

## **The Collapse of the Communist Totalitarian Power and its Outcomes : Nationalism and New Totalitarianism**

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### **Rezime**

#### **Kolaps totalitarne moći u zemljama "realnog socijalizma" i posledice: nacionalizam i novi totalitarizam**

Autor ukazuje na neadekvatnu procenu posledica raspada komunističkog sistema, kad je uzeta u obzir samo jedna opcija: demokratizacija postkomunističkog društva, ali ne i mogućnost obnove totalitarizma, što je bilo realnije pretpostaviti s obzirom na uslove duboke društvene krize i komunističkom indoktrinacijom konstituisanog mentaliteta.

Analizuje se kontradiktorna struktura postkomunističkih društava, u kojima se menja mono-organizacijsko ustrojstvo usled formiranja mnogih stranaka, ali se zadržava karakter "partijske države" pobedničke partije sa autoritarnom strukturom vlasti i totalitarnim aspiracijama u pogledu kontrole društvenih (ekonomskih, političkih i kulturnih) ustanova.

Drugi trend koji se analizuje jeste orijentacija na potvrđivanje nacionalnog identiteta sa prevashodnom težnjom da se formiraju nacionalne države u mnogonacionalnim društvima. Autor ukazuje na dodirne tačke između komunističke i nacionalističke ideologije, čime se objašnjava lakoća prelaza sa prve na drugu posle rušenja komunističkog sistema.

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### **1.**

When trying to grasp the events which happened in 1989/90 in Eastern and Central Europe one should take into account certain misconceptions concerning the possible developments in post-communist societies, which may explain the unintended outcomes that confront us, once again, with a multitude of authoritarian/totalitarian dangers. The most decisive of which was the error of the first premise, namely that the collapse of the communist totalitarian power leads straitforwardly to the road of democracy.

What is overlooked is the option of a new authoritarian/totalitarian order that may come to replace the communist totalitarianism. As a matter of fact, that option was more realistic for the reasons listed below: a/ due to the longlasting influence of the communist totalitarian indoctrination an authoritarian mentality has been constituted which was likely to give priority to the reestablishment of an authoritarian/totalitarian power rather than to a long-term democratic transformation of these societies; b/ being that a deep social crisis has taken hold of these societies, with multiethnic countries additionally suffering from national confrontations, they longed for a strong power capable of resolving the existing problems and conflicts; and c/ owing to the fact that anti-communist propaganda was based on the similar (authoritarian) mechanisms of intolerant perception with regards to the possible alternatives of these societies' future development - the growth of a real pluralistic society was hindered.

Which consequences have resultated out of this error? First of all, a transformation of one-party rule into a multiparty system was stopped in the middle of its development taking thus a form of either the new party-state (with the tendency of the winners at the election to consolidate totalitarian power and restrict the role of opposition to the parliamentary games); or the nation-states relying upon one's own

nation as undisputable authority that all social/political groups and individual members should be submitted to.

Following such a development these societies have adopted a contradictory structure: at the surface they have no longer a mono-organizational form as having been constituted from many parties and/or different national states; however, in the bottom of their heart they have preserved an authoritarian state which primarily aimed at abolishing communism at all cost irrespective of the possible negative effects when using the totalitarian means in such anti-communist campaign.

The most dangerous was anti-communism preached in the name of "national selfdetermination" as against the "communist imperialism", which did not imply only the phenomena of national repression but included multinational communities as such. In its intolerance this trend was likely to completely lose sight of what the constitutive parts of the existing multinational states had in common and what would be worth of preserving. Instead, the disintegrative forces were given the strongest impetus and the hostile attitudes towards the other nations were fostered.

A search for national identity was fully separated from a basic need for a democratic transformation of the former "real socialist" societies. Given the circumstances that a national appeal for identity has a strong affective flavour, the former has got the prevalence over a difficult project of society's democratization which would imply, first of all, the establishment of the rule of law and a democratic state that could no longer be misused for political ends by the new political elites.

I want now to turn the readers' attention to the responsibilities of the European Community and the United States in sharing the above described mistakes with East Europeans. Because they did not offer a real (economic first of all) aids but merely a verbal support to the democratic forces in these societies. They rather encouraged a simplistic and almost primitive anti-communist campaign which led nowhere as far as a democratic transformation of the societies in question was concerned. They also, perhaps unintentionally, supported the nationalist parties pushing thus forth the disintegrative forces in multinational countries, despite a verbal affirmation of the preservation of the existing states with their established borders.

## 2.

A critical point in the development of the post-communist societies was their choice of the road that should be taken after the collapse of the communist totalitarianism. Two paths could have been followed after the break in 1989/90 in Eastern and Central Europe:

- Either an intensive transformation of the existing social and political institutions, first of all of the state and the respective representative bodies which would be incorporating in a long-term project of the democratic development of all social sub-systems, economics included, as against the inherited totalitarian elements.
- Or a formal and rash alternation of one-party system onto a quasipluralistic society with multiplicity of political parties or nation-states appearing as a facade, while, in fact, hiding behind a new authoritarian/totalitarian order.

Why majority of the East European societies have chosen the second way? First of all, because it was much easier to do so; secondly, they rushed to get rid off communism as soon as possible without being aware of the traps in the shadow of that road unless a clear vision of society's transformation is projected; and thirdly, a pragmatic end of seizing power was defined as a primary aim which prevailed over the badly needed global conception of the democratic transformation of these societies.

What we have as a consequence today in the majority of the postcommunist societies is the renewal of a party-state constituted either from the modified socialist parties or from the right-wing(nationalist) parties. The newly elected party elites continue to function as the "possessors" of the state when using the latter in order to safeguard their parties' political ends abusing thus the function of a real democratic state whose primary end is to defend their citizens' rights and interests.

Such a superficial development of pluralism is manifest primarily as a lack of the pluralistic perspectives being that a single alternative is officially in option in terms of recapitalisation in one variant alone (e.g. "Thatcherism"). As to the other options, hostile attitudes are usually expressed even when the more tender forms of capitalism are in question, not to speak of socialism.

In the multinational countries which have been disintegrated as the states, the universal communist ideology has been replaced for a new "universalizing nationalist ideology" that cannot bear even the person's neutral position with regards to national feeling. The latter also requests from everyone to come over to "my side", otherwise one risks to be labeled as an "enemy of people" (as it was characteristic of the communist ideology either).

### 3.

Another moment contributing to the so far described anti-democratic outcomes of the post-communist developments is the contradiction between means and ends during the development of a democratic statehood.

Anti-democratic means cannot be utilized in order to achieve democratic ends. However, anti-democratic means prevailed in the practices of the post-communist societies despite the fact that the newly established political elites came in power through the free elections. The very first act of inaugurating "political fitness" with regards to the important social positions, implying that many institutions should be purged from the old personnel, defined not personal capacities but rather political loyalty as one of the primary criterion in recruiting new cadres. While the reduction to one "alternative" alone implied violence in imposing developmental ends given the circumstances that they have been chosen according to the party elites' ideological convictions, and not primarily with regards to the countries' real possibilities and the population's needs.

A specific role is played by the ideological propaganda means through the ruling parties' control of mass media. Even though room is open to freedom of speech in the press and at the TV duels, which gives an impression that an open society has already been constited in Eastern and Central Europe, there is still a significant discrepancy between words and deeds. Because the parties which won power after the collapse of "real socialism" have succeeded in preserving power monopoly having thus a decisive say in all important decision-makings. In other words, it is much easier in these societies to practice a verbal criticism of the established regimes than to undertake radical changes. Therefore, the appearance of freedom judged by freedom of speech must not hide a still strong social control from the part of power elites as far as mass media are concerned.

The role of mass media has not been much changed: they are still mostly used as propaganda means aiming at imposing one set of social goals while reducing a real possibility of choce when forcing people to follow the official polity. When having seized power the former dissidents began to behave like their precessors in the communist regime; namely, they also started to use mass media as a means of ideological indoctrination being quite intolerant with regards to the other political convictions justifying the restriction of different views in the name of "social cause". I do not see the difference between the new political elites' conviction in the absolute rightness of their cause vis-a-vis the belief of the communist parties in their historical mission. In fact, it is criticism of the established political order which is met with hostility.

Free election bacame new space for allowing the practice of citizens' rights to elect their representatives, but not much more than that. For almost a full dependence of social/political groups and individuals on the will of the ruling political elites still remains. Citizens' disobedience has not yet been accepted as a principle of a democratic behaviour. But rather, it is still treated as a rebellion which may "do harm" to society in its hard days of a democratic transformation. That is to say, these societies have become democratic in form but still authoritarian/totalitarian in their intentions. It is because the power structure has not been entirely changed but

what was altered was merely the subject of power located in a new political party or a nation-state.

Therefore, what the post-communist societies need is a more radical transformation of power structure and mechanisms of rule. They should transform, in the first place, the state which still basically function as a party organ ("party-state") being more concerned with the preservation of the established order than to become a seat of the rule of law as a guardian of citizens' rights and liberties.

#### 4.

Thanks to such conditions it was rather easy for new totalitarianism to put on the cloak of nationalism, and vice versa. Because nationalism by its very nature implies the establishment of total control over the population so as to homogenize it within the nation-state. Sovereignty based on the ethnic principle is thus opposed to the liberal concept of democracy which should rely upon the sovereignty of citizens as free individuals in terms of *demos* as a political category, as against ethnicity/nation as an organic one.

While democracy implies a free choice of social groups and political parties with regards to a diversity of the interests, national ideology relies upon the ties of blood and soil defining citizens in terms of their belongeness to their ethnic groups/nations. Thereby, nation as a natural primary group is *eo ipso* defined as superior to individuals, and national ends and interests are categorically declared as higher than those of citizens' rights and liberties. Domination of the state over citizens - now of the nation-state - is what both communist and nationalist ideologies share, having also in common the totalitarian mechanisms of rule.

Nationalism - which must not be mistaken with a natural need for national identity - cannot but use totalitarian ideology and mechanisms of rule. For it intends at levelling down individual particularities and reducing the differences in order to achieve homogenization of the nation, which alone embodies its members' social existence. Therefore, political parties are acceptable in so far as they are nationalist parties. Which speaks in terms of a new monolithism rather than a genuine political pluralism. As a matter of fact, inner differences are denied in favour of national unity, and only external differences, those which concern the other nations, are recognized. However, given the circumstances that unity and homogenization is what matter, what is different is a priori treated as hostile. That is the reason why the differences coming out of the other nations are taken as an act of threat with regards to one's own national unity. Because nationalism inevitably implies hostility towards the out-groups (i.e. the other nations) and supports the polity of national conflicts in multinational countries. It is in those countries that national leaders have persuaded their peoples that they are in dangers to be destroyed by the other nations extorting in this way the hostile reactions against nations by whom they are supposed to be jeopardized (as it is put by a German social democrat, Horst Grabert). Owing to the fact that political leaders are very influential in the so-called political societies, this suggestion fell on the fertile grounds. However, what was hidden under the surface was national leaders' intention to manipulate the quest for national identification and use it as a means so as to gain or preserve power monopoly in the newly established nation-states.

One may say that a confusion between the concept of national liberation and the demand for the creation of strong nation-states (based on ethnic criteria) was responsible to destabilization and disintegration of the multinational states in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia. While the former as a need for selfdetermination has not necessarily implied separation from the existing states and multiplication of small and fragmented states whose dependence on the super-powers becomes more predictable; the idea of the state based on the pure ethnic criteria as the locus of sovereignty inevitably led to the secession, and owing to the hostile nature of nationalism, to the ethnic wars. Because the conception prevailed that every nation must have an independent state even if it was going to lead to the civil war (B. Denitch).

A democratic transformation of the ex-communist regimes is not in itself incompatible with the need for national identity, but when the latter is reduced merely to the constitution of the nation-states it appears as a significant obstacle to democratic processes. Because democracy assumes a mechanism which restricts the institutional power for the sake of enlarging civil rights and liberties; while nationalism implies the domination of the nation as an exclusive collective authority with its over - all control of social life on group and individual levels. It is in the latter that communist and nationalist ideologies are alike, both implying power monopoly and the use of political instrumentalization of the important social institutions, mass media included, so as to impose predefined "higher interests" over individuals' needs and rights. Which inspired Adam Michnik to say that in the post-communist societies structures of power are still communist by their very nature although without communists.

A dominant collectivistic ideology has not been changed but rather, communist collectivism is exchanged for new collectivistic ideology with national flavour, both implying glorification of the state as supreme authority. When recollecting the fact that an authoritarian social character, left as the legacy of ex-communist indoctrination, still has a prevalence, it is understandable why nationalism was more acceptable than a real democratic transformation of the East European societies. Therefore, a link between authoritarianism and nationalism has to be analyzed in order to better understand what is really going on in the ex-communist societies. One of the characteristic misinterpretation is a description of the developments in the former Yugoslavia in terms of "new democracies" in Slovenia and Croatia as against "bolshevism" in Serbia, while, in fact, what is really in play is the emergence of nationalism as a new totalitarianism with its characteristic repressive policy with regards to the individual rights and liberties. It is related to a tendency to concentrate power into the hands of the nation-state as a collective authority so as to homogenize the intra-group relations and thus compensate individual insecurity and powerlessness within group security and its power. When establishing an affective tie with one's own nation and its leader - as a relevant authority - individuals' feeling of belongingness is satisfied and the needed security is provided. That is, what they are not able to realize as individuals, citizens compensate as a "mass" in the populist/nationalist movements. The more individuals are powerless, the stronger their need for identification with the nation as an exclusive authority. This may explain a link between legacy of the communist totalitarianism and the eruption of nationalism after the collapse of the communist regimes.

Thereby, the nationalist movements in multiethnic countries which brought new political elites in power, appear as the main obstacle to a democratic development in post-communist societies. Thus a conclusion may be derived that the primary task of the democratic forces in Eastern and Central Europe, Yugoslavia and Russia included, is to demystify nationalism as a destructive trend which hides behind the idea of national liberation fostering social change exclusively along the line or the promotion of the national states. Peace movements should fight a nationalist madness in order to open rooms to rational solutions of the deep economic and social crisis in these societies.

But what matters too is the constitution of individuals as citizens aware of their civil rights and capable of using them in order to create new democratic institutions and a democratic mentality as well. Unless individuals liberate themselves as citizens, it is more likely that post-communist societies will oscillate from one form of totalitarianism to another without being capable of coping with the challenge which a democratic transformation presents.

However, some authors find more general reasons for the eruption of nationalism at the end of the XXth century. Leszek Kolakowski points at a universalized nihilism and relativism of our age which discredit all unconditional criteria and abolish the meaning of history. People thus seek for an "archaic historicity" and for mythology which does not aim at explaining the meaning of history but rather at satisfying a need for belongingness in

order to reduce chaos and insecurity. Such an ontological explanation of the emergence of nationalism, which is far from being characteristic only of the post-communist societies but is spread all over Europe, reveals the limits of a purely sociological answer in terms of being merely a consequence of the break down of one social system and socio-psychological instability brought by it.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that nationalism is our inescapable destiny. It should be rather explained as anachronism of our age pointing once more at the necessity to create democracy with the corresponding institutions and used them properly in order to provide stability of the emerging social order so as to fight chaos and normlessness that produce anomie and confusion, thus laying grounds to nationalism. It is only democracy that enables society's members to regain sense concerning the possible meaningful actions of their own, because it awakes their confidence in their capacities as citizens to change the given social conditions. And on the other side, the present-day social situation which nurtures nationalism speaks about the shortcomings of the existing democracies in Europe as a whole, demanding an improvement of the democratic institutions all over the world.

That the weakness of democracy is manifest also outside the borders of the post-communist societies may be affirmed when paying attention to the dangers which our civilization at the end of our century is confronted with.

"Anti-communist fundamentalism" (as Adam Michnik called it) is one among those dangers which replaces a communist fundamentalism but at the same time enforcing both extreme right-wing ideologies, either in form of national shovinizism or national-socialism - which pushes us closer and closer to fascism - and clericalism that becomes politically more offensive.

From such a despair only the development of democracy can save us. Then plurality of values and a reasonable relativism which emphasizes differences will not lead to chaos when people would have the opportunities to exercise their freedom of choice through the institutional democratic order providing a necessary framework for cultural and political pluralism. In this way they will grasp that sovereignty of the citizen is more basic than ethnic sovereignty, and that the right of self-determination consists of, first of all, in the citizens' opportunity to make decision concerning the form of the government they want to live in, and not in secession of each nation from its current state and the constitution of multiple nation-states.

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#### Summary

#### **The Collapse of the Communist Totalitarian Power and its Outcomes: Nationalism and New Totalitarianism**

The Author points at inadequate prognosis of the consequences of the collapse of communist system when only one option is taken into account, i.e. democratization of postcommunist societies, while ignoring a possible renewal of totalitarianism as a more realistic one if keeping in mind a deep social crisis in these societies and the legacy of the communist indoctrination and its impact to the population's mentality.

A contradictory structure of postcommunist societies is analyzed: a changing mono-organizational structure due to the constitution of different political parties, while what remains is a "party state" with the authoritarian structure of power and totalitarian aspiration with regards to control of social institutions.

Another trend which is analyzed is an orientation to the affirmation of national identity in terms of the constitution of national states in multinational societies. The author pays attention to the linkages between the communist and nationalist ideologies, explaining in this way an easy transition from the former into the later in postcommunist societies during the nineties.