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Online publication date: 16 August 2010

To cite this Article Petsinis, Vassilis(2010) 'Twenty years after 1989: moving on from transitology', Contemporary Politics, 16: 3, 301 — 319

To link to this Article DOI: 10.1080/13569775.2010.501652
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2010.501652

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Twenty years after 1989: moving on from transitology

Vassilis Petsinis*

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This article sets within a qualitative framework part of the social sciences research that has been carried out on Central and Eastern Europe since 1989. This qualitative study relies upon quantitative data from journal monitoring carried out on a number of thematic journals on post-Communist Europe. What the article demonstrates is that political science research on post-Communist Europe has advanced from the stage of transitology to methodological approaches more deeply entrenched within the European whole. Sociological research, on the other hand, has recently started to position the East European regional inside the European or global more emphatically.

Keywords: transition studies; post-Communist politics; post-Communist societies; Eastern Europe; journal monitoring

The year 1989 stands as a landmark for social scientists engaged in the study of Central and East European politics and societies. Since the fall of the Berlin wall and the disintegration of the federal states in this macro-region (i.e. Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia), a number of academic specialists from all over the globe have been active in research on the ways that these changes have unfolded within their specific sociopolitical and geopolitical settings (i.e. case-studies), and the ways that these changes have interacted with the ‘international system’, impacted upon it and have been simultaneously affected by concurrences at the global level. The initial phase of these research endeavours might be termed transition studies (or transitology).

As a matter of fact, a wide range of social science articles and monographs have concentrated on the multifaceted processes through which Communist regimes have been transforming into multiparty democracies (political transition); the dissolution of the corporate nexus between state and society (e.g. the various nomenklatura networks), as well as the entire process of transformation in order for post-Communist societies to conform to the parallel reforms at the political level and the system of economic administration (social transition); and the privatization of the economic sphere with the aim to dissolve the centrally planned model and create a financial sector based on the private ownership of resources (economic transition). Since the incorporation of quite a few countries in Central and Eastern Europe within Euro-Atlantic structures, the formal terminology has changed and the term integration is nowadays preferred over transition.

In this study, I set within a qualitative framework part of the social sciences’ research that has been carried out on Central and Eastern Europe since 1989. This qualitative study relies upon quantitative data from the journal monitoring that I have been carrying out on a number of thematic journals on post-Communist Eastern Europe. At this point, a crucial detail should be singled out: it is impossible to summarize the full spectrum of the social sciences’ research

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ISSN 1356-9775 print/ISSN 1469-3631 online
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DOI: 10.1080/13569775.2010.501652
http://www.informaworld.com
on post-Communist Europe or cover the entire geographic region of Eastern Europe in this study. Therefore, my methodological focus is cast on the disciplines of political science and sociology, whereas the empirical focus concentrates on the macro-regions of Central and Southeast Europe (thus excluding the post-Soviet space and the German Democratic Republic (GDR)).

Of particular importance is to place this piece of work within the broader framework of the Society and the Political project and assess the degree to which the social sciences’ literature on post-Communist Eastern Europe actually enlightens us about the interplay between the global and the regional within the political and social processes in this macro-region (especially in the light of Euro-Atlantic integration), and the conspicuous ways in which this global–regional interaction is reflected in everyday life within post-Communist social settings. What this work demonstrates is that political science research on post-Communist Europe has advanced from the stage of transitology to methodological approaches more deeply entrenched within the European whole. Sociological research, on the other hand, has recently started to position the East European regional inside the European or global more emphatically. Prior to the thematic discussion, it is essential to place this piece of work within a theoretical framework.

Theorizing ‘transition’: some introductory remarks

The processes of social and political transition in Central and Southeast Europe are not the single occasion in modern history that political establishments transform from authoritarian or totalitarian rule into liberal democracies. On quite the contrary, macro-regions such as Southern Europe and Latin America have been ‘political workshops’ where a variety of paths towards democratization have been employed and tested, or, in some cases, are still being tested. Of course, there exists a plenitude of qualitative differences between the recent cases of democratic transition in Central and Southeast Europe and those that were put under way in Southern Europe or Latin America; whether temporal-spatial, structural, ideological or geopolitical. Nevertheless, it is not my intention to discuss in length these qualitative differences yet. At this point, it is essential to set in context the various shapes and paths that democratic transition processes can obtain, from a more macro-political perspective. Of particular use to this objective is to rely upon the work by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan and their treatise of the patterns of democratic transition encountered in Latin America, Southern and post-Communist Europe. In a broad sense, one might sketch out two major types of non-democratic governance in the contemporary world: authoritarian and totalitarian.

According to Linz and Stepan, authoritarian regimes differ from totalitarian in their relation to four focal dimensions: pluralism, ideology, leadership, and mobilization. Along these lines, authoritarian regimes might be defined as: ‘... political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones’. Totalitarianism, on the contrary, presupposes the elimination of all sorts of pre-existing political, economic, and social structures. As a matter of fact, there exist three major dimensions which are characteristic of totalitarian rule: (a) a solid, well-articulated and preponderant ideology; (b) intensive and extensive mobilizing potential; and (c) a charismatic leadership with boundaries of action which are not clearly defined and a frequently unpredictable behaviour toward elites and non-elites alike. Within the framework of this terminological distinction, Franjo Tuđman’s Croatia and Slobodan Milošević’s Serbia can be classified as authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, Bulgaria under Todor Zhivkov qualifies as a representative example of totalitarian governance.
Linz and Stepan introduce a third category of non-democratic governance, namely *sultanism*. According to Max Weber, ‘... sultanism tends to arise whenever traditional domination develops an administration and a military force which are purely personal instruments of the master... sultanistic governance consists only in the extreme development of the ruler’s discretion’.\(^4\) The sultanistic polity becomes the personal domain of the ‘sultan’ and the importance attached to surveillance mechanisms is even more evident than in any other form of non-democratic rule. There is no rule of law, no space for a semi-opposition and no apparent differentiation between hardliners and moderates within the ruling elite. Sultanistic regimes usually do not have an elaborate and guiding ideology. Instead, they are situationally adaptive and they can incorporate ideological elements even incompatible to each other but always in assent with the sultan’s discretion. Within the political context of Communist Eastern Europe, the sultanistic model might be particularly applicable to the cases of Enver Hoxha’s Albania or Nicolae Ceausescu’s Romania.

In all of this, one thing should be borne in mind: the earlier-outlined categories of non-democratic rule are not static but rather malleable, shifting and situationally adaptive fields. For instance, under the influence of combined (domestic and external) political, socioeconomic and geopolitical catalysts, it is likely that an interim transition from ‘proper authoritarianism’ to *soft authoritarianism* may take place. In most cases, this can assume the form of a compromise between regime moderates and opposition moderates. This is always conditional upon the function of a coherent democratic opposition in civic society and, most of all, the extent to which this civic society actually exists. As a result of this compromise, a series of structural reforms are likely to be put under way. This may eventually pave the way for the transition from soft authoritarianism towards democratization.

In totalitarianism, the picture becomes less transparent, since not even the limited political and socioeconomic pluralism that exists under authoritarianism is available. Nevertheless, as a consequence of internal as well as external pressures, it is always likely that one or more of the following distinct (but interwoven) processes may be engineered from within the governing structures: (a) deliberate policies of the rulers to soften or reform the totalitarian system; (b) erosion of the cadres’ adhesion to the regime’s ideological pillars; (c) emergence of social, cultural and economic pluralism. At a first stage, the combined impact of these three processes may lead to the transformation of totalitarianism into *post-totalitarianism*. However, in contrast to soft authoritarianism, the transition from post-totalitarianism to democratization can either be obstructed or delayed because of the post-totalitarian leadership’s recruitment from party-members, bureaucrats and the technocratic apparatus associated with the former regime; the persistence of ideology as part of social reality, despite its eroding appeal; or the domination of associational life by the mass-mobilization mechanisms that operated under the totalitarian regime. Therefore, one should not confuse the institutional pluralism of a post-totalitarian regime with the political pluralism that one can find in a democracy.

**Transition at work in Central and Southeast Europe**

In order to successfully comprehend academic writing on Eastern Europe since 1989, it is essential to summarize the political and social realities in this macro-region during the transitional processes. Prior to this, it might be useful to briefly sketch out some key-differences between democratic transition in post-Communist Europe and older cases of transition. For the purposes of this work, my focus is cast on the transitional processes in Southern Europe (i.e. Greece, Spain and Portugal). As is also the case with Central and Southeast Europe, there exist a number of qualitative differences among the patterns of non-democratic governance in South European countries as well as among the subsequent courses that the democratization processes followed.
Still, one might outline a number of common denominators among the democratization processes in Southern Europe which clearly differentiate these cases from transitional processes in Central and Southeast Europe (Elster et al. 1998). These are as follows: (a) no South European transition evolved from a totalitarian, post-totalitarian, or sultanistic regime; (b) in contrast to post-Communist Europe, democratization in Southern Europe focused principally on politics and, only to a secondary extent, on economic reforms; (c) with the relative exception of the ‘nationalities question’ in Spain, problems with ethnic implications were not a major issue during democratic transition in Southern Europe; and (d) in contrast to the mostly peaceful paths towards transition in post-Communist Europe (Romania excluded), the end of non-democratic rule in Southern Europe was often marked by popular upheavals (e.g. Portugal and Greece in 1974). All these discrepancies clearly indicate the uniqueness of the transitional processes in post-Communist Europe. This uniqueness, together with the fact that we have to do with fairly recent political developments, is to account for the intense and ongoing interest among social scientists in the processes of political and social transition within post-Communist settings.

Coming back to Central and Southeast Europe, the processes of political and social transition have differed considerably from one country to the other. They have been subject to the geopolitical environment (e.g. the breakup of Yugoslavia as the most notable case), the political infrastructure as well as the patterns of social stratification inherited from the previous era. Social scientists have schematically outlined the following common features among post-Communist states undergoing a phase of political transition: (a) establishment of a multiparty system and free elections; (b) a political landscape dominated by reform Socialist and ‘new’ political parties; (c) growing differentiation between elite and grass-roots politics; (d) establishment of Western-style constitutional courts; and (e) large-scale replacement of top administrative cadres with powerful links to the old regime (i.e. *lustration*). These reforms at the political level ran parallel to a series of social changes, the most crucial of which were the following: (a) dissolution of the old *nomenklatura* network; (b) attempts towards a ‘reinvention’ of civic society; and (c) formation of new interest-groups and intellectual elites that consist of former *nomenklatura* notables, politically active intellectuals and economic entrepreneurs with no links to the old regime.

Many (sometimes most) of these aspects have been endemic to quite a few transitional processes in post-Communist Europe. Nevertheless, the diversity among the patterns of governance in the Central and Southeast European countries during Communism implies that these countries were likely to pursue different paths towards transition and they did. In Poland, the version of Communist authoritarianism and the limited social pluralism that prevailed in this country facilitated, at an early stage, a pact between the regime moderates and the anti-Communist opposition. Nevertheless, in the long term, certain problems emerged. The semi-presidential constitutional framework that was established did not provide a neutral ground for equilibrium between the President and the Prime Minister. Instead, throughout the 1990s, both actors tried to take advantage of this arrangement in order to maximize their power; thus frequently coming into conflict with each other. Meanwhile, the Roman Catholic Church remained an extra-parliamentary, but still very influential institution, which retained all its prestige. On quite a few occasions, the new Polish elites sought to strike an informal partnership with the Church thus promoting a series of conservative measures in various areas of public life. The aggregate of all these catalysts was a relative impediment to political and social transition in Poland, at least during its early phase (Millard 1994a).

In Hungary, a post-Communist political society had already taken shape, during the 1980s, before the formal end of Communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe. This facilitated the compromise between the regime moderates and the opposition to a greater extent than it was the case elsewhere in the Warsaw pact. The establishment of the novel political map
in Hungary signified a rapid and decisive break from this country’s Communist past. For example, as early as 1989, regime moderates as well as the opposition leadership were to publicly declare the incidents of 1956 no longer as a ‘counter-revolution’ but as a ‘national uprising’. As a result of this drastic, but peaceful, process the societal demands to lustrate former members of the *nomenklatura* and the Communist establishment were kept at a low level in Hungary. This paved the way to a more effective transition (Bozoki *et al.* 1992). Nevertheless, certain developments with regard to the ethnic Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries (mainly Romania, Slovakia and Serbia) occasionally flared nationalistic sentiments at the elite as well as the popular level.

In Czechoslovakia, the chronic state of frozen post-totalitarianism and the ensuing political stagnation caused the Communist regime to peacefully collapse from within (Wheaton and Kavan 1992, Musil 1995). Therefore, in contrast to Poland or Hungary, one might argue that in 1989 a state of political *tabula rasa* came to the fore in Czechoslovakia. What immediately became an issue of vital importance was the redefinition of the relations between the Czech and the Slovak republics. Since no federation-wide parties existed, the new Czech and Slovak elites (led by Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus in Czech Republic and Prime Minister Vladimir Mečiar in Slovakia) staunchly promoted their own standpoints, constantly vetoed each other’s proposals, ultimately causing the federal state to dissolve by the end of 1992. Since the dissolution, the Czech government carried on with its rapid privatization agenda while Vladimir Mečiar favoured a more statist approach to market economy. In Czech Republic, the series of political and economic reforms were implemented in an effective and timely fashion. Meanwhile, a series of allegations over the Mečiar government’s political cronynism and financial mismanagement delayed Slovakia’s path towards transition at its early stage. To these should be added the occasional instances of tension between the Slovak government and the ethnic Hungarian elites.

In Bulgaria, the persistence of a totalitarian model, in combination with Sofia’s tight dependence on Moscow, was a clear indication that the early beginnings of transition in this country would differ from those in Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary (Tzvetkov 1992). As soon as Gorbachev gave the green light for *glasnost* in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian leadership initiated a process that would transform the country’s governance into a post-totalitarian one. The reformed Communist elites proclaimed free elections which they won (in June 1990), thus reconstituting their grip to power. It took quite long for the Union of Democratic Forces to transform itself from an umbrella anti-Communist movement into a proper political party and rival the Bulgarian Socialist Party. However, throughout the 1990s, a viable democratic system functioned in Bulgaria. If there was a major hindrance to political and economic transition in this country, this was corruption and the gradual formation of an informal network which involved the political establishment, the economic administration and organized criminal activity.

In Romania, Ceausescu’s sultanism left no space for a non-violent exit from Communist rule. Nevertheless, the highly personalized and despotic governance under a sultanistic regime can facilitate the ‘capture’ of a popular uprising by groups linked with the old regime (Almond 1992, Rady 1992). Indeed, this is what happened in Romania when President Iliescu and his associates were quick on their feet to appropriate the revolution of 1989 in order to dissociate themselves from accusations of their own involvement in the previous regime, and position themselves as the true defenders of the people’s interests and obtain legitimization for cracking down on any voices of dissent (e.g. the state-sponsored transfer of coal miners to Bucharest in order to crush the student protests in June 1990). The ongoing legacy of sultanism was the main factor to account for the delay in the emergence of a civic society and political pluralism in Romania, during the first half of the 1990s. Another negative catalyst that came to play in the same period was, as in Slovakia, a state of tension between Bucharest and Romania’s ethnic Hungarian elites. Consequently, it took longer for the democratic transition to be completed...
in Romania. As for Albania, Ramiz Alia, who succeeded Enver Hoxha in 1985, carried out a number of substantial reforms that signified a decisive break from his predecessor’s sultanistic rule. This averted the danger of bloodshed but the road to transition in this impoverished and long-isolated corner of the Balkans was long and painful.

Finally, it might be useful to make a brief reference to the Yugoslav case. The high degree of ethnic heterogeneity, as well as the conflicting claims to self-determination and sovereignty, eventually paved the way to Yugoslavia’s contested dissolution through war (1991–1992) (Cohen 1993, Lampe 2001). Slovenia was the only former Yugoslav republic that managed to break away from the crumbling federation with minor damage and, after a series of reforms, become an EU member-state (2004). In Bosnia-Herzegovina, on the contrary, the legacy of the recent conflict still complicates transition. In Serbia and Croatia, the enhancement of the presidential office, during the 1990s, enabled Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman to pursue authoritarian patterns of governance. Since the reincorporation of certain territories into the Croatian state in 1995–1996 (i.e. the former ‘Serbian Republic of Krajina’ and Eastern Slavonia), Croatia gradually entered a normal course to democratization. In Serbia, on the contrary, the interplay of adverse domestic (i.e. political instability and the question of Kosovo) and external (i.e. UN embargo and the NATO bombing of 1999) catalysts delayed the transition process until Milošević’s fall (2000). In this short overview, it is impossible to summarize all aspects of diversity among East European states undergoing transition. Nevertheless, these differences are indicative of the diverse courses that these processes of social and political transition have followed.

**Transition and integration in Central and Southeast Europe: what the experts say**

In the previous sections, I placed this study within a theoretical framework and provided a brief overview of Central and Southeast Europe during transition. This was of essential importance for enhancing our understanding of diverse transitional processes and assessing the social sciences’ literature on this topic since 1989. In the following sections, I proceed into a qualitative assessment of the social science’s literature on post-Communist Central and Southeast Europe with a special emphasis on political science and sociology. As part of this assessment, a distinction is made between the phases of transition and integration. This qualitative approach has relied upon quantitative data from the journal monitoring that I have been carrying out on relevant journals. This monitoring covered 362 articles that were published between 1989 and 2009 and originate from a wide range of academic disciplines (i.e. political science, sociology, international relations and contemporary history).

These articles were mainly extracted from three high-profile thematic journals on post-Communist Europe: *Europe-Asia Studies, Journal of Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, and *East European Politics and Societies*. At this point, one thing should be made clear: My selection of articles, however extensive, in no way does it provide a full overview of the relevant literature but only a carefully shandpicked fraction of it. Moreover, owing to this journal’s principal focus on the post-Soviet space, a relatively lower emphasis was put on articles from *Europe-Asia Studies*.

Before proceeding to the qualitative assessment, it might be useful to provide a quantitative summary of the journal monitoring. Out of the 362 articles in total, those that one might broadly classify under the disciplines of political science and sociology cover the lion’s share, whereas some minor interest has also been demonstrated in the disciplines of contemporary history and international relations (Table 1). At the same time, most authors have been keener on qualitative approaches (Table 2). When it comes to the subjects that have attracted the social scientists’ attention, political transition has been overwhelmingly popular, followed by elite-level politics/party politics, ethnic relations/nationalism and social transition/social.
transformation (Table 3). In accordance with this trend, most articles have concentrated on developments that took place during the 1990s, followed by articles dealing with the integration phase (i.e. 2004 up to date) and a smaller number of articles on the ‘prehistory’ of transition (Tables 4 and 5). As far as the geographic focus is concerned, a proportionally comparable interest in Central Eastern and Southeast Europe has been the case (Table 6). Lastly, it seems that the ongoing processes in Central and Southeast Europe have incurred great interest among social scientists based in Western, especially American, academic institutions (Table 7). Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that a considerable percentage of these academic experts originate from the countries of Central and Southeast Europe themselves.

The social sciences’ literature on post-Communist Europe is internally-divided into works that deal with the phase of transition and works that deal with the phase of integration. When I use the term integration, in this context, I am basically referring to the integration of post-Communist states into European structures. Along this line of argument, the acceptance of a

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
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<tr>
<td>Political science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International relations</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
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<td>Modern history</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
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<th>Subject</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic relations/nationalism</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political transition</td>
<td>83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparative politics</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social transition/social transformation</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral politics</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional administration</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Political history</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign policy</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Political sociology</td>
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<td>Political economy</td>
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<td>Political theory</td>
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<td>Gender in society</td>
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<td>Other subjects</td>
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### Table 4. Theories.

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<tr>
<td>Rational choice</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structuralism/post-structuralism</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constructivism</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>Positivism</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realism/neo-realism</td>
<td>27</td>
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### Table 5. Time periods covered.

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<tr>
<td>Contemporary period (2000–up to date)</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>198</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s–late 1980s</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late nineteenth–early twentieth century</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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### Table 6. Geographic areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic area</th>
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<tr>
<td>Central Eastern and Southeast Europe (general/comparative focus)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary/Czech Republic/Slovakia/Poland/Old Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia/Ukraine/Belarus/ex-USSR</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Baltic States</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Yugoslavia/Bulgaria/Romania/Albania</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other regions/countries</td>
<td>7</td>
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### Table 7. Origin of authors.

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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Eastern Europe</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Europe/The Balkans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia/Ukraine/Belarus</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Baltic States</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other regions/countries</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>372</td>
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</table>
post-Communist state into the European Union roughly signifies the completion of the transitional phase and the beginning of the integration process. Strictly for the purposes of this work, I have nominated the fulfillment of the *EU Copenhagen Criteria* (1993) as an indicator that the democratization process in a post-Communist state has been brought to an end. The *EU Copenhagen Criteria* set the following standards for the acceptance of post-Communist states into the European structures: (a) the proper function of a multiparty democracy (e.g. transparent elections, freedom of press and the right of all citizens to participate in political life); (b) the rule of law (i.e. governmental authority exercised in accordance with documented legislation); (c) respect to human rights, as codified in the *UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *European Convention on Human Rights*; (d) protection of the rights and freedoms of national minorities (in accordance with the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, drafted by the Council of Europe in 1995); (e) the proper function of a competitive market economy; and (f) harmonization of the national legislation with the main body of European Law (i.e. the *acquis communautaire*).5

In compliance with these basic conditions, in 2003–2004, the European Union judged that a number of post-Communist states that had applied for EU-membership fulfilled the necessary prerequisites in order to enter the European structures. Consequently, in May 2004, five post-Communist states from Central Europe (i.e. Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia) plus the three Baltic republics were admitted to the European Union. Since that date, these states have started to actively participate in the bureaucratic and other working procedures of the Union. This has had a simultaneous and ongoing impact on domestic politics and the processes of socioeconomic transformation in all these states. Three years later, Bulgaria and Romania were also granted approval to enter the European Union (January 2007). Correspondingly, social scientists have ceased to concentrate on these post-Communist states’ endeavour to conform to the European standards. Instead, they have started focusing on how these post-Communist states and societies operate inside the European framework; in other words: integration as a living reality. The impending end of *transitology* left a clear implication that the methodological lenses for the study of these states and societies had also modified in order to adapt to the new circumstances. In the following sections, I clarify how this process has unfolded.

**Assessing the political**

Of particular value for the purposes of this study is to place the review of the social sciences’ literature within the framework of the *Society and the Political* project. With specific regard to Political Science articles, my primary concern is to assess the degree to which the social sciences’ literature on Central and Southeast Europe since 1989 has covered the intersection between the *global* (or *European* and *supranational*) and the *regional* in the sociopolitical processes that have been witnessed in this macro-region. This endeavour is set within the broader framework of the *transition versus integration* debate. An additional concern is to assess the extent to which the perspectives of Western and East European social scientists on subjects of major concern differ from or are compatible to each other.

During the early stage of the social sciences’ research on post-Communist Europe, academic experts did not demonstrate a great interest in the intersection between regional political processes and supranational or other external agents. This was particularly the case during the first half of the 1990s. Therefore, one might regard the first wave of Political Science studies on Central and Southeast Europe after Communism as rather ‘inward-looking’. This is quite understandable, taking into consideration that the principal endeavour, by post-Communist governments in this macro-region was to rapidly and radically dismantle the erstwhile dominant...
political reality; its structures and symbols. Nevertheless, these ‘inward-looking’ approaches have been strictly conditional upon the diversity in the paths towards transition which were pursued by different states. Subsequently, different political scientists were likely to put a greater emphasis on different subjects always in relation to the post-Communist country that they focused on.

Starting with early post-Communist Poland, the main bulk of Political Science articles has concentrated on party, elite-level and electoral politics. A number of academic articles have sought to critically outline subjects, such as: the evolution of the Polish party-system since 1989 (Baylis 1994, Millard 1994c, Marody 1995); the voting patterns in the 1991 and 1993 parliamentary elections (Millard 1994b, Wade et al. 1995); and the reshaping of Poland’s administrative bureaucracy since the end of Communist rule (Wiatr 1995). Most of these case-studies have focused on the lack of consensus among the multitude of new political parties that acquired their seats at the post-Communist Sejm (i.e. senate), as well as the ensuing political apathy among a considerable segment of the electorate. This endeavour has been set within the framework of the jurisdiction conflict between the President and the Prime Minister, and the informal nexus that often involved the political establishment and the Roman Catholic Church, as a potent extra-parliamentary agent. Consequently, during the early half of the 1990s, political scientists writing about Poland demonstrated a minor interest in subjects such as ethno-politics or identity-politics (Walicki 1997).

When it comes to early post-Communist Hungary, most political scientists have also been primarily interested in party and elite-level politics (Rona-Tas 1991, Kis 1998). Most academic experts, writing about Hungary in the first years after the formal end of Communist rule, have positioned their approaches along the lines of the argument that the interim phase of soft authoritarianism (mid-late 1980s) facilitated a peaceful and stable passage to democratic transition (Bozoki 1990). Nevertheless, the same specialists have also been quick on their feet to single out the impact of additional catalysts that might have potentially impeded the transitional process. The most notable of these catalysts was the politicization of nationalistic sentiments with regard to certain developments that had an impact on the ethnic Hungarian communities outside Hungary (Bunce and Csanadi 1993). As a result of this intersection of catalysts, a great interest in ethno-politics, alongside elite-level politics, has been the case among political scientists dealing with Hungary during the first half of the 1990s.

A relatively comparable interplay between an interest in elite-level politics and political research with ethnic implications has also been the case with political scientists writing about the former Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, there exists a qualitative difference in comparison to the Hungarian case: with regard to the former Czechoslovak space, it seems that, since the ‘velvet divorce’ of 1993, political research on institutional politics represents the lion’s share as far as the Czech Republic is concerned (Dangerfield 1997, Turnovec 1997, Grzymala-Busse 1998). When it comes to Slovakia, though, an increasing number of experts started to deal with case-studies that one might classify under the theoretical label of ethno-politics (Wolchik 1994, Carpenter 1997). This is understandable, always considering the political employment of nationalist populism by Vladimir Mečiar and the triangular nexus of occasional friction that involved Bratislava, Budapest, and Slovakia’s ethnic Hungarians during the first half of the 1990s.

Moving to early post-Communist Romania, the landscape with regard to Political Science research is particularly diverse. Romanian and Western academic specialists have demonstrated an equal interest in subjects as varied as institutional politics, party and electoral politics, ethno-politics and political research with identity implications. This heterogeneity is not hard to grasp. A plenitude of topics such as the ambiguity surrounding the 1989 revolution (Roper 1994, Siani-Davies 1996), institutional fragility (Mihut 1994), as well as the necessity
to redefine the relations between the Hungarian minority and the Romanian state (Craiutu 1995), rendered early post-Communist Romania a goldmine among political scientists with an interest in Central and Southeast Europe. To these one might also add the longstanding academic interest in Communist as well as pre-Communist Romania.

On the contrary, a small number of case-studies have dealt with early post-Communist Bulgaria (Mellone 1996, McGregor 1996) and an even smaller number with early post-Communist Albania. This occurrence is not hard to comprehend, taking into consideration the lack of interest as well as the limited ability to carry out research in these two countries (especially Albania) during the Communist era. Therefore, no proper foundations were there to build upon. Lastly, Yugoslavia’s contested dissolution and protracted ethnic conflict provided an oasis for many specialists engaged in the field of ethno-politics. At an initial stage, domestic and Western academics started to elaborate topics such as the political dimension of ethnic cleansing and other war practices (Sell 1999), and conflicting nationalist narratives and their institutionalization within the ex-Yugoslav space (Pusić 1992, Žanić 1995). Meanwhile, and especially since the mid-1990s, a greater number of political scientists would express an interest in topics such as the (frequently conflicting) endeavours by the ex-Yugoslav elites to draw the new constitutional maps for their states (Khan 1995), and the necessity to draft novel proposals for the regulation of questions with ethnic or minority implications (Varady 1992).

As previously stated, the early phase of Political Science research on post-Communist Central and Southeast Europe was rather ‘inward-looking’ and academic experts did not demonstrate any great interest in the intersection between regional processes and supranational institutions. This was the case with home-based and Western academics alike. However, this does not mean that there was no interest whatsoever in intra-regional or inter-state comparisons. On quite the contrary, a notable percentage of regional experts on early post-Communist Eastern Europe carried out comparative research on elite-level/institutional politics and on a rich variety of secondary subjects. The empirical subjects of major concern were comparative studies between cases of negotiated and contested transitions (Friedheim 1993); the evolution of multiparty systems in different post-Communist polities (Agh 1995, Cirtautas 1995); and the interplay between democratic institutions and the politicization of nationalism (Pusić 1994, Szabo 1994). Especially towards the end of the 1990s, a number of regional experts proceeded in an evaluation of the first decade after Communism. These experts demonstrated a particular interest in subjects such as the ideological foundations of Real Socialism, how this operated within different settings and the political heritage that it disseminated throughout Central and Southeast Europe (Mahr and Nagle 1995, Pop-Eleches 1999), and the endeavours by the post-Communist elites to assess this heritage, dismantle it and elaborate viable political alternatives for their states and societies (Janos 1996, Naimark 1999).

The second half of the 1990s was a watershed for regional specialists in post-Communist politics. During that period, a number of states in post-Communist Europe expressed more emphatically their formal interest in becoming associated with the European Union. This had a direct impact on the methodological lenses employed by social scientists for the assessment of the political developments in this macro-region. In other words, their focuses gradually started to shift from discourses concentrating on internal transitional processes towards discourses that sought to place internal processes within a transnational (or supranational) European framework. This signified the early stage of academic approaches that were no longer and exclusively interested in transition as such, but in European integration. During this early phase, regional experts made an internal distinction which consisted of three layers or ‘gears’: (a) states that were in a relatively better position to become associated with the European structures (i.e. the four Visegrád states plus the three Baltic republics); (b) states impeded by a variety of internal hindrances such as dysfunctional institutions and/or organized crime (i.e. Romania and Bulgaria);
and (c) states where an intersection between adverse domestic and external catalysts signified that these states had been, and still are, undergoing different forms of transition (namely the Western Balkan area). Correspondingly, the secondary subjects that occupied political scientists dealing with each of these layers were qualitatively different to each other.

Starting with the first layer, so to speak, the main topics of concern have been the combined impact of EU enlargement upon state-sovereignty, governing institutions and democratization in Central Eastern Europe (Agh 1999, Moravscik and Vachudova 2003); the implementation of regionalization in Central Eastern Europe, in accordance with the Council of Europe and EU guidelines (Brusis 2005, O’Dwyer 2006); and the endeavour to harmonize domestic minority policies with EU standards (Tesser 2003, Deets 2006). Meanwhile, the second wave of Political Science research on post-Communist Europe saw an increase in academic interest in the countries of Romania and Bulgaria. This interest became manifest through case-studies that concentrated on the perspectives of Bulgarian and Romanian political parties on their countries’ prospects for accession to the EU (Spirova 2008a, 2008b); the persistence of negative catalysts such as authoritarian tendencies (Romania) and corruption (Bulgaria) (Gledhill 2005, Noutcheva and Bechev 2008); and the even greater necessity to harmonize domestic legislation on minority issues with EU standards (Csérgo 2002, Rechel 2008). Lastly, regional experts on the Western Balkans demonstrated a particular interest in subjects such as the interaction among regional governments, supranational agencies and international organizations within the broader framework of securitization in the post-Yugoslav space (Grillot 2008, Söberg 2008), and comparative approaches to democratization processes in the post-Yugoslav space since the Dayton Agreement (1995) (Turkes and Gökgoz 2006, Alexander 2008).

In an overall assessment, the second wave of Political Science research on post-Communist Europe managed to build successfully upon the foundations inherited from the initial phase. Instead of maintaining an ‘inward-looking’ disposition and/or engaging into comparisons at a strictly regional scale, academic specialists advanced one step forward with their endeavours: they moved from particularistic case-studies with an East European regional focus towards macro-level approaches which aimed at assessing regional developments as parts of a wider process with further-reaching repercussions; namely European integration. As already made clear, my journal monitoring, however extensive, represents just a tiny fraction of the entire research that social scientists have been carrying out on post-Communist Central and Southeast Europe. Nevertheless, this small fraction is sufficient enough to demonstrate that regional experts, regardless of their individual perspectives, have been successful in singling out a number of difficulties and potential perils in the way towards integration. This has been the case with subject-areas such as institutional reforms and the management of minority issues. Regional experts have demonstrated that the pressures on the New European states to conform to EU norms have often been more intense than those exerted on other European states during earlier waves of enlargement. This has been promptly singled out as a rough indicator of double-standards and potential source of friction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ EU member-states (Bruszt and Stark 2003, Johns 2003). As a matter of fact, academics originating from East European countries themselves have been quicker on their feet to detect and underline this discrepancy. Nevertheless, Western and East European researchers alike have equally pointed out certain institutional and other weaknesses that need to be dealt with, so that the states in the region can pursue their paths within European structures in harmony. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to assert that, with the relative exception of research on the Western Balkans, the first decade of the new millennium saw the gradual end of transitology. As the second jubilee after 1989 approached, regional experts did not reiterate the same subjects that occupied them during the late 1990s. On quite the contrary, a variety of political scientists have underlined the necessity to elaborate new theoretical frameworks that would replace
transitology (Kubicek 2000, Wiarda 2002). This serves as an additional and clearer indication that empirical research on Central and Southeast European politics no longer functions as a distinctively separate area but it becomes more and more integrated into the wider network of European studies.

Assessing the social

In the previous section, I provided an overview of the Political Science research on post-Communist Europe from 1989 up to date. These processes at the elite and governmental levels had simultaneous and direct repercussions on regional societies. Of particular value for the objectives of this study is to, once again, place it within the premises of the Society and the Political project. Therefore, my primary concern in this section is to assess the degree to which sociological research on Central and Southeast Europe actually enlightens us about the intersection between the global and the regional within post-Communist social settings. As has been the case with political scientists, sociological research on post-Communist Europe has also been subject to the internal distinction between discourses focusing on transition and discourses concentrating on integration (or, perhaps in this case, reintegration).

In addition to this, the early phase of sociological studies on post-Communist Europe has been equally ‘inward-looking’. Western and home-based sociologists alike shifted their lenses towards internal developments and did not seem to be particularly keen on positioning post-Communist societies under transition inside a wider European or global framework. This, once again, is quite understandable considering that the interplay between political transition and social transformation in post-Communist states could provide plenty of research material in itself. The subjects that seem to have occupied regional specialists during the first half of the 1990s are compatible to the parallel processes at the governing structures. Correspondingly, some commonplace research areas have been: the impact of systemic transformations upon patterns of class stratification in post-Communist Europe (Zagorski 1994, Slomczynski and Shabad 1996); the welfare state and the prospects for restitution of private property (Inglot 1995, Kozminski 1997); the endeavours towards dissolving the nomenklatura nexuses and consolidating civic societies (Bernhard 1996, Vassilev 1999); and the social dynamics of institutions like the Church (Ramet 1991).

As has also been the case with political scientists, the sociopolitical specificities of each post-Communist state exerted a definitive impact upon the thematic areas covered by academic specialists. Therefore, sociologists dealing with different countries were likely to demonstrate a greater interest in different topics. For instance, sociologists working on Romania were likely to demonstrate a greater interest in the social dimensions of the persistence of authoritarian tendencies at the governmental level (Carey 1995, Kligman 1990). Meanwhile, sociologists with a post-Yugoslav focus wrote about subjects such as the endeavours by the post-Yugoslav elites to shape novel collective identities and communicate them to the grass-roots level (Greenberg 1996).

What has been of particular significance is that regional experts started to work extensively on subject-areas not particularly well dealt with, prior to the transition processes. Most

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important, a vivid interest in sociological research with gender implications came to the academic fore. An increasing number of Western and East European sociologists started to elaborate themes such as women in politics and the interrelation between unemployment and gender in post-Communist Europe (Fodor 1997, Graham and Regulska 1997) (Table 8). Another thematic area of secondary appeal has been the attempts by East European sociologists to produce short histories of their countries’ academic establishments and intelligentsias as a whole (before as well as after 1989 – e.g. Daskalov 1995, Tarifa 1996). Finally, the second half of the 1990s also saw various attempts to summarize and evaluate the social and cultural impact of 1989 upon post-Communist Europe from a comparative angle (Todorova 1992, Sztompka 1996).

The subject-areas that attracted the attention of regional experts since the second half of the 1990s and the dawn of the second millennium did not differ substantially from the focal areas of interest during the early 1990s. On quite the contrary, one might speak of nearly a linear continuity, especially with regard to the study of subjects such as gender in the society (Fodor 2006, Glass 2008); property restitution and other aspects of societal transformation (Vecernik 1999, Stan 2006); the persistence of nationalism as a component of daily social discourse (Fox 2004, Clark 2008); and the contribution of non-governmental agents towards the consolidation of civic societies (Cellarius and Staddon 2002). Nevertheless, the period after the second half of the 1990s saw a greater academic interest in sociological research on marginalized groups (most commonly the East European Roma) as well as the emergence of various forms of racist violence in post-Communist Europe (Barany 2000, Mudde 2005).

A number of studies and experts have spoken about the Europeanization process of post-Communist societies in Central and Southeast Europe which, as they contend, has run parallel to the Europeanization of the political order. Personally, I disagree with the very use of the term Europeanization within social contexts. For instance, one might speak of the endeavours by post-Communist states to restructure and refashion their governmental institutions, so that they could conform to EU standards. Such endeavours might be regarded as a step towards the Europeanization of the political order inside this macro-region. Always in relation to the political context, the term Europeanization might also be used as a synonym to European integration. Nevertheless, the employment of Europeanization with reference to the transformation of Central and Southeast European societies as such is not a valid option. This is precisely because these societies have always been parts of the European continent, whether from a geographic, cultural, or historical perspective.

Central and Southeast European societies have participated in nearly all the historical, political and sociocultural processes that have shaped Europe’s multifaceted identity through the ages. Therefore, to regard half a century of Communist rule as a historical experience that utterly and definitively alienated the societies in this macro-region from the rest of the Continent might be rather exaggerated. The 50 years of Communist rule have beyond doubt shaped specific sociopolitical mindsets and popular attitudes throughout Central and Southeast Europe. This becomes particularly evident, to varied degrees, in the political/electoral and other attitudes of the older generations. Still, this does not provide sufficient material for the formulation of quasi-orientalist discourses which aim at erecting walls between post-Communist Europe and the rest of the Continent in the dawn of the second millennium. In an overall assessment, then, it might be more appropriate to speak of the reintegration of post-Communist societies into the European whole instead of their remodelling in accordance with (Western) European patterns.

With specific regard to sociological research, this reintegration process has recently provided regional experts with a rich variety of new subject-areas. A number of sociologists have started writing about topics such as the social integration of migrants from Eastern Europe in ‘old’ European countries (Culic 2008, White and Ryan 2008). The simultaneous formation of small
immigrant communities in East European urban centres (e.g. Prague’s Vietnamese and Belgrade’s Chinese) is likely to become an additional area of academic interest in the immediate future. In a few words, it has only been until quite recently that sociologists have sought to place the (East European) regional within the European and the global more emphatically. Nevertheless, this endeavour has opened brand new and encouraging prospects for the expansion of comparative research on ‘new’ and ‘old’ European societies. As has also been the case with Political Science research, thematic studies on Central and Southeast European societies are becoming more and more integrated into the wider network of European studies.

Instead of a conclusion

The transitional and integrative processes in post-Communist Central and Southeast Europe have kept the acute interest of the international academic community alive up-to-date. This occurrence is not very hard to comprehend, always considering the uniqueness of these processes together with the fact that we have to do with fairly recent sociopolitical developments. In all of this, a crucial detail should be kept in mind: these processes have been qualitatively different from one country to the other. In other words, they have been subject to the geopolitical circumstances, the political infrastructure, as well as the patterns of social stratification inherited from the Communist era. With specific regard to research in the fields of political science and sociology, this has been subject to an internal temporal distinction between the phase of transition and the phase of integration. The acceptance of a post-Communist state within the bounds of the European Union roughly signifies the completion of the transitional stage and the beginning of the integration process.

As far as political science studies on post-Communist Central and Southeast Europe are concerned, their early phase did not demonstrate a great interest in the intersection between regional processes and supranational or other external agents. In a slightly different phraseology, academic specialists did not seem greatly interested in positioning the East European regional inside the matrix of the European or global. This occurrence is not particularly hard to grasp, considering the principal endeavour by post-Communist governments to drastically deconstruct the erstwhile dominant political reality; its structures and symbols. This, in itself, could provide vast resources for research. Therefore, one might regard the first wave of Political Science studies on Central and Southeast Europe after Communism as rather ‘inward-looking’. However, this does not imply that there was no interest whatsoever in intra-regional or inter-state comparisons – especially in the subject-areas of elite-level and institutional politics. As the first jubilee after 1989 approached, a number of political scientists proceeded in a critical evaluation of the first decade after Communism; Real Socialism’s heritage and the attempts to assess and deconstruct it. The second half of the 1990s and the advent of the second millennium was a turning point for Political Science research on post-Communist Eastern Europe. Since then, academic experts gradually shifted their lenses from discourses concentrating on domestic transitional processes to discourses that aimed at placing these processes inside a wider European context. This meant that, from that point onwards, regional political developments were judged not solely from a ‘parochial’ angle but as parts of a broader process with further-reaching repercussions; namely European integration. Correspondingly, a growing number of regional specialists stressed the necessity to elaborate new theoretical frameworks that would replace transitology.

When it comes to sociological research, the use of the term Europeanization with reference to the transformation of Central and Southeast European societies as such is not a valid option. This is simply because these societies have always formed part of the European milieu, whether on geographic, cultural, or historical grounds. Therefore, instead of formulating quasi-orientalist discourses that separate these societies from the rest of Europe, it might be wiser to speak
of reintegration. This term refers to varied social processes which aim at reintegrating post-Communist societies within the European whole, instead of their remodelling in accordance with (Western) European patterns. This reintegration process (or processes) has recently endowed sociologists with a wide array of new subject areas. This, in turn, opens brand new and encouraging opportunities for the expansion of comparative studies on ‘old’ and ‘new’ European societies. As an epilogue, one might argue that thematic research on post-Communist Central and Southeast Europe, whether in the field of political science or sociology, no longer stands as a distinctively independent area but it becomes more and more integrated into the wider network of European studies.

Notes

1. Society and the Political is an ongoing project at Södertörns Högskola (Stockholm, Sweden) with a regional focus on transitional processes in post-Communist Europe. For a short outline of the project, see http://webappl.web.sh.se/C125702700229BA0/0/A4E0C68D5629E04FC1257379003D0B78 and the Södertörns Högskola website, at: http://www.sh.se
2. For further information, see Linz and Stepan (1996).

References


