
Central and Southeast European Politics Since 1989

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Now in its second edition, *Central and Southeast European Politics Since 1989* aims to keep readers updated on the troublesome issues the countries of region have dealt with in their transition process from communism to democracy, and the present and future challenges they will have to handle in order to become democratic countries with full respect for the rule of law. This more than ambitious goal is not an easy task, first because of the nature of the analyzed regions; the authors themselves describe their aim as “both an ambitious and necessary” endeavor (p. 563). There is no doubt that this book is exactly that. *Central and Southeast European Politics Since 1989* represents a valuable introduction to the process of transition from communism to democracy; it includes all of the countries of Central and Southeastern Europe and offers an analysis of their brief post-communist history; the fall of their communist regimes; the establishment of democracy and the ensuing challenges including war, economic transition and the privatization process; and their accession to the EU and NATO. The book presents each country’s unique path to democracy, along with its own specific problems, which makes it also a kind of comparative analysis of the democratization and transition processes in the analyzed regions. An introductory explanation and analysis of these important topics is given in the book’s first two chapters, which form a basis for better understanding the subsequent chapters.



These, in turn, discuss each country separately and explore the aspects analyzed in relation to each of the countries’ specific dynamics.

Although they share certain common characteristics –a communist past, democratization, and an EU/ NATO membership goal– it is hard to consider the diverse countries spreading from the Baltics to the Mediterranean as a single region. The glossary itself sounds confusing as some of the terms are overlapping – Central Europe/Central and Eastern Europe/ East Central Europe/Eastern Europe/Southeastern Europe. That might explain why, although the introductory chapters (part one and two) briefly mention and analyze all of these countries, the middle chapters focus on Central Europe (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary), the ex-Yugoslavian states (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Southeastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria and Albania). The period on which the book focuses (some thirty years) is a long and turbulent time in history. It is not an easy task to follow all the changes happening in that period, and from that perspective this book deserves only praises as it manages to successfully bridge this long period and not to omit any important development. Still, I find this inclusiveness and breadth to be the book’s main disadvantage – it is difficult to keep in mind so many different aspects of the transition process in so many countries at

the same time. That is why the book is lengthy and too broad in scope.

The book consists of a total of twenty-one chapters divided into six parts. The first chapter of “Part One – Introduction” explains the beginning point of the book, described as “the Great transformation of 1989” (p. 3). This refers to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, as well as the integration of East and West Germany and the further integration into the EU and NATO. The authors go on to describe the subsequent modes of transition and the formation of different regimes in the newly formed Southern and Central European states, and the serious problems concerning democratization, corruption, economic transformation, media freedom and religiosity. The second chapter, “Post-socialist Models of Rule in Central and Southeastern Europe,” points out the huge expectations in the region connected with the collapse of communism. However, it turned out that they mostly just stayed that – expectations. Throughout the region, the same old communist leaders continued to remain in power, now as nationalists, whereas the main problems were privatization and lustration (p. 27). “Part Two – Issues,” discusses the general state of media freedom, democratization and the economic transition in the post-communist European countries and ends by briefly explaining the unfortunate war in former Yugoslavia. “Part Three – Central Europe,” “Part Four – Yugoslav Successor States,” and “Part Five – Southeastern Europe” analyze the historical legacies, the development of political life and political systems in the post-transition period, and the challenges and short-

comings as well as the current state of affairs in these countries. The final “Part Six – Present and Future Challenges” focuses on the main issues the countries are facing and the prospects of their solution. The abovementioned difficulty about naming the regions and grouping the countries in regions is reflected in the book’s structure as well, which could have been omitted. In each chapter, when analyzing every country, the authors follow a similar pattern and this is good, although the developments in each country determine how much is said about current issues.

This book cannot be considered either a solely historical or a solely political book, because it includes more than these two disciplines’ findings – a point emphasized in the concluding chapters. Rather, it “evaluates overarching issues within a larger analytical context as well as particular political, economic, and cultural factors” (p. 563); this is its unique value: the book is comprehensive and contemporary.

Researchers and analysts who wish to focus on one issue and make comparisons among the countries covered here will find this book useful, as will anyone interested in exploring a single country; such readers can use the book’s relevant chapter as a valuable source for research. Also, the very detailed reference literature given at the end of each chapter is worth mentioning and can be important in conducting further research. This book shall be of use and importance to students, analysts and policymakers interested in any country of the region, and in the different experiences of these neighboring countries.