution. The ensuing reductions in the levels of state terrorism against the population and the emergence of dissent were unintended and, from the elite's perspective insignificant, consequences of its own interest in reining in the secret police.

The termination of terror was the end of Arendt's radical evil, "unpunishable, unforgivable absolute evil which could no longer be understood and explained by the evil motives of self-interest, greed, covetousness, resentment, lust for power, and cowardice;... this newest species of criminals, is beyond the pale even of solidarity in human sinfulness." (Arendt 1973, 459) Shallow ordinary opportunistic evil based exactly on "self-interest, greed, covetousness, resentment, lust for power, and cowardice" replaced the radical variety. The single surviving totalitarian elite became then stable and secure enough to become a *ruling class*. Losers in power struggles within the elite were demoted, rarely even expelled from the elite, but they and their families were otherwise unharmed. To secure themselves from the bureaucrats below them, this new class had to choose docile unthreatening opportunistic bureaucrats as their deputies and eventual successors. This late-totalitarianism bureaucratic elite gradually replaced the professional revolutionaries, or as Hall (1995, 82) put it, *technocracy* replaced *ideocracy*. This marked the end of personal rule, of loyalty

to a leader and the cult of personality, and the emergence of a ruling class, bureaucrats who accumulated power not so much by the ruthless and arbitrary use of violence as through networking, lobbying, creating alliances, participating in illicit exchanges, conspiring, not standing out, and appearing loyal.

Agnes Heller put the difference between the revolutionary totalitarian and late-totalitarian elites in moral terms, as between evil people, who justified their behavior by immoral principles that they spread like a disease, and normal bad people, who did not espouse evil principles but exempted themselves from general moral principles. “In the original or initial state, evil has a high density and visibility; it is demonic.... But in the continuous phase of totalitarianism... the density and visibility of evil diminish, and its epidemic effect dies away.... Since the demon is always associated with (totalitarian) power, the slackening of the regime in the continuous phase necessarily has a therapeutic effect.” (Heller 1993, 157) Heller used theological and medical metaphors to explain the moral difference between the totalitarian revolutionaries armed with terror and ideology and the grey late-totalitarian elite armed just with monopoly control over the resources of the totalitarian state. Heller was right to note the radical difference between what she called the *original* and *continuous* stages of totalitarianism. Bureaucratically, they overlapped. While bureaucrats gradually replaced the surviving old revolutionaries, the later continued to threaten and dominate them. The bureaucrats began a silent struggle for liberation against the old revolutionaries and the institutional norms they constructed.

This new elite, like any upper class that wishes to maintain itself, needed rights to secure its own future and pass on what it accumulated to its families. This had been predicted well in advance of the success of totalitarianism by Michels (1962, 348) who foresaw the emergence of a bureaucratic hierarchy under socialism, and its transformation into a ruling class when parents would pass on their status to the next generation. Michels and likeminded thinkers, including most tragically Czechoslovak president Beneš, expected this process to quickly follow the revolution. But the first revolutionary totalitarian generation was too fanatic, too psychopathic, and too briefly in power before meeting a violent end to form a class. Class emerged only with the second and third post-revolutionary generations as a result of the selection of bureaucratic successors.

It may seem strange to group the late-totalitarian bureaucratic elite with the English commonwealthmen of the seventeenth century and the American founders of the late eighteenth century as republicans seeking liberty from domination and protection in the form of rights. (Pettit 1999, 17-79; Skinner 2006) But we should bear in mind that they shared a politically potent interest in personal liberty protected by rights. The English and American republicans that Pettit and Skinner idealized were well-off and privileged, and some were slave holders. Exactly because they had many privileges and were able to oppress others, they felt entitled to rights and could conceive of obtaining them, something that people lower down in the social hierarchy could not imagine, let alone organize to obtain. As much as the English gentry resented that its privileges were dependent on the arbitrary sufferance of the king and could be rescinded at any moment, as much as the American colonists felt that even a moderate tax was domination by arbitrary power, the “gentrified” late-totalitarian elite dreaded that all its material gains could be lost at any moment following a change in the constellation of power inside the Communist Party. During the last twenty years, of Communism nobody was prosecuted for corruption and embezzlement (in stark contrast to contemporary China). The elite had the negative liberties of no interference to derive wealth and status from their bureaucratic positions. But they had no guarantee that in some future their privileges will not be taken away. Therefore,

just like the gentry of other countries in other historical periods, this elite set to guarantee the status of its families and their privileges by liberating themselves from the centralized power that dominated them.

The precise identity of the late-totalitarian elite was kept intentionally vague; it was not in its interest to stand out. (Voslensky 1984, 70) Within the exclusive and unified hierarchical structure that is the hallmark of totalitarianism, the exact distribution of power was informal and opaque. Since totalitarian states did not follow laws, rules, or regulations, formal role within the hierarchy did not necessarily correspond with actual status and power. It was easier to identify who was *not* a member of the totalitarian elite. Reflecting the amorphous nature of power in totalitarian systems, Rita Klimova, the English language spokesperson of the Czech Civic Forum, introduced the King James Bible expression “the powers that be.” (Garton-Ash 1990, 92) “They were identified by their clothes, their black curtained cars, their special hospitals and shops, their language and their behavior.” This led to the slogan “we are not like them!” (Garton-Ash 1990, 146-147) Kotkin (2009) introduced appropriately the term *uncivil society* as the opposite of civil society.

Michnik compared in 1988 the nomenklatura to the white population in South Africa’s apartheid regime, in charge of systemically discriminating against the majority of the population. “[T]he unchecked power of this ruling *nomenklatura* is the source of the... irrationality and crisis of the Communist economy. Our whole economy is subject to stiff and arbitrary planning measures introduced and guided by this small ruling group, which is not subject to legal constraints, market forces, or democratic procedure.... The *nomenklatura* will not relinquish their grip on the economy because this is the source of power.” (Michnik 1998, 99) Michnik was right, though he did not foresee that the nomenklatura could enhance its grip on the economy through privatization.

The late-totalitarian elite inherited from its revolutionary predecessors extensive rights to control aspects of the lives of their subjects, to jail them, decide on their employment and the level of education they and their children could enjoy, where they could live and how big would be their home, what level of medical treatment they could receive, whether they be given an exit visa to emigrate or visit another country and so on. The extensive rights of the elite against their subjects, their domination of their society, were of little interest to people who perceived their interests as property and class, enrichment and passing on their wealth and status to their families. The late-totalitarian elite also inherited from the revolutionary elite some duties against its interests. Ritualistic duties such as marching on May Day and listening to long, jargon filled and meaningless ideological speeches must have been very exciting for the revolutionaries; but for the second-generation bureaucrats they represented a meaningless waste of time. The duty to hide from each other their wealth, avoid engaging in conspicuous consumption and the restrictions on passing on hidden wealth to their descendants were painful. Above all, though nobody was prosecuted for theft, for exercising their naked liberties in the last couple of decades of Communism, there was no guarantee that an arbitrary change in the upper echelons of the party may not bring the party to an end.

Totalitarianism may be explained as the expansion of the state to overtake all the social space that civil society occupied previously between the state and the family. The family asserted itself as the basic social unit in late-totalitarianism, and as Ivo Možný (2009) argued, expanded to colonize the state, to use naked liberties to appropriate resources from it. But naked liberties are inherently insecure. The second-generation bureaucratic totalitarian elite initiated then a process of adjustment of rights to interests. On the one hand, they gradually ceased to

exercise their rights to control the minute aspects of their subjects' lives, granted them negative liberties. On the other hand, they attempted to gain for themselves property rights and release themselves from the ritualistic duties of Communist ideology. *Since members of the elite were in charge of enforcing their duties on each other, since they dominated each other, they could spontaneously relax their mutual controls through neglect and liberate themselves of themselves, first expand their naked liberties, and then turn them into rights.* When this process advanced sufficiently, it brought down the state and ended totalitarianism.¹ The stealing of the state was spontaneous, first comes first served, transmutation of naked liberties into property rights.

Throughout the eighties, Soviet Bloc elites acquired naked liberties and began participating in the second economy, a process that would lead eventually to spontaneous privatization. In Poland "In the 1980s, the Party introduced pseudo-market reforms that enabled a formal legitimization of the *nomenklatura*'s informal property rights of the earlier period. The new pro-entrepreneurial, pro-market rhetoric facilitated a conversion of the long-standing *nomenklatura* practices of illegal appropriation of state resources, corruption and organized crime into officially hailed schemes of privatization that turned the party apparatchiks into entrepreneurchiks." (Łoś & Zybortowicz 2000, 73) During the last year of Communism, the Polish government actively created opportunities for its elite to move to the private sector using their social and cultural capital to acquire rights proper. (Łoś & Zybortowicz 2000, 107-108) Likewise, in the Soviet Union, the 1987 Law on State Enterprises relaxed central control over managers and initiated in earnest the process of spontaneous privatization. "Once it became clear that the ministerial supervisors were unable (or unwilling, given then rent-seeking potential) to stop enterprise managers from

¹ Solnick made a similar claim in arguing that under late Communism, "individual bureaucrats were primarily self-interested and highly opportunistic in pursuit of that self-interest. Their opportunism was chiefly limited by the authority of their bureaucratic supervisors, whose property rights over organizational assets were clear. When either authority relations or property rights eroded, institutional collapse was unleashed." (Solnick 1999, 5) I agree with Solnick, except for his use of "property rights," by which he (Solnick 1999, 30) meant loosely "control," or naked liberty. It was very rare for anybody in the Communist hierarchy, even on its highest echelons, to have property rights--they could not sell their assets, take a loan against them, or bequest them to their children. Usually, they had naked liberties, the freedom to use and exploit and prevent others below them in the hierarchy from having these naked liberties. Solnick attempted to apply Neoinstitutional theories and ascribe the collapse of Communism to the relationship between principals with property rights and their agents. However, the concept of property rights is inapplicable to centrally planned economic systems. Solnick was aware of this conceptual problem and so slid from talking of ownership to authority relations and from property to control: "Top Party leaders could delegate authority for setting planning targets or approving personnel appointments to subordinate organizational levels because their ultimate authority—their ultimate "ownership" of all political and economic resources—remained unchallenged. In the absence of clear legal or procedural norms for third-party resolution of property rights conflicts (and the Soviet system clearly lacked these), the principle of ownership could only be demonstrated by the fact of control. Property rights were rudimentarily defined by the hierarchical organizational structure, rather than the reverse." (Solnick 1999, 30)

A similar conceptual problem is in arguing that in Poland "[i]n the 1970s, managing the country became for the Party elite synonymous with owning it, that is, having unhampered use of its wealth and institutions." (Łoś & Zybortowicz 2000, 73) This quotation mixes naked liberties, "having unhampered use of its wealth and institutions" with property rights proper.

claiming de facto ownership rights over assets the pace of spontaneous privatization accelerated. New “commercial banks” (themselves the result of spontaneous privatization within state banks) became active financiers of managerial buyouts. Industrial ministries consequently disintegrated *well before* the 1992 initiation of a formal privatization program in Russia.” (Solnick 1999, 229) “[T]he main reasons why the late communism’s elite, or its more dynamic networks, relinquished their political monopoly without resistance were... their conversion into capitalists, which suited their long term interests better than did the economically bankrupt and internationally shunned communist system.” (Łoś & Zybertowicz 2000, 107) In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe the adjustment of rights to interests was spontaneous; it did not follow deliberation or a collective decision of the elite to adapt its rights to its interests. The adjustment of rights to interests just happened as the aggregate of individual spontaneous decisions and actions.

Following 1989, late totalitarian elites gave up political rights that were not in their direct interest, but gained economic rights, both by spontaneously appropriating the properties they had managed prior to the end of totalitarianism, and by separating assets from liabilities, rights from duties, possessing the first and transferring the second to the state. “Private ownership” was continuous with Communist managerial practices whereby managers were “insured” against risk by the state via budget shortfalls that were covered by the state. (Solnick 1999, 31) The opening of the borders and the creation of modern financial institutions in post-totalitarian states allowed the elite to further transmute naked liberties into property rights by moving liquid assets they spontaneously privatized to foreign bank accounts. Money in the bank in Moscow or Kiev was a naked liberty, one could enjoy it while one was spending it but there were no duty holders like the state or the legal system to create a protective cordon to turn the liberty into a right. Once liquid assets were transferred to banks in the U.K., or Cyprus (so they thought...), or Switzerland, the naked liberties became ordinary property rights, protected by duty holders in the governments and legal systems of those countries. As Solnick (1999) explained, the less “*specific*,” was the asset, the more uses it could have, the easier it was to appropriate it. Liquid assets are the least specific. Some bureaucratic rents were very specific, for example, selling licenses to businesses or draft deferments to the families of conscripted soldiers. Corrupt bureaucrats could not move such rent generating “assets” elsewhere. The more tied wealth was to the soil in natural resources, the more specific it was, and the more was it in the elite’s interest to cling to political power, directly or indirectly, which partly explains the interest of the Russian elite in politics, especially following the meteoric rise in commodity prices.

Post-totalitarian popular liberty combined genuine non-domination by the former elite with negative liberties. New genuine liberty included the new right to travel and its most potent version, the right to exit and emigrate. (Hirschman 1970) The people gained the right to elect their political representatives and express themselves in speech and to publish, if they were so inclined.

But the democratic electorate did not gain the right to determine via democratic elections the distribution of property rights and state granted privileges that benefited the late-totalitarian elite. Elections did not decided on policies that were agreed upon in backroom deals between special interests, bureaucrats and politicians, irrespective of who wins the elections. In some cases, when there were competing elites, the elections decided which mafia will have the opportunity to drain the state this time around. In some countries people who were not loyal to the ruling party had no right to own, manage, or express themselves in the mass media. The monopoly over information in totalitarian societies and the absence of exposure to alternative perspectives and views left citizens, especially those with lower levels of literacy and education, dwellers in the countryside who did not travel much beyond their region, and older voters, highly exposed to

manipulation by the electronic media, especially television. Therefore, political elites have been interested in control of the electronic mass media for manipulating elections. (Gallagher 2005, 89-90) They have been indifferent to much of the printed media that is read mostly by urban intellectuals, who would not vote for them anyhow. Whomever controls television controls Russian politics. (Hoffman 2003, 475) Garton-Ash, analyzing the first six years of populist authoritarianism in Slovakia, suggested such regimes have three “pillars,” television for the people, the secret police to handle political opponents, and “privatization,” the misappropriation of state properties by regime members and cronies. (Garton-Ash 1999, 304-305) The absence of these rights is consistent with having negative liberties to engage in business, own properties, and having freedom of expression.

The political and geopolitical results of 1989-1991 were the *unintended* consequences of the adjustment of the rights of the nomenklatura to its interests. By “unintended” I do not mean unforeseen or unpredictable, but uncared for and indifferent to. Private nomenklatura vices generated public democratic virtues. A less positive unintended result of this late-totalitarian elite adjustment of rights to interests and granting of negative liberties for the people has been popular cynicism towards democracy. Since politicians and governments seemed unable to control the elite, and even worse, sometimes were incorporated by it, some ordinary people became disillusioned with democratic politics. (Rupnik 2007) Disillusionment with democratic political elites led economically desperate voters initially to return Communist elites to political power through democratic elections. The “new new political class” was made of “people slightly lower down the Communist hierarchy who very rapidly adapt to the rather different techniques of acquiring and exercising power in a modern television democracy. You may not be able to teach an old dog new tricks, but the young dogs learn them in no time. After all, they joined the party in the 1970s not because they believed in communism but because they were interested in making a career and in the real politics of power.” (Garton-Ash 1999, 169) The nomenklatura capitalists financed the old-new Communist parties and so ensured that the state continued to subsidize and protect them.

The end of totalitarianism was the end of monolithic social hierarchy dominated by single externally united elite. Initially, mostly organized dissidents replaced the old elite in government and parts of the media. But beyond politics and the media, the late-totalitarian elite remained in place, in the economy, the state bureaucracy, the security services, the legal system, and the education system, merely by default, because after totalitarianism there were no alternative national elites to replace them. The distinctly post-totalitarian scarcity of competing elites and the largely successful adjustment of the political rights of the late-totalitarian elite to its economic interests led to elite continuity after the end of totalitarianism. Beyme (1996, 4) thought that the absence of alternative elites excludes the changes that took place in 1989-1991 from being revolutionary. (cf. Fairbanks 2007) If there was no dissident organization, late-totalitarianism persisted, albeit with open borders. For example, Slovakia and the Czech Republic had the same Communist regime. But though there were about 2000 Czech dissidents, mostly in Prague, there were only a handful of Slovak dissidents. Consequently, democracy arrived in Slovakia a decade later, with the fall of Mečiar’s populist authoritarianism. (Garton Ash 1999, 306)

The dissidents were very good at critically analyzing the totalitarian regime and at debunking its ideology. But the majority of the population had limited access to Radio Free Europe and even less so to the samizdat publications where these ideas were articulated. Most people heard about the dissidents from official vilification campaigns in the state mass media that unintentionally granted them recognition as an official opposition. When the circumstances

changed, they turned to them for leadership. When the nomenklatura vacated the political realm to migrate to the upper echelons of the economy, it created a power vacuum. What filled in that vacuum depended on what was available at the time of transition. Then, the dissidents as alternative elite became vital. Where there was a dissident elite, it could move in to fill in the power vacuum and kick start a process of political and social democratization. Theoretically, the political, post-totalitarian, significance of the dissidents as the alternative elite fits nicely with good old fashioned democratic theory (Dahl 1963, 1972): Modern representative democracy is a polyarchy where alternative elites jostle for power in elections. When there are alternative elites, there is democracy, where there is only single elite, there is trouble. Where the dissident elite was missing, a faction within the old regime, less prominent or less high up on the hierarchy moved in to fill in the power vacuum and delayed and obstructed democratization. The elite could afford then the luxury of infighting over the spoils of the command economy. Where there was organized alternative elite, however small, the late-totalitarian elite remained cohesive and attempted to incorporate the new political class through sharing some of its assets, consumer goods and connections. (Łoś & Zybertowicz 2000, 120-121; Tucker 2000, 209-241) Civil society remained weak and mostly passive either way.

The dismal record of twentieth century European intellectuals, the abandonment of the truth and morality dissident project, led to questioning the traditional Platonic concept of intellectual responsibility that regards philosophers as having special knowledge of socially useful truth, assuming that doing good requires knowledge of the truth. (Rockmore 1993) In the absence of intellectuals who speak for life in truth and for morality, the void in the public sphere was filled in by technocratic experts and managers whose expertise was amoral and was concerned with truth only to the extent that it was pragmatically useful as a technical mean to narrow ends, most notably economic growth, efficiency, and government revenues. *Technocratic totalitarian Managerialism*, the belief that an unelected, uncontrolled, managerial class knows the best interests of the people and how to achieve them, and should be trusted to exert itself on their behalf, is the ideology of this new class of “experts.” In the absence of a class of public intellectuals to check and balance the technocrats in the name of truth and morality, the result is creeping totalitarianism as the technocratic elite that sleep walked into the crisis of 2007/8 expands the realm of the state ever deeper into civil society territory under the pretense of improving the economy.

Despite the failure of the technocratic elites to foresee, preempt, prevent, and understand the economic crisis of 2008, they used it as an excuse to expand the state and its control over civil society. The failure of the European technocratic elites to resolve the deep economic has led to a loss of trust, not just in the liberal institutions of state, but also in the liberal constitution and the system of checks and balances it is founded on. As in the period following the First World War and even more so following the recession of the 1930ies, anti-liberal xenophobic parties gain support across Europe, from traditional democracies like France to post-authoritarian countries like Greece and even attained power in post-totalitarian Hungary.

The post-totalitarian illiberal state was founded in Russia long before the global economic crisis of 2008, following its economic meltdown in the late nineties. Putin was the first to apply the political formula of control over the mass-media, pseudo-democratic elections when the ruling party chooses the “opposition” parties, gradual elimination of civil society, concentration of power in the state to the exclusion of the judiciary, the parliament, the central bank, and the media, and of course massive corruption to keep the system cohesive and moving.

In post-totalitarian societies where illiberalism emerged after the economic recession of

2008, most notably in Hungary, it reacted not just to the global recession but also to the failure of liberal constitutions to take root in post-totalitarian Europe and the consequent failures of democracy. In other words, in post-totalitarian Europe, institutional illiberalism caused political illiberalism and deepening of institutional illiberalism. The global economic recession that started in 2007/8 has not been just painful because it caused economic hardship, unemployment and fall in the standard of living, as elsewhere. In post-Communist countries it came after a long and painful economic restructuring and recession that resulted from the rationalization of markets, shifting of export markets westward, and the corruption that often accompanied the process of privatization, the theft of parts of the economy by the late-totalitarian elite, and the further subsidies and government contracts this group and newer economic-political informal associations of well-connected players have been receiving from the state. Post-Communist countries received little breathing space between the end of the local post-Communist recession and the beginning of the global “made in the USA” recession. The difference was that the post-Communist recession had a meaning whereas the global recession is, from a post-Communist perspective, absurd; America caught developed economic flu and Europe contracted pneumonia. The post-Communist economic pain had a purpose and was presented by the reformers as a transition to a more prosperous kind of economy, “like in Germany.” There was a clear villain who was blamed for the pain, the long Soviet occupation and the local oppressive Communist regimes. The politicians’ promises of a better tomorrow seemed credible to some if not many, and tangible because of the beaconing prosperity in proximate Western Central Europe, Germany and Austria. The sacrifice appeared meaningful. The sacrifice also seemed to result from a policy choice. The economic restructuring of the nineties could be told as a narrative that adapted Judeo-Christian eschatology to describe economic history: exile and occupation, liberation and sacrifice, redemption and the kingdom of endless consumer prosperity.

In the first years of the 21st century, most post-totalitarian countries enjoyed vigorous economic growth because the bitter economic medicine of restructuring worked despite the corruption that reduced but did not eliminate growth. Growing liberalized economic relations within the European Union following the accession of post-Communist states and financial support, integration grants, from the wealthier Europeans helped as well. Russia grew rapidly in the twenty first century for a different reason, soaring energy prices. (Orenstein 2009) Then, as the title of an anthology put it “*First the Transition, Then the Crash.*” (Dale 2011) Only that this time, the recession had no meaning, higher purpose, or an eschatology. The pain has just been pain, not a sacrifice for a higher purpose, and therefore has been felt more acutely. The villains this time were anonymous, hardly understood, risk managers, corporate leaders, policy makers, regulators, and poor people who assumed unreasonable levels of risk and debt in sub-prime mortgages, half the world away, mostly in the United States. Rather than the radical evil of totalitarianism, this recession resulted from technocratic incompetence and greed. The meaninglessness of this recession spawned conspiracy theories exactly because they gave some meaning to the pain. Within Europe, the absurdity was exacerbated by the prospect of post - totalitarian states participating in bailing out wealthier post-authoritarian states that did not undertake the kind of painful restructuring post-Communist countries had to undergo during the nineties but instead took loans to pay for a standard of living they could ill-afford. The poorest, post-totalitarian, Europeans joined Europe to become prosperous and receive subsidies. Instead, they were hit by a global recession and were asked to pay, albeit smaller amounts than the wealthier Europeans, to bail out profligate wealthier and luckier post-authoritarian states. Similarly, post-Communist countries joined the NATO alliance to receive protection from more

powerful nations against Russia. But instead they were asked to join Western efforts to help Ukraine and isolate Russia. Countries like Hungary and the Czech Republic have no national specific interests in Ukraine, they are still afraid of provoking Russia which invaded both countries, and Russian petrodollars influenced both economies and individual politicians, especially in an economic environment where Russia kept growing thanks to energy exports while Western Europe stagnated. Central European governments reacted then to the Ukrainian crises not unlike Western Europeans reacted to the German threats to Central Europe in the late thirties or to the Russian invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, according to their short-term narrow perception of their interests.

The helplessness of democratically elected officials to change the course of their globally exposed economies (with the exception of Poland that was the only European country not to undergo a recession after 2008) weakened trust in elected politicians after a generation of corrupt politicians of all parties undermined public trust in the democratic process that elected such officials. As long as people were hopeful about the economy, whether it was shrinking due to restructuring or growing, they were tolerant of traditional corruption. When the pie began to shrink for no apparent good reason and with no hope for future growth, this tolerance declined, and various demagogues and crooks could enter politics with a single promise, to fight corruption. Only that the apparent failure of democracy was not a failure of democracy, but of an illiberalism that was brought about by failures in the implementation of liberalism, failures to found the rule of law enforced by independent, competent, strong, and honest institutions, first and foremost the police and the judiciary. Tragically, the proposed solution for this original sin of illiberalism, is more illiberalism. The new populist parties and especially Hungary's Prime-Minister, Viktor Orban, do not have a plan or even an ideological orientation for a plan. They want to achieve a strong government in a weak state by weakening and reducing even further the independence of the already weak institutions that should check and balance their powers, the police, the judiciary, the Central Bank, and the media. This will beget only more corruption and privatization of the state itself. The state will become owned by an association of interests bent on extracting resources from it without providing services to citizens. Putin and Orban attempt to weaken an already weak civil society even further by breaking and disbanding non-governmental organizations. (Müller 2014; Krastev 2014) Control of the electronic mass media is essential for them. Control of the printed media is preferable. Both can be achieved through and by oligarchs who purchase them for political reasons. (Šimečka 2014)

The original sin of the transition from totalitarianism was the failure to construct liberal institutions. The small illiberalism at the very beginning, the scarcity of justice that has not been remedied, led through corrupt political democracy to the larger populist illiberalism that emerged following the economic recession. The scarcity of justice that was inevitable after totalitarianism has not been remedied. There are more lawyers and a better educated population. But the liberal institutions of the rule of law, the judiciary and the police have not been reconstructed as competent, loyal to liberal-democracy, strong and independent, so politicians, bureaucrats at the highest echelons of the civil service, and their private business partners would no-longer be above the law. Undoubtedly, the politicians wanted it so; they still do, and the populist illiberal politicians wish to weaken the rule of law even further.

Against this background, the contemporary significance of dissent becomes obvious. Instead of opportunistic intellectuals, post-totalitarian countries and if you may excuse rhetorical flourish, humanity, needs dissidents who can live in truth, tell truth to power, protest political corruption and other forms of unethical behavior, and serve as a moral compass and conscience

for society, until better institutions emerge. Truth, responsibility and democracy should offer an alternative to populism, illiberalism, totalitarian managerialism, social engineering, and kitsch.

Dissidents were vital in mitigating the legacies of totalitarianism. Post-totalitarianism was the adjustment of the rights of the late-totalitarian elite to its interests. Democratization depended on the presence of alternative dissident elite that could take over the state from the late-totalitarian elite. In the post-totalitarian social environment where justice was scarce and consequently rough and of limited scope, and where institutional designs could not transmute personal vices into public virtues in the absence of the rule of law, personal integrity and morality, the presence of people in institutions who were not corruptible was priceless.

Totalitarianism is not dead, it merely disintegrated. Its pieces are spread all over and they can be put back together again. Totalitarianism has already made a partial return, obvious one in Putin's secret police restoration in Russia and less obviously in the incremental intrusion of the state into social realms like academia, the media, the judiciary, and the central bank, where it has no place in a liberal democracy. To paraphrase Heidegger, only dissidents can save us now. This will be the one truly positive legacy of totalitarianism (maybe together with public transportation). Dissidents who live in truth and believe in personal integrity and decency irrespective of the cost, are needed now more than ever. If the managerial state continues its steady march towards ever increasing concentration of power, the abolishing of independent institutions, and hierarchical unification of social elites, the dissidents should return to revive the tradition that saved civilization from totalitarianism and maintained the tradition of high culture against kitsch, until better times arrive.

If there is one thing we can learn from the recent crisis of 2008 it is that even proper liberal democracies with competent, independent, and strong institutions and checks and balanced can fail. Financial regulation drew the best and brightest minds, not just the obvious fools and crooks who designed education systems to have an unaccountable managerial class in charge of meeting graduation targets and linked teacher evaluations to their evaluations of their students. Liberal institutional designs fail, degenerate, and become corrupted by power hungry and greedy elites who find ways to outwit the intentions of the designers, or take advantages of new circumstances, unforeseen by the designers, or worst of all, find ways to control or take over the very institutions designed to regulate them and then redesign the institutions and their regulations to fit their interests. When institutions fail, as eventually they all inevitably do, the Republican citizen, the dissident, the kind of ordinary citizen who cannot be pragmatic and adapt to new illiberal institutional arrangement, the one who cannot be corrupted, the "beautiful soul" of Eyal Press' (2012) excellent volume, or the decent bureaucrat of Coetzee's (2004) *Waiting for the Barbarians* must be there to resist if not stop the catastrophe and set a personal example for others to follow, at least until a better institutional design is put in place and the managerial elite is overthrown or constrained by institutional designs to do less harm. This was the service the dissidents rendered to their societies. "Truth and love will overcome lies and hate," chanted the demonstrators in 1989. Non-totalitarian societies need such dissidents, truth and love, now more than ever.