



ORIGINAL PAPER

# Explaining the European Communist Bloc Formation and Implosion: Capitalizing Ideology and Societal Inputs

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## Abstract

The article examines the main events that led to the formation of the communist bloc and then its implosion in 1989-1990. The political evolution of Eastern Europe – in the aftermath of the Second World War – reveals the existence of a complex plan framed by the Kremlin and based on gradualism and camouflage in the circumstance of the Red Army's presence, a plan that targeted the incorporation of the occupied states into the Soviet economic, social and cultural system. Consequently, the continuation of these states (within the communist bloc) was obtained through political, military and economic pressures. After Stalin's death (1953) a hesitant incipient liberalisation could be discerned within the communist bloc. This phenomenon of "de-Stalinisation" – visible during Khrushchev's period – had an immediate effect in the other communist states in Europe. Thus, the phenomenon of "de-Stalinisation" freed the centrifugal forces which, in various East-European socialist countries, led to internal liberalisation and the weakening of their connections with the Soviet Union. In the late 80's, Soviet leader M. Gorbachev also inaugurated a novel approach of interstate relations, among which there was the principle of "recognising the right of *popular democracies* to choosing their political regime" – which accelerated the fall of the Berlin wall and the communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe in the autumn of 1989.

**Keywords:** *the communist bloc, the Soviet Union, popular democracies, Stalin, Gorbachev*

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One can speak about a *socialist socio-economic* system and a corresponding *socialist governing system*, in rigorous terms, only after the Second World War, when, under the well-known historical circumstances, a number of Eastern European countries, and, in time, other Asian and Latin American countries went from the former social-economic system based on private property, the principle of market economy, the principle of competition, the traditional production relations, the established division of the society into the owners of the production means and the owners of the labour force, to the socialist system based on state property, the principle of distribution according to need and the work performed, the principle of economic planning etc. (apud Voiculescu, 2002: 291-297).

The first socialist state in the world was established in Russia, as a result of the October 1917 Revolution (Dukes, 2009: 214-231). The revolution occurred at lightning speed. On the night of 6<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> of November (24<sup>th</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> of October old style), the red guards and soldiers, who sided with the revolution, took control of all strategic points in Petrograd (the capital of the Russian Empire at the time) – the Winter Palace, the seat of Government, was occupied and a Soviet government was established throughout Russia: the Congress of Soviets appointed a Council of People’s Commissars chaired by Lenin, with Trotsky in charge of Foreign Affairs and Stalin – the Ministry of Nationalities (Riasanovsky, 2001: 469-476). After taking over power, Lenin went on to put into practice the ideological principles – stated in his book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, written in 1916 and published in the spring of 1917, principles aiming the victory of global Socialist revolution, in accordance with the slogan “Win Russia and then the world” (apud Nolte, 2005: 62). Lenin's death (1924) was followed by a fierce battle for leadership during which Joseph Stalin (1876-1953) thwarted, without mercy, the plans of his opponents, one by one. Succeeding Lenin, I.V. Stalin – supporter of the theory of “building socialism in one country” – created an inflexible and totalitarian model and turned the Communist ideology from an internationalist theory into a nationalist doctrine” (Baradat, 2012: 190-192).

After the end of the First World War, the revolutionary movement expanded: starting with the mutiny of crews in the German military fleet, in the early days of November 1918, and followed by the action of Karl Liebknecht who proclaimed a “Socialist Republic”; and later, on 21<sup>st</sup> of March, 1919, a “Republic of Soviets” was established in Hungary, on the initiative of Béla Kun (Carpentier, Lebrun, 2006: 325). In the same month of March 1919, Lenin founded in Moscow the Third International, the Communist International (Komintern), whose objective was leadership of the world revolution and the creation of a world Communist Party. An attempt was made to implement Communist parties in different societies in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa. All Communist parties that were established during that period remained loyal to “Lenin’s genetic framework” of construction of Communist society which had at its core (apud Courtois, 2008: 12): a doctrine – *Marxism-Leninism*; a model of organization – the *Party of professional revolutionaries*, turned into the *party-state* after the take-over of power; a strategy and a tactic – both commanded by the necessities of taking over and maintaining power in “the homeland of socialism”.

The fate of Europe – and implicitly of the world – would change at the end of World War II. Fearing Soviet expansionism, Western European countries turn their gaze upon the United States, who offers economic aid through the *Marshall Plan* and military protection through the signing of the *Atlantic Pact*. With regard to the Eastern European countries occupied by the Red Army, they undergo a process of political and economic “*satellization*”, which leads to complete allegiance to the Soviet Union. Between 1945-

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1950, Stalin created a satellite empire within which constituent states retained their separate legal identity – both in relation to each other and to the USSR – but had to abide by the judgments of Moscow because of Soviet military power, the methods of the C.P.S.U., the national police regime and the inequitable economic treaties (Calvocoressi, 2000: 269). A few years after World War II, the Communists were in power not only in the Soviet Union and Mongolia (the Mongolian People's Republic was proclaimed on 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1924 under the leadership of the single party), but also in eight countries in Southern and Eastern Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia) and in Asia they were ruling the Popular Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Soulet, 1998: 11).

The enforcement of Communist society in Eastern Europe was gradual; cautious as usual and still in good relations with Western powers, Stalin initially adopted a tactic that was familiar in the years of the Popular Front and the Spanish Civil War, namely (Judt, 2008: 119-138): he favored the creation of governments “of national unity” (coalitions of Communists, Socialists and other so-called “antifascist” parties); what was sought was to exclude from power and persecute the supporters of the former regime, but in a cautious and “*democratic*” manner, rather than in a reformist and revolutionary style; for the sake of Western leaders’ peace of mind, in 1945-1946, Eastern Communists did not generally assume the titles of State President, Prime Minister or Foreign Minister, preferring to leave them for their fellow socialist, peasant or liberal coalition party members; “socialist society” as an objective is rarely spoken of, the Communist Party did not promote collectivization in the beginning, quite the contrary, the division of land and its allotment to peasants, nor was the party militating yet at government level for the nationalization of major means of production or for state property; the declared goal of Communists in Eastern countries during 1945-1946 was to “accomplish” the unfinished bourgeois revolutions of 1848, through redistribution of property, guarantee of equality and the observance of democratic rights.

During 1946-1947, with the support of the Red Army, the Communist parties gradually moved on to strategies of covert pressure, then to outward repression and terror (Judt, 2008: 119-138): political opponents were tarnished, bullied, threatened, beaten, arrested, prosecuted as fascists or collaborationists and imprisoned or even shot; “people’s” militias formed by the Communists contributed to creating a climate of fear and insecurity; vulnerable or unpopular politicians in non-communist parties became objects of public disgrace. The members of the Peasant’s, Liberal and other traditional parties proved targets – vilified with accusations of fascism and national betrayal, they were gradually eliminated; the Social Democrats were forced to institute Communist-Socialist “unions”, and those who refused were eliminated from political life. After the decimation, arrest or absorption of the main opponents, and also by falsifying the elections of 1946-1948, the Communist parties in the East (or the newly formed “Unity” or “Labor” Parties) imposed their monopoly on political power, pursuing the following objectives: an intense nationalization, collectivization, the destruction of the middle class and the punishment of real or imaginary enemies (Giurescu, 2003: 48-53).

Step by step, the Soviet sphere of influence in Central and South-Eastern Europe became an extension of the Soviet political regime, economically and socially. Stalin wanted to impose the Communist system in the countries that were under the domination of the USSR (Păiușan-Nuică, 2008: 39-45). The takeover of power by the Communists in all the eight states turned into “Socialist Republics” (such as Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia) or “popular democracies” (such as East Germany, Albania, Bulgaria,

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Hungary, Poland) led to the establishment of a political, economic and social regime that replicated the Soviet model in all aspects. All eight States will adopt the same kind of *Constitution*, taking as a model the Soviet Constitution of 1936, of course with a few formal variations, meant perhaps to correct the impression that the institutions of the new states had been cloned in their entirety after those of the USSR (Soulet, 2008: 1). Under such circumstances, the *Communist system* developed as a *totalitarian and authoritarian government* in the countries occupied by the Red Army. This totalitarian governance may be characterized by the following traits: an official ideology; a single mass party usually headed by a single man; a terrorist police force; a monopoly of communications; a monopoly of weapons; an economy ruled from the center (apud Voiculescu, 2002: 284).

The political evolution of Eastern Europe reveals the existence of a complex plan framed by the Kremlin and based on gradualism and camouflage in the circumstances of the Red Army's presence, a plan that targeted *the incorporation of the occupied states into the Soviet economic, social and cultural system*. The continuation of these states – within the communist bloc – was obtained through political, military and economic pressures. In this sense the Soviet Union imposed the establishment of supra-national bodies such as the *Cominform*; *The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance* (CMEA) and *The Military Treaty of Warsaw*.

The *Cominform* (*Information Bureau*) was constituted between 22 and 27 September 1947, when in Szklarska Poreba, Poland, the representatives of nine communist parties (i.e. those in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, France and Italy) decided to set up the Information Bureau, a body through which Stalin could coordinate directly the political movement of the Communist leaders (Onișoru, 2004: 34-37). The Cominform's objective was the strengthening/expansion of the USSR's control over European Communist parties. When the Cominform was formed, A.A. Zhdanov – one of Stalin's main collaborators – enunciated the Kremlin's official doctrine in the field of international politics, stressing that “the world is now split into two irreconcilable « factions »: the faction of « democracy and peace », whose leader is the USSR and the « imperialist » faction, whose main driving force is represented by the United States” (Berstein, Milza, 1998: 231).

*CMEA* (*The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance*) was created in January 1949 as a reply to the Marshall Plan. Its founding members were the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, joined by Albania and Eastern Germany (China and Yugoslavia were admitted as observers). The CMEA became an auxiliary of Soviet politics which – by use of excessive economic planning, instituting national targets and tracing specific tasks for each company – sought to annex the economy of satellite states (Calvocoressi, 2000: 277).

With regard to military issues, Moscow employed a strict control by means of the occupation army, the officers of the satellite states' armed forces, who had been trained and were in the service of the USSR and also through the creation of the *Warsaw Treaty*. This treaty – signed on 14 May 1955 (by the USSR, Poland, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, East Germany, Hungary) – was a military tool that proved practical for the Kremlin in dealing with the United States of America and other Western countries, and also in keeping under control the “Socialist allies” attempting to emancipate themselves from under Soviet tutelage (Olteanu, Duțu, Antip, 2005).

In the early 1950s, the Kremlin tried to impose a unique model of socialism, copied exclusively after the Soviet system, and to establish total control over Eastern European countries. Soviet “counselors” are enforced in all the countries where the Red

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Army was stationed, being present and omnipotent – they are the ones who shape national realities according to Moscow’s desire/politics. The Soviets controlled everything through these “advisors”: the economy, the culture and, in particular, the policy of those states within the internal life of the Communist Party, the army and the security forces. The omnipresent and omnipotent Soviet ambassador becomes “the number one official supervisor” (Soulet, 2008: 78).

On the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> of March, 1953 Stalin’s death was announced. The new administration – Malenkov, Beria and Molotov – declared they were ready to govern the country. Shortly afterwards internal fighting for power in the Soviet Union started: in mid-March 1953, Malenkov resigned from the post of Secretary of the party and Khrushchev was promoted to the position of First Secretary of the party; in the summer of 1953, Beria was arrested and then killed; in February 1955, Malenkov resigned from the post of Prime Minister, too, Nikolai Bulganin being appointed in his place. From that moment on, Khrushchev and Bulganin – the head of the party and the head of Government – moved to center stage in Soviet matters and to the forefront in foreign affairs. In 1956, Khrushchev felt self-assured enough to launch a deadly attack against Stalin’s actions and character, saying that he had been a cruel and bloody tyrant, who had destroyed many lives during the great purge of the party and the army in the 1930s. This attack on the former Soviet leader – expounded in the “Secret Report” of February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1956 in front of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU – actually triggers the process “de-Stalinization”, which will include (Courtois, 2008: 299): the removal from the party leadership of the “anti-party group”, consisting of several Stalinists; the amnesty and release of Gulag prisoners and the rehabilitation of victims of terror; a certain relaxation of censorship is allowed (in 1962, Solzhenitsyn published *A day in the life of Ivan Denisovich*, the first story about the Gulag), etc.

This radical change and Khrushchev’s recognition of “national forms of socialism” will arouse the hope of a close liberation in Soviet-exploited Eastern Europe (Berstein, Milza, 1998: 303). The phenomenon of “*de-Stalinization*” in the USSR had an immediate effect in the other socialist countries, namely: it released the centrifugal forces which, in various East-European socialist countries, led to internal liberalization and the loosening of ties between them and the Soviet Union; it was required that a new doctrine regarding rapports between socialist countries shall be developed; the principle of “peaceful coexistence” was adopted in the area of international affairs; “the fraternal countries” are encouraged to take “reformist measures” in order to make certain “corrections” to the socialist system. Many Communist leaders – also encouraged by the popular movements of 1956-1957 – agreed to proceed to changes, but of different depths and orientations. Thus, the strategies adopted by Yugoslavia, by the countries under Soviet influence and by those under Chinese influence proved to be significantly different and any post-Stalinist reconciliation policy disintegrated, causing the “Communist bloc” to fall to pieces.

The impact of the post-Stalinist Soviet policy was manifested very strongly in Poland and Hungary. The first obvious signs of unrest occurred in Poland, where several riots broke out in June 1956, imposing a series of claims and reforms: the Polish Communist Party called for a reinstatement of the purged Wladislaw Gomulka as head of the party; the dissolution of organized collective agricultural farms; higher privileges for the Catholic Church; the overall reduction in the intensity of state control, etc. On the other hand, the events in Hungary would follow a significantly different course: in October 1956, after the outbreak of student riots and popular demonstrations, the new government

led by Imre Nagy stated with no hesitation that they were going to withdraw Hungary from the Warsaw Pact organization, to introduce a multi-party system and to move towards Western constitutional forms. As these actions constituted an outright challenge to the USSR, Soviet troops entered Budapest and suppressed the Hungarian revolutionary movement (Jelavich, 2000: 321-324). Clashes over certain aspects of the Communist system – imposed by the USSR – continued and expanded to the socialist countries in Asia. When discord erupted in Eastern Europe, the social climate within the “fraternal countries” in Asia was particularly difficult: in China an “endemic agitation and sporadic violence” become visible both in rural areas and in factories, while in Vietnam, the farmers’ discontent is increasing, due to grave excesses in the land reform and religious intolerance (Soulet, 2008: 120). Worried by the expansion of popular dissatisfaction, the leaders (both in China and Vietnam) enforce certain measures – be they symbolic – meant to make the system more flexible. Thus, 1956 was *the first obstruction of the unremitting expansion of Communism* starting with 1917, both at territorial level, and at the level of ideology and public opinion; and, most importantly, it brings to light the fractures within the core of Communist parties and inside the system as a whole. In the area of diplomatic relations between the two systems – Communist and capitalist – one can notice a significant improvement in relations with the West (according to the principle of “peaceful coexistence”), but the situation remains chaotic and not infrequently at the edge of stability, being marked by a series of events, such as: the Suez Canal crisis in 1956; the Berlin crisis in 1958 (which ends in the construction of the Wall in August 1961); the nuclear missile crisis in Cuba, in the autumn of 1962, and so on (Courtois, 2008: 214-221).

In the 1960s the Communist system in general – and in particular that in the Soviet Union – experiences an ample economic crisis (agricultural problems remain unresolved, the production of consumer goods is well below the level of Western countries, the East-West technological gap is increasing; the intellectual stratum in socialist countries denounce the bureaucracy which is, ultimately, the Communist party apparatus, and so on) (Vaise, 2010: 93). These difficulties will lead to the fall of Nikita Khrushchev’s regime, through a “Palace revolution” (October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1964). Political power in the USSR is taken over by Leonid Brezhnev – at party level – and Aleksei Kosygin as head of government. Brezhnev’s policy in relation to the countries of the Eastern bloc is characterized by intransigence. Hostile to the *Prague Spring*, aimed at the liberalization of the Communist regime, in August 1968 he enforced, in the name of the doctrine of “limited sovereignty” also called the “Brezhnev doctrine”, the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Treaty troops (nota bene: Romania took no part in the invasion); he caused the removal of Alexander Dubček and imposed a policy of “normalization” that put an end to the experience of “socialism with a human face” (Judt, 2008: 404-411). In the “Brezhnev era” the USSR is involved in both the politics of the East-West détente (in 1966, Charles de Gaulle makes a historic visit to the Soviet Union, and in 1972 President Nixon is received in Moscow; in August 1975, the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference is signed), as well as in establishing closer ties with countries in the Third World (“The six-day war” allows him to approach the Arab countries Syria and Egypt (Osiac, 2013: 123-132); he helps India in the fight against Pakistan, who was allied with China; he supports Vietnam; he collaborates with the popular movements in Africa in their fight for national liberation, etc.). This internationalism bestows a certain international prestige upon the Soviet Union and for *the communist system these years equal maximum extension*. However, the intervention in Afghanistan – in December 1979 – would lead to

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a catastrophe for the USSR. On his death in November 1982, Brezhnev would leave behind a country weakened economically and exposed to growing complaints, both from within and from the countries that constituted the Communist bloc.

After Brezhnev's death, leadership of the USSR came to Andropov and Chernenko for a short period. After the disappearance of the two rulers, political power is taken by Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev (born in March 1931), who is appointed general Secretary of the Communist Party in March 1985. From the start, Gorbachev promises changes aimed at reforming the Communist system to make it more efficient. His objective was *to establish connections between political parties, the state and a controlled liberalization* (Berstein, Milza, 1998: 375). On these lines, he declared, in 1986 at the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Party, that "democracy is the healthy and pure air without which a public, socialist body cannot lead a rigorous life" (Dukes, 2009: 333). From this moment on (1986), he launches a policy of *Perestroika* (economic restoration); which allows the authorization of private enterprises in the fields of crafts, trade and services, while in 1987 a law concerning state enterprises is promulgated, allowing managers a large autonomy; and *Glasnost* (transparency and freedom of expression), which seeks to infuse ethics into the system. At the same time, in June 1988, Gorbachev announced his intention to restore a "*socialist rule of law*", to impose a separation between party and state. In addition, in foreign policy, Gorbachev inaugurated a new approach of international relations through: the de-ideologization of international relations; the cessation of the arms race and a sustainable détente; resuming the Soviet-American dialogue (in December 1987 *Treaty of Washington* would be signed, which eliminated intermediate-range missiles); a rapprochement to Western Europe (a Charter for a New Europe would be signed by the Soviet Union in November 1990); the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan (operation which was completed in February 1989); recognition of the right of "people's democracies" to choose their own administration (which accelerated the fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in the autumn of 1989).

All of these events – as a result of the implementation of the policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* – would lead to an amplification of nationalist movements both in the Soviet Union and other communist states in Europe in accordance with the "Domino principle" (Preda, Retegan, 2000: passim). What most reformers in the socialist world would have wanted was to transform communism into something similar to the Western social democracy. However, the year 1989 brought about the collapse of Communist regimes. Gorbachev realized too late that a liberalization of the Communist system was impossible. The meeting in Malta, in December 1989, of the two presidents – Bush and Gorbachev – legitimated an accomplished fact (through the "reformist revolutions", "Velvet revolutions", "bloody revolutions" in socialist countries) i.e. *the end of the Cold War*, but also *of the Communist regimes*.

In 1990, one by one, the republics of the USSR proclaim their sovereignty and the activities of the Communist party are discontinued. Gorbachev resigns from the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party and requests the CPSU be dissolved. The disappearance of the Communist Party – which had been the binding force of the Soviet Union ever since 1917 – leads to the liquidation of the USSR. The destiny of the former USSR is sealed on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1991 in Minsk, when the presidents of the three Slavic Republics (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus) take note of the collapse of the Soviet Union and decide to create a Community of Independent States (CIS) (Berstein, Milza, 1998: 388). Gorbachev resigns on December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1991, a date which marked the end of the Soviet

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system and ushered in a process of democratization and political and economic transformations, as well as the birth/independence of certain former soviet states.

The process of *democratization and political transformations* continued in the other socialist countries in Eastern Europe. In the late 1980s, Albania experienced a general crisis that would reach all state structures. Understanding that the Communist power was in danger, and under pressure from the people, in September 1988, Ramiz Alia, First Secretary of the Party of Labor, announced measures which were only “semi-democratic” and which were continued in early 1989. Later on, following huge demonstration in Albania’s main cities – Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Shkodra, Kavaja i.a. – in December 1990 Ramiz Alia was forced to accept the introduction of political pluralism in the country. On November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1990, student circles in the “Enver Hoxha” University in Tirana initiated the first opposition party – the Democratic Party. The establishment of the Democratic Party was followed by the creation of other opposition parties: the Republican Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Greens Party, the Agrarian Party, etc. As a result, on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1991 the first pluralist elections took place, resulting in the first pluralist Parliament. The free elections of March 1991 mark the beginning of the proper transition from the totalitarian system to a democratic pluralist society.

As a result of the adoption of a new Constitution in 1971, *Bulgaria* was defined as “a socialist state of laborers from towns and villages, led by the working class”; and the Party was presented as having a leading role in the State, in the society and in the process of building socialism. But, with the worsening economic problems at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, Zhivkov's regime is beginning to falter. Inside, the reforms imposed by the New Economic Mechanism remained unaccomplished, for various reasons, while signs of protests organized at the University of Sofia forecast the end of Zhivkov’s regime (Crampton, 2003: 419-420). Thus, *the domestic economic crisis, the ethnic tensions* (inflamed by the so-called “process of regeneration”, initiated in 1984, stating that the Turks in Bulgaria were not in reality Turks, but Bulgarians who had been forcibly converted to Islam), *the support given to the “reformers” within the Bulgarian Communist Party* by Mikhail Gorbachev, led to the removal of Todor Zhivkov. On November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1989 Todor Zhivkov is removed from power through a “palace coup”, and the new Bulgarian Communist leader, Petar Mladenov, immediately turned towards a policy of “restructuring” similar to Gorbachev’s reforms. The Bulgarian communists did not envisage that the removal of Todor Zhivkov and the speed at which events unfolded, both domestically and internationally, will bring about the end of the Communist regime in Bulgaria (Buzatu, 2011: 618-629).

In *Czechoslovakia*, the Communist Party, aware of its lack of popularity and mismanagement of the country – but also the momentum of changes coming from a USSR led by Gorbachev – preferred to sit at the negotiations table rather than resort to force. Gustáv Husák was removed from the post of General Secretary of the party and a group of more conciliatory communists led by Ladislav Adamec was named in his place. The latter would consider changes within talks with the representatives of the Civic Forum led by Václav Havel. In the context of the transformations which encompass the entire Eastern Europe in 1989, as well as in the aftermath of the great popular demonstrations in October-November in Prague, Václav Havel becomes President of Czechoslovakia. (On December 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 1989 the Parliament still led by the Communists elect him President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic) (Crampton, 2003: 568). The removal of the Communist regime in Prague – so quick and lacking in bloody incidents – will remain in history as the so-called “Velvet Revolution” (Buzatu, 2011: 621). In 1989 the people of



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Czechoslovakia took their fate into their hands. On January 1, 1990 the new President, Václav Havel, pardoned 16,000 political prisoners; and the next day, the secret police was abolished; through an agreement with Moscow it was established that the Soviet troops stationed in Czechoslovakia, counting 70,000 people, should retreat until 1991. However, Czechoslovakia did not survive its freedom: on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1993 the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia are proclaimed independent States.

After Tito's death, *Yugoslavia* will experience a visible escalation of tensions and conflicts between the constituent nations of the Federal State, which would lead to a real political crisis. In 1968, Slobodan Milošević was elected at the head of the Serbian League of Communists; and in 1987, he visited Kosovo, promising Serbs there they would no longer be the target of harassment. In May 1989 Milosevic becomes President of Serbia and calls for a new Constitution (September 1989) which incorporated the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina into the Serbian State. However, Milosevic's new strategy violated one of the fundamental principles of Federal Yugoslavia: *none of the administrative units was supposed to meddle in the affairs of the other*. The infringement of this principle was used by the other constituent states of Yugoslavia as a pretext to trigger actions/wars of separation. On June 25, 1991 Croatia and Slovenia proclaimed their state independence, followed by Macedonia (September 15, 1991) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1992) (Gârz, 1993: 9-69). As a consequence of internal conflict, turning (in Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and later Kosovo) into actual civil wars, resulting in massacres and unimaginable destruction, population displacement and expulsion on the criterion of ethnic "purification", the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will disintegrate completely (Jelavich, 2000: 345-362).

*Poland* is the first among the states of Eastern Europe to embark on the process of reform and revolution. In Poland, General Jaruzelski, appointed First Secretary in October 1981, asserts himself as the representative of a modernist tendency in state reform and accepts the idea of organizing a "round table" with the contestants of the Communist regime who were spearheaded by *Solidarity* (led by Lech Walesa) (Soulet, 2008: 124-125; Sowinska-Krupka, 2008: 243-260). Thus, in April 1989 57 delegates of the party, the Church and *Solidarity* commence negotiations concerning Poland's future. Following these discussions, *Solidarity* became legal again, broad economic reforms were to be applied and free elections organized for half of the seats in Parliament (Crampton, 2003: 429). Furthermore, the negotiations entailed also the introduction of a bicameral legislative body and the restoration of the Polish Roman Catholic Church. The elections (in June) record the victory of *Solidarity*. The new parliament convened on July 4 and, following negotiations, decided that Tadeusz Mazowiecki (Buzatu, 2011: 621) – a journalist and *Solidarity* activist – become Prime Minister. Under the leadership of the new Prime Minister, Poland witnessed the dismantling of the Communist system. On December 29, 1989 the Parliament approved constitutional amendments abolishing the leadership of the party, the State received the new name of the Republic of Poland and the old pre-war flag and coat of arms were readopted. In conclusion, Poland had conducted a non-violent radical change of the system with commendable care for legality.

In the *German Democratic Republic*, the revolution that changed the old Communist rule was generated by a government crisis triggered by changes in other countries. The grievances of Eastern Germans were amplified by the difficulty of travelling abroad, which translated into a general exodus to the West, especially after the summer of 1989, when Hungary – with a new reformist leadership – opened its border with Austria and many East Germans took advantage of the opening of borders to flee to

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the West. Resistance groups – such as *New Forum*, *Democratic Renaissance*, *Democracy Now* – began to appear and they supported the protests and demonstrations against the communist regime ruled by Erich Honecker (Droz, 2006: 134-135). The church also had a very important role, organizing non-violent protests, peaceful wakes, praying and discussion meetings. On October 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 1989 in Berlin, in the presence of Gorbachev, invited to the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of the GDR, there was an extremely violent repression, which led to the amplification of the protest demonstrations in all the major cities, such as Leipzig, Dresden, Magdeburg et al. (Soulet, 2008: 134). Faced with the extent of the hostile movement, Honecker resigns on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1989, invoking health reasons and is replaced by Egon Krenz. Hoping the demonstrations would cease, on September 9 Krenz announced the frontiers between the two Germanys would open (Fulbrook, 2003: 237). The East and West Berliners headed for the Wall. In 72 hours, three million people crossed in the west. It was obvious, the “Iron Curtain” had fallen. Gradually, the character of the mass demonstrations started to change into calls for the reunification of the two countries.

While these events were unfolding in the DGR, on November 28, 1989 federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl expounded a ten-point program consisting of a series of measures meant to lead to the establishment of the German State. Chancellor Kohl’s efforts were successful. Due to profound domestic changes, the Soviet Union renounced its claims for domination in Eastern Europe. In Eastern Germany, the fall of the Wall hugely strengthened the movement for fundamental political changes. On March 18, 1990 the first free elections brought to power an “Alliance for Germany”, the new Prime Minister being Lothar de Maizière (Fulbrook, 2003: 300-301). Through these free elections in March 1990, the GDR had voted for dissolution, a process that ended on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1990 with the official reunification of the two German states.

*Hungary* is one of the countries – alongside Czechoslovakia and Poland – that managed a peaceful transition from communist dictatorship to political democracy, from planned economy to market economy, while other states – such as Romania and Russia – experienced moments of violence.

The first steps towards achieving these objectives were taken by the Hungarian Parliament in December 1988 and January 1989, when laws guaranteeing the right to freedom of association and assembly were passed. They were followed, in February, by other measures which allowed the existence of a multiparty system and the relinquishing of the socialist party’s leadership role (Crampton, 2003: 430). Another extremely important measure – which led to the breach of the “Iron Curtain” – was adopted through the May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1989 Government decision to dismantle the electrified fence on the Austrian border, allowing free passage to the West; this action triggered the transit of hundreds of thousands of East German refugees and destabilized the communist rule in the DGR irremediably (Soulet, 2008: 129).

Another of the initiatives taken by the party leaders, with a significant impact on the society, was the decision to inter Imre Nagy’s earthly remains (Judt, 2008: 539). After the June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1989 ceremony of interring of Imre Nagy and other four of his colleagues as national heroes – attended by 300,000 Hungarians – there were round table negotiations, in the Polish model, between the representatives of the opposition and power. On the side of the opposition, they were attended by parties already formed – the Democratic Forum, the Alliance of Free Democrats, the Young Democrats – while the other side was represented by communist leaders; in the course of these negotiations the main issue put forward was the reorganization of political life and the changing of the

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Constitution. As a result, the parliament soon passed laws stipulating changes in the constitution, and on October 23<sup>rd</sup> the People's Republic became a Republic. The terrain was prepared for the transition from the single party system to parliamentary democracy, from total dependence on the Soviet Union to state independence. Thus, by virtue of the will of the party's progressive wing and the peaceful, continuous pressure of civil society, Hungary experienced a negotiated de-satellization.

In late 1980s, *Romania* was affected by an acute social-economic crisis with disastrous results for the communist political regime, under Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship. A first appeal against the regime took place on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1987 when workers in the city of Brașov rioted, violent clashes taking place between the forces of order and demonstrators that kept shouting "We want bread! Down with the tyranny" (Scurtu, 2009: 73-74). The events in Brașov reveal the degradation of the socio-economic situation, the people's exasperation and the regime's determination to resort to brutal repression. From the inside, neither Ceaușescu nor his system seemed affected by the giant wave of discontent that would change the status of the Eastern European states.

In 1989, Ceaușescu's regime was completely discredited both inside the country and outside it (Stanciu, 2010: 79-86). In short, the Romanian dictator had everyone against him and his family. Within the party, as well as in the country, everybody wanted him removed from power. After the Communist Party Congress, in November 1989, the Romanian society seemed a barrel of gunpowder ready, at a mere spark, to trigger the explosion of hatred of millions of people against Nicolae Ceaușescu and the regime he represented (Calafeteanu, Neacșu, Osiac, Rusu, 2009; Olimid, 2009: passim). The beginning takes place in Timișoara, on December 16, 1989 when several thousand people protest against the removal of Pastor László Tökés, and on that day the army opened fire on the demonstrators. The army went into action again on December 21, this time in Bucharest. On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Ceaușescu's regime is removed and replaced by a Council of the National Salvation Front, headed by Ion Iliescu (Buzatu, Cîrstea, 2010: 577-608).

Analyzing the events of 1989-1990, we find that the world witnessed a unique episode: the breakup, in times of peace, of a large multinational power and its satellites. In Eastern Europe the Communist power abdicated – with the exception of Romania and Yugoslavia – through a process of largely peaceful changes. Thus was achieved a transition from communist dictatorship to political democracy, from planned economy to market economy (Georgescu, 2015: 163-169).

Referring to "*The Great Event in December 1989*", M.S. Gorbachev, George Bush and Helmut Kohl emphasized in 1999 – on the occasion of the tenth celebration of the fall of the *Berlin Wall* – "that the destruction of the *Wall* was achieved from top downwards, and not vice versa. The consequence? It is easy to discern in today's Europe: the *Wall* itself no longer exists; for Berlin, once again capital of Germany, it remains an unpleasant recollection; Europe nevertheless continues to be divided, separated by other real or imaginary walls, the same as – if not even worse than – in the midst of the *Cold War*. How is that possible? Both the defeated, and the victors of 1989 definitely started from false premises, they based their actions on miscalculations, then they fooled each other and presently *the realities* force actions that are devoid of any perspective. Communism was not simply demolished and exchanged for a multilaterally developed capitalism" (apud Buzatu, 2011: 605).

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