



REVISTA INCLUSIONES

HOMENAJE A ALEKSANDAR IVANOV KATRANZHEV
Y NIKOLAY POPOV

Revista de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales

Volumen 7 . Número Especial

Enero / Marzo

2020

ISSN 0719-4706

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THE GREAT CHANGE IN CENTRAL EUROPE IN 1989

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Fecha de Recepción: 11 de octubre de 2019 – **Fecha Revisión:** 28 de octubre de 2019

Fecha de Aceptación: 19 de diciembre de 2019 – **Fecha de Publicación:** 01 de enero de 2020

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present the mechanism by which Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia rejected the Soviet type system in 1989 and started building up a democratic country with an active market economy. It reveals the impact of Soviet *perestroika* on political process in the three Central European countries at the end of the 1980s. It considers in a comparative aspect the main factors that influence the realization of change - the communist elite, the economic situation of each country and the activity of the opposition. It is emphasized that the transformation in all three countries was initiated after the “Round Table” negotiations, which largely predetermined the peaceful nature of the transition. The rejection of communist regimes gives them a sense of return to Europe, which is why they define the difficult transition as the “Road to Europe”.

Keywords

Velvet revolution – *Perestroika* – Reforms – Central Europe – Poland – Hungary – Czechoslovakia

Para Citar este Artículo:

Ivanova, Diana. The great change in Central Europe in 1989. Revista Inclusiones Vol: 7 num Especial Enero-Marzo (2020): 223-243.

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Introduction

The unexpected end of “state socialism” in Europe and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc 30 years ago give the British political scientist Timothy Garton Ash a chance to call 1989 “the year of miracles”. The end of the bipolar system of international relations and the elimination of artificially created barriers on the Old Continent have opened up new opportunities for countries that, for more than four decades, have been deprived of the right to determine their own political and economic system. They reject the failed Soviet-type model and elect parliamentary democracy and a free market economy. The East Europeans strongly hope that the change will overcome the backlog of Western states and indeed respect human rights and freedoms. Today, idealism has passed since the beginning of the transition, and objective assessments show both the indisputable progress and the realization of the set goals - joining the Euro-Atlantic structures, as well as the certain disappointment with the high social cost and the serious problem of corruption.

During the transition, the group of three Central European countries - Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia - stood out, which were able to more easily meet the requirements and earlier than other Soviet satellites to achieve their goals. The reasons for this have a logical explanation. On the one hand, one must take into account the peculiarities of their historical heritage, which after World War II distinguishes them in a Central European model of socialism, whose differences from the other two models - the Soviet and the Balkan ones, are mainly of a civilizational nature. The spiritual closeness of Central European countries to the West - the Catholic religion, the general scientific and cultural development, the influence of the Enlightenment, and the subsequent development of positivism - creates a sense of individualism, which is why the Stalinist model is most difficult to implement in these countries. This also predetermined attempts to resist the imposed Soviet political and economic system - the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the Prague Spring in 1968 and periodic protests in Poland, culminating in the creation of the independent Solidarity trade union in 1980. On the other hand, the reasons for the faster European integration of the so-called 'excellent countries' should also be sought at the start of the change, so in the following lines I will try to find out how the system of change is being implemented in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, what is common among them and what is specific to the individual countries in the breakdown of the compromised “state socialism”.

Key factors for change

Like every turn, the 1989 one is the result of the simultaneous action of both external and internal conditions. The Soviet *perestroika*, started by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, is the major foreign policy factor that made transformation possible. It changes the international environment and eliminates the dependence of satellite countries on the USSR, thereby allowing the natural development of political and socio-economic processes in them. Due to the economic backwardness of the West, the Soviet Union ended its financial and commodity subsidies for its satellites, resulting in the logical condition of the Communist Party monopoly on power in those countries. This refusal by the Brezhnev Doctrine (for the limited sovereignty of Eastern European countries) eliminates the threat of Soviet troops interfering with any manifestation of independence that is not consistent with the center of Moscow. As the British historian from Oxford University Timothy Garton Ash writes, *Deprived of the Kalashnikov crutch, the communist*

*elite could not but fail because it had nothing else to hold it on to power.*¹ The new policy of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) removes the external constraints on democratization in the Eastern Bloc and makes it possible to break the tension that has been generated for decades.

After *perestroika* puts Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia under equal foreign policy conditions, internal factors are crucial for the development of their processes, the main ones being the ruling communist elite, the highly dependent on its activity economic condition of the respective country and the activity of the opposition. They are interconnected, each of them affecting the socio-political development of different Central European countries to varying degrees.

Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia are starting to make changes from different starting points. Their political and economic structures are not the same. Despite the uniformity that the imposition of the Soviet model leads to, there are some peculiarities in the individual countries. They were more pronounced in the late 1980s and influenced the beginning of the transition. Although coalitions recognizing the leading role of the Communist parties are governed in all three countries, the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) has the least influence in society. At the end of the 1980s, 5.8% of the population were its members, with the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) uniting 7.7% and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz) 10.9% of the citizens². Together with its satellites, Wojciech Jaruzelski's Party has failed to cope with the country's political crisis. This has led to its erosion and to the transformation of the independent Solidarity trade union into a mass opposition movement, under the pressure of which democratic changes are taking place in Poland.

The activity of the Hungarian communist elite, which periodically undertakes reforms to stabilize the system, determines its leading position at the beginning of the transition, as well as the lack of social tension in the country. It belongs to the initiative to lead the process of democratization before the change of course in the USSR. Gorbachev's *perestroika* simply "legalizes" attempts at transformation and leads to their radicalization.

Unlike the Polish and especially the Hungarian ruling authorities in Czechoslovakia, they find themselves completely unable to respond to the changed situation in the Eastern Bloc. This led to the rapid collapse of the CPCz in the fall of 1989, under pressure from the largest mass protests in the camp, to its total removal from power, and to the conversion of its successor Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM,) and the Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS) in the secondary political forces. The economic performance of the three Central European countries also has an impact on the transition. The most industrialized of them is Czechoslovakia (47.9% of the working-age population is employed in industry and construction), followed by Hungary (38% vs. 20.4%) and Poland (37.4% vs. 27.7%)³. The economic development has a direct impact on the standard of living of the population, as well as the choice of economic mechanisms through which to make the transition to a market economy.

¹ T. G. Ash, „Nie narodat”, Izbor num prolet-lyato (1993): 3.

² Vandich, Tsenata na svobodata, Istoriyata na Iztochna Tsentralna Evropa ot Srednovekovieto do dnes: monograph (Sofiya: Otvoreno obshtestvo, 1999): 324.

³ L. Berov, Ikonomikata na Balgariya i bivshite sotsialisticheski strani: Desetiletie po-kasno (1989-1999): monograph. (Sofiya: Planeta – 3, 1999): 43.

There are also differences in the activity of the opposition in the three Central European countries. The Solidarity independent trade union, legally created after the 1980 strikes and banned after the martial law in Poland on December 13, 1981, forces the Polish ruling elite to undergo the most serious evolution in the Eastern bloc - from martial law to the "round mass". Unlike Poland, where the economic crisis is turning the opposition into a driver of change, Hungary's economic problems are motivating the reformers of the MSzMP to deepen the country's democratization processes. Freed from the tutelage of Moscow they find themselves more flexible than their counterparts in the region and, by the end of the 1980s, direct changes in their desired direction. The relatively tolerant attitude of the authorities towards the opposition, on the one hand, dampens its activity and, to a large extent, ensures social peace and peaceful transition, and on the other, enables it to prepare for its new role in society.

At a time when genuine attempts for national emancipation were being undertaken in Poland and Hungary, "normalization" ruled in Czechoslovakia. It is the only one of the three Central European socialist states to remain in the group of "hardliners" who disapprove of Gorbachev's *perestroika*. The systematic crackdown on the internationally recognized opposition does not allow it to take the lead in democratic change. With its refusal to make any changes in the country, except for the mandatory (mainly personnel), the most conservative regime in the region is doomed to the fastest collapse. Events in neighboring countries help society overcome its atomization and, in just a few weeks, make the most radical changes in Eastern Europe.

The successful final of the "long hike" for the Poles

Poland, the most rebellious of the Soviet satellites, is the first to begin the transformation. The society adapts extremely hard to the imposed political and economic system, which is the cause of the periodic crises in the post-war development of the country - 1956, 1968, 1970-1971, 1976, 1980-1981. Pressed by the independent Solidarity trade union, the authorities began reforms before the *perestroika* began, and the change of the course in Moscow gives them the opportunity to deepen them. The "Round Table", held from February 6 to April 5, 1989, with the participation of the ruling and the opposition during the church mediation, is a breakthrough in the Soviet-type system⁴. For the first time, power and opposition sit on the negotiating table. The agreements reached provide for gradual political and economic changes within the framework of democratic socialism. It is decided to build the future political system on the basis of political pluralism, freedom of speech, democratic order in the formation of all governing bodies, independence of the judiciary, strong local self-government. The most urgent reforms are the implementation of the principle of trade union and public pluralism; recognition of the right of the opposition to legal activity; the new law on public associations; launching legal and judicial reforms; the extension of freedom of expression; substantial democratization of the principles for the election of representative bodies. The real division of powers into executive, legislative and judicial is becoming the guarantor of democratic change. The creation of a second chamber of parliament – the Senate, as well as the establishment of a presidential

⁴ At the end of August 1988, when Poland was hit by another strike wave due to the severe economic crisis, Interior Minister Czesław Kiszczak announced the readiness of the authorities to negotiate with *representatives from various public and professional spheres*. Although it does not directly mention the name Solidarity, it is clear to everyone who can be a major partner of the governing. A condition set by the two countries to start negotiations on the Round Table (with the August 31 consultations) is to abate the strikes. Lech Wałęsa managed to complete it in a few days. A. Paczkowski, *Pół stoletia dějin Polska 1939-1989: monograph* (Praha: Academia, 2000): 348-349.

institution with great powers – is envisaged. Negotiating parties reach an agreement that allows party reformers to control the reforms. According to him, the governing coalition (PUWP, United Rural Party, Democratic Party and secular Catholic organizations) should receive 65% of the seats in the Sejm, with the remaining 35% left for free in two rounds. The 100 Senate seats will be fully democratically distributed. It is envisaged to form a coalition government with the PUWP chairperson after the elections. The first president should be elected by the two houses of parliament and the next by universal suffrage⁵.

Although the decisions adopted do not overcome the contradictions between the main forces in the Polish society, they clearly express the will for change that will provide the country with a better future. In order to make this change possible, the two main negotiating parties are rebating their previous positions, which justifies the agreements being called (semi-ironically and semi-critically) the “deal of the century”⁶. From a distance of time, the famous dissident and publicist Adam Michnik defines it as the most sensible political action in the Polish history in the twentieth century⁷. With the unprecedented for the socialist camp agreement on the sharing of power between the Communists and the opposition, the “round table” becomes a model for the other states behind the “Iron Curtain” (except for Romania), which reject state socialism.

Compromise solutions, on the one hand, represent political surrender for PUWP and, on the other, give it a chance to continue to exist and even to maintain the leading role in government (albeit for a brief period). The “Round Table” is defined as *the space where the “transfer” of legitimacy is to take place* - the opposition guarantees the communists that there will be a compliance with the constitutional order in exchange for its integration into the institutional system⁸. Along with its legitimization, Solidarity was given the opportunity to run in truly democratic elections four years later. The third participant in the conversations, the church, does not make concessions in favor of either party. For it, the negotiations are a confirmation of its own power and authority in society.

The prerequisites for real pluralism in the Polish public life, created by the decisions of the “Round Table”, are legalized in the parliamentary elections of 4 and 18 June 1989.

The first semi-free elections in Eastern Europe played the role of plebiscite “for or against state socialism”. The electoral vote strongly rejects the failed system, which underscores its illegitimacy. The catastrophic loss of the ruling coalition⁹ created conditions for the opposition to come to power four years earlier than foreseen at the “round table”,

⁵ Porozumienia Okrągłego Stolu: docum (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo NSZZ Solidarność Regionu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, 1989), 10-12

⁶ A. Paczkowski, Pół stuleci dějin Polska 1939-1989...

⁷ A. Mihnik, Vazkresenata nezavisimost i demonite na nezhnata revolyutsiya. 1989-1999 Deset godini po-kasno. Urotsi za badeshteto: sb. nauch. tr (Sofiya, Fondatsiya “d-r Zhelyu Zhelev”, 1999): 287.

⁸ G. Mink, Le paradoxe du compromis historique. La Grande secousse: Europe de l' Est 1989 – 1990 / sous la dir. de Pierre Kende et Aleksander Smolar: compil. de la recher. scient. (Paris : Press du CNRS, 1990), 55.

⁹ The Solidarity Civic Committee sends 260 of its representatives to the country's 560-member Legislature, 99 of them in the Senate and 161 in the Sejm. The only non-Solidarity senator is the big entrepreneur, the non-party Henryk Stokłosa, who has invested a lot of money in the pre-election campaign. The 65% (or 299) seats reserved for the Sejm MPs are distributed as follows: 173 for the PUWP, 76 for the United Rural Party, 27 for the Democratic Party and 23 for the three Christian associations participating in the coalition.

which makes its arrangements meaningless. The Polish society votes on the confidence of individuals who have proven in the period of prolonged illegal struggle that they can be their leader on the path of democracy.

In the summer of 1989, a political crisis unfolds in Poland, the key to which is the transfer of power into the hands of the opposition. This crisis has been resolved through a new “deal”, on the principle of *Your President, our Prime Minister*¹⁰, once again violating the April agreements. While in the election of the head of state, Solidarity leaders accept the candidacy of general Wojciech Jaruzelski and even campaign in his favor, reaching an agreement on the composition of the future government is proving to be an extremely difficult task that Polish politicians have failed to cope with for months. After many consultations, the opposition succeeded in imposing its proposal and in September the first non-communist government in the Soviet bloc, led by Lech Wałęsa Tadeusz Mazowiecki¹¹ was approved.

The formation of a multiparty cabinet in Poland predetermines the path of development of the country. It must eliminate the remnants of the old regime, since much of the nomenclature remains in place. However, the first steps in this direction are too moderate, because the “Polish experiment” remains the only one in Eastern Europe until November 1989. It is also significant that it was achieved through a compromise solution and national reconciliation, which presupposes refusing revenge on yesterday's adversaries. As Adam Michnik points out, *Tadeusz Mazowiecki's philosophy of government is based on continuous but cautious reforms ... Mazowiecki wanted to neutralize all social conflicts that are naturally a consequence of transformation*¹².

The most serious test for the Polish society is undoubtedly the overcoming of the economic crisis (food prices have increased by 312.6% since 1988). To cope with huge inflation, the new finance minister is developing an economic reform program known as the

“Balcerowicz plan”.¹³ Polish economists are trying to meet the conditions of international financial institutions so they can get new loans. To this end, a government savings program is developed that is in line with the orthodox macroeconomics: price stabilization in the coming months; drastic reduction of the budget deficit; strict control over credit expansion and interest rates; reaching a homogeneous and realistic exchange rate

¹⁰ On July 3, 1989, an article by the Editor-in-Chief Adam Michnik, entitled *Your President, our Prime Minister*, appeared in the Solidarity newspaper Gazeta Viborcha.

¹¹ The new government stands next to dissident Jacek Kuroń as Minister of Labor and Social Welfare and General Czesław Kiszczak, who continues to lead the interior ministry. The PUWP also retains the Ministry of Defense, led by General Florian Siwicki, but quits the Foreign Ministry in favor of the non-party professor of international law Krzysztof Skubiszewski. The last of the ministries – the one of finance was headed by Solidarity economist Leszek Balcerowicz. The formation of the new government was also supported by the USSR. Two days after Tadeusz Mazowiecki's appointment as prime minister in Warsaw, KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov arrives. The conversation he has with the new Prime Minister in the presence of General Czesław Kiszczak, reassures the “big brother” and the Polish transition receives his “blessing”. Georges Mink, *Le paradoxe du compromis historique...* 57.

¹² A. Mihnik, *Vazkresenata nezavisimost i demonite...* 290.

¹³ It provides for the privatization of industry; liberalization of existing markets and introduction of capital markets; sale of real estate and industrial property by the state to private persons, including reliefs for foreigners. Georges Mink, *Le paradoxe du compromis historique...* 59.

and exchange of gold; limiting wage increases.¹⁴ Restrictive politics inevitably leads to some disappointment with the reforms, which was also evident in the election of head of state in late 1990, when Lech Wałęsa won the second round.

The processes, which began in 1989 in Poland, initiated the chain reaction that led to the collapse of state socialism in the Eastern part of the Old Continent. Their course is influenced by both the fact that the country makes a breakthrough in the Soviet bloc and is the first to take the “road to Europe” and the dire economic situation inherited from the previous period. The first factor determines the compromise nature of the agreements reached in April 1989. The “Round Table” agreements open the way for major change, but also determine the way in which it will be implemented. The reform of the system begins gradually, with constant “deals” between the ruling and the opposition, which is why the British analyst Timothy Garton Ash introduces the term “refolution” for the change of the system in Poland.¹⁵ The fall of communism on a European scale gives the Poles a sense of slowdown. Preserving consensus requires an urgent acceleration of change. The “Refolution” must give way to revolutionary transformations. After that happened, in 1990 the country successfully completed the first phase of the transition to democracy and a market economy. Due to the influence of the second factor, economic reforms have serious negative consequences, resulting in a significant decrease in the standard of living of the population. Finance Minister Balcerowicz's “shock therapy” proved successful and in the late 1990s Poland, the only former Soviet satellite, was in a better economic state than during the socialist period.

The end of “cadarism” in Hungary

Hungary, perceived in the West as *the most cheerful hut in the socialist camp*¹⁶, also belongs to the group of sincere followers of the *perestroika*. Guided by a principle *whoever is not against us is for us*, the authorities undertake limited reforms that aim to stabilize the system and provide some compensation for the crushing of the 1956 revolution.¹⁷ The economic crisis that has plagued the country since the beginning of the 1980s is a catalyst for change. Hungarian leaders, accustomed to adapting to changing conditions by pursuing certain reforms, again adhered to this political line. It is the ruling elite of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) that is the main driver of change in the country. The initiative to lead the process of democratization before the change of course in the USSR belongs to it. Gorbachev's *perestroika* simply “legalized” the attempts at transformation and led to their radicalization. The other factor in the breakdown of socialism is the opposition movements. Unlike Solidarity in Poland, they did not have such

¹⁴ Ignatsiy Saks, Polsha i Braziliya: borbata e edna i sashta: noviyat katehizis. Sled totalitarizma nakade: Problemi na prehoda kam pazarna ikononika i grazhdansko obshtestvo (Sofiya: Alternativi, 1991), 249.

¹⁵ T. G. Ash, “Revolution: The Springtime of Two Nations”, The New York Review of Books num 36 Vol: 10 (1989) <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1989/06/15/revolution-the-springtime-of-two-nations/>

¹⁶ Kende, L' énigme de Gorbatchev ou le préalable. La Grande secousse: Europe de l' Est 1989-1990/ sous la direction de Pierre Kende et Aleksander Smolar: compil. de la recher. scient (Paris: Press du CNRS, 1990), 27.

¹⁷ Faced with the task of restoring the lost confidence of the Hungarians in MSzMP, in 1967 the János Kádár's government devised a comprehensive economic reform program. As a result of this reform, a new, complex structure of the Hungarian society is emerging. New groups also raise the issue of political pluralism.

a strong influence among the Hungarian society and intensified their activity in the second half of the 1980s due to the relatively tolerant attitude of the authorities. The absence of a strong confrontation (as during the martial law in Poland) between the opposition and the ruling ones in Hungary even determines some similarities when choosing ways out of the crisis. Both sides believe that more decisive and consistent economic reforms are needed, as well as changes in the political system. The difference is in the priorities. Party reformers have a primary interest in economic reform and opposition forces - in the political sphere. In the 1980s, a so-called state-society “stalemate” was created¹⁸. The communist government is aware of its inability to maintain its dominant position in the state, but is not ready to cede power. It accepted (at the end of 1988) the pluralism that had been established, but did not formally legitimize it. In this way, the party elite, on the one hand, prolongs the agony of the regime and, on the other, enables the opposition (which is not hardened by a long political struggle) to gain the experience that will be very necessary for the future governance of the country.

In 1989, the Communist elite, among whom the top reformers took over, deepened the inevitable changes in the country. At the beginning of the year, two important steps were taken in this direction - on January 11, the Parliament passed a law on assemblies and associations, according to which different political parties may emerge¹⁹, and in February at a party plenum the HSWP refused its party-guaranteed in the constitution leadership in the public life and, moreover, proclaimed the creation of a rule of law²⁰. These acts mark the birth of a new pluralistic society and are the starting point for all subsequent events in the “year of miracles”. They were followed by a reassessment of what happened in 1956, officially declaring that it was not a counter-revolution but a popular uprising, which was a reaction against the inhuman rule of Mátyás Rákosi²¹.

It is clear to everyone that a new read of the history of the mid-1950s will lead to the rehabilitation of Imre Nagy and the principles of his politics. This, in turn, will cast doubt on the legitimacy of the regime established after the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution. The symbol of this regime, János Kádár, retired from political life in May 1989 because of his severely impaired health, which also marks the end of an era in Hungarian history called “Kádárism”. Evidence of a break with the past is the removal of wire fences along the Austrian-Hungarian border²², reminiscent of the “Iron Curtain”.

¹⁸ E. Irmanová, Kádárismus vznik a pád jedné iluze: monograph (Praha: Karulinum, 1998), 79

¹⁹ During the first half of 1989, dozens of political parties emerged. They can be divided into three groups. The most influential of these are the parties that emerged from the democratic opposition that existed as movements even before the law was passed - the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF), the Alliance of Free Democrats (AFD) and the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ). They are the most serious opponent of HSWP. The second group consists of the old historical parties, active before 1949, which in the spring of 1989 resumed their activities - The Social Democratic Party, Christian Democratic People's Party (CDPP), Independent Smallholders' Party and others. The third group includes small parties whose membership does not exceed 100 people. It is characteristic of them that they do not criticize the HSWP as a ruling party (unlike the first two groups), but instead focus their criticism on newly created parties, which they call “opposition to the opposition”.

²⁰ I. Yannakakis, La secousse. La Grande secousse: Europe de l' Est 1989-1990/ sous la direction de Pierre Kende et Aleksander Smolar: compil. de la recher. scient (Paris : Press du CNRS, 1990), 35-36.

²¹ E. Irmanová, Eva, Kádárismus vznik a pád jedné iluze...

²² Against economic assistance from the West, at the end of May 1989, Hungary began to remove metal fences along the border with Austria. Yannakakis, Ilios, La secousse. La Grande secousse:

The next step of the Hungarian governing body conducting the changes is to organize a “round table”. Unlike in Poland, where only moderate opposition in the face of illegal Solidarity (because pluralism has not yet been recognized) is involved in discussions with government officials, in Hungary, multiparty has been officially in existence since the beginning of the year and the party will not succeed if points to its interlocutors. This is one of the main reasons for the debate on Hungary's future to be held in two stages. After the completion of the two parallel “round tables” - the governing bodies and their elected organizations, on the one hand, and the informal groups, on the other, an agreement is reached to organize a “National Round Table”. It was called the “Hungary's Negotiated Revolution” and began on 13 June 1989. Three parties took part in the talks: HSWP; representatives of the opposition “round table” (9 parties and organizations) and traditional public organizations (Hungarian National Front, trade unions, youth union, etc.). In his speech at the opening of the “National Round Table”, the leader of the ruling HSWP, Károly Grósz, assured those present that the party was a supporter of the peaceful transition and distinguished itself from the remnants of the Stalinist model. He states: The HSWP, *along with other political forces, is committed to building a democratic and socialist constitutional society*. Opposition leader Imre Kónya notes that their goal is also to ensure a peaceful transition to democracy that *truly upholds the will of the people*²³.

Three days after the opening of the “National Round Table” in Hungary, a real reassessment of the events of the autumn of 1956 takes place, closing the most painful page in the country's history. Imre Nagy's mortal remains were solemnly buried on June 16, 1989. His rehabilitation marks the moral collapse of the forcibly imposed regime and undergoes a “revolutionary” change in public consciousness. Following this symbolic for the region act, HSWP is rapidly losing its influence. Although it continues to lead the reforms, it is aware that it needs immediate and dramatic change if it is to remain a serious political factor.

In the summer of 1989, democratic processes accelerated. For the first time since the July legislative elections²⁴, independent candidates have been on the National Patriotic Front list for the first time. Opposition members are winning, as a result of which the Hungarian Parliament ceases to be a one-party member. His work includes new personalities expressing the views of different parties (HDF, FIDESZ, CDP, etc.). In this way, pluralism becomes operational, not just formally recognized.

The undeniable liberalization of governance in Hungary is also confirmed by some foreign policy action. On August 19, 1989, a picnic was organized in the small town of Sopron (on the border with Austria), with foreign tourists also attending. At the end of the event, about 500 East Germans, mixed with Austrian and Hungarian nationals, crossed into Austrian territory²⁵. It is the beginning of one of the largest emigrant waves in Europe. Thousands of GDR residents are leaving their home for the refusing to reform regime of

Europe de l' Est 1989-1990/ sous la direction de Pierre Kende et Aleksander Smolar (Paris : Press du CNRS, 1990), 36.

²³ Opening Full session the National Roundtable Negotiations, June 13, 1989, Scenario of the Transition. Roundtable Talks in 1989, docum. Vols. 1-4 (1999): <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/19991105/13jun89.htm>

²⁴ Many prominent MPs have been forced to resign under the pressure of public opinion in the past. This calls for partial elections for the vacant seats.

²⁵ I. Yannakakis, La secousse. La Grande secousse: Europe de l' Est 1989-1990/ sous la direction de Pierre Kende et Aleksander Smolar: compil. de la recher. Scient (Paris: Press du CNRS, 1990): 37.

Erich Honecker. The “fatal blow” of this conservative regime was dealt with on September 10, 1989. After fruitless negotiations with the East German rulers, Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh and Foreign Minister Gyula Horn hold a secret meeting in Bonn with GDR’s Chancellor Helmut Kohl taking the decision to open the border with Austria. In the first three days, more than 15,000 East Germans crossed the border points to go to GDR²⁶. This move by Hungarian diplomats fueled the revolutionary wave of the spring of 1989 that caused the fall of communist regimes on the Old Continent.

One week after this significant foreign policy move, the final arrangements of the “National Round Table” were signed (18 September 1989)²⁷. They set the basic principles for creating political and legal conditions for a peaceful transition to a democratic rule of law with a multi-party system and seek a way out of the social and economic crisis. A number of proposals for laws and amendments to the constitution are adopted, which relate to: the formation of the constitution, the establishment of a constitutional court, the status of political parties, the election procedure, changes in the Criminal Code and the Labor Code, etc.²⁸ One of the most important results of the work of the “Round Table” is the agreement that the parliamentary elections will be held in the spring of 1990, but unlike the Polish, they will be completely free.

In the autumn of 1989, extremely important changes took place in Hungary, marking the final break with the party-state system and beginning the democratic development of the country. At its XIV Congress (October 6-9, 1989), HSWP announces the end of its existence, as well as the previous concept of socialism, as they have exhausted their capacities and reserves. A Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP, MSZP) was established, which abandoned the vicious system of the bureaucratic party state and the principle of democratic centralism. At the same time, it is considered to be the heir to the reformist aspirations of the HSWP and the traditions of the communist and socialist movements.

The end of the Bolshevik-type ruling party was followed by the acceleration of democratic change, which resulted in Hungary becoming a rule of law. On October 18, 1989, the Parliament approved the constitutional changes agreed to at the “round table” on a proposal by the opposition. The definition of “national” is dropped from the name of the country and the preamble to the Basic Law is changed. According to its new text, *the Hungarian Republic is an independent democratic state based on the rule of law and the recognition of the equality of values of bourgeois democracy and democratic socialism*²⁹. In the next few days, the Parliament will vote on the law on the functioning and economic activity of parties, which provides the legal basis for the transition to multi-partyism, and the law on the election of deputies³⁰ and a president. The presidium of the republic was

²⁶ V. Volkov, “Revoljutsionnye preobrazovaniya v stranah Tsentralnoy i Yugo-Vostochnoy Evropy”, *Voprosy istorii*, num 6 (1990): 29.

²⁷ The agreements were signed by MSZMP, opposition organizations - Society Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, Independent Smallholders' Party, Christian Democratic People's Party, Hungarian Democratic Forum, Hungarian People's Party, Hungarian Social Democratic Party, as well as public organizations and movements. Eva Irmanová, *Kádárismus vznik a pád jedné iluze... y Timothy Garton Ash, Rok zázraku...* 45.

²⁸ E. Irmanová, *Kádárismus vznik a pád jedné iluze...* 17-175.

²⁹ E. Irmanová, *Kádárismus vznik a pád jedné iluze...* 176.

³⁰ The October 1989 Mixed Electoral Law provides for 176 (out of 386) seats to be distributed by majority and the remaining 210 to be distributed among parties according to the proportional vote

abolished, it was decided to disband the workers' militia and a law was adopted to establish a Constitutional Court. The freedom of speech and the press, the freedom of associations were also affirmed, the date of the national holiday was changed, as well as the emblem of the country, the sickle and hammer were removed from the tricolor³¹.

The official break with the Communist period took place on October 23, 1989, marking the 33rd anniversary of the start of the Hungarian Revolution. At a solemn ceremony on Lajos Kossuth Square from the central balcony of the Parliament building, the President of the State Council and President Mátyás Szűrös, acting interim, proclaims the Hungarian Republic. On National Remembrance Day, Hungarian society begins a new phase in its historical development - the construction of Western-style democracy.

To overcome the economic crisis of state socialism that has led to the accumulation of large external debt (Prime Minister Miklós Németh said at a December parliamentary session that Hungarian foreign debt was \$ 19 billion, likely to increase by another \$ 1 billion by the end of the year), the three-year anti-crisis program of the government, with the participation of opposition parties, is adopted. It envisages a shift to a new economic model by changing ownership relations, widespread privatization and promoting entrepreneurship, developing and strengthening the market. The realization of these ideas requires the liberalization of mechanisms for regulating prices, imports and wages; a significant reduction in government spending and a rebalancing of the state budget, first eliminating unprofitable productions and ending subsidies. A radical change in foreign economic relations is needed, aimed at integrating with Western Europe, broadly attracting foreign capital, introducing market relations in trade with the USSR and the countries from the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance³². The heaviest obligation the cabinet undertakes is to pay the debts at any cost, with increasing rates. Some of the measures, such as currency restrictions and changes in taxation, are welcomed with disagreement by the population.

The economic program, prepared under the direction of M. Németh, enters into force at the same time as the “Balcerowicz Plan” and also aims to bring the country out of the economic crisis. Unlike the “shock therapy”, however, it does not provide for such drastic financial constraints as the state of the Hungarian economy (albeit in a crisis) is significantly better than that of the Polish economy.

Hungary becomes the second country to successfully overcome the obstacle of democratic emancipation. After the Polish victory puts an end to the myth of the eternity of the Party State, the Hungarian change makes it possible to return to a “normal”, “bourgeois” democracy.

Taking into account the political and economic situation in the country and taking advantage of the Polish example, the government officially recognizes the existing pluralism, completely removes the Conservatives from the party leadership, starts negotiations with representatives of almost all major parties and public organizations. Imre Nagy's rehabilitation and the reassessment of the events of 1956 changed public

and accepted adjustments at the national list level. See in more detail: A. Arato, “Izbori, formirane na koalitsii i Konstitutsiyata v Ungariya”, *Politicheski izsledvaniya* num 4 (1995): 379.

³¹ François Fejto, *Fin des démocraties populaires* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 274.

³² *Tsentrallyno-Vostochnaya Evropa vo vtoroy polovine XX veka. T. 2 Ot stabilizatsii k krizisu 1966-1989* (Moskva: Nauka, 2002), 417.

sentiment and became a catalyst for transformation, in the expression of which transformed the National Round Table agreements that provided for a gradual change of system. The self-dissolution of the HSWP and the adoption of constitutional amendments aimed at creating a true rule of law legitimize the current situation in the country. The reform initiators acknowledge that they are incapable of meeting the expectations of the public and allow the opposition to take power before the elections themselves.

The victory of the new right-wing forces in the face of the Hungarian Democratic Forum in the completely free elections of 25 March and 8 April 1990 marked the end of the bargaining period between the Socialists and opposition parties and established Hungary as the first stable political democracy in the region. Based on the reforms carried out by the old regime and the socio-economic situation in the country, the new governing elite does not run into unnecessary risks and prefers gradual changes to be made. This allows him to make the smoothest transition to democracy and a market economy in Eastern Europe.

The collapse of the “normalization” regime in Czechoslovakia

Following the defeat of the Prague Spring in 1968, one of the most conservative regimes in the Soviet bloc has established itself in Czechoslovakia, which denies any other model of social development – except for the one imposed as a result of Brezhnev Doctrine. It can only function if it is isolated from countries with different political and economic systems. For this reason, the only possible links are with the USSR and the other fraternal countries, but they are also limited to contacts at an institutional level³³.

The Czechoslovak ruling elite, which does not adhere to the principles of Soviet *perestroika* (justifying that the necessary reforms were carried out in 1968), does not change its methods of government even when the opposition is formally recognized in Poland and Hungary.

At a politburo meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in January 1989, it was argued that it was necessary to take action against activists of illegal groups that were increasing their influence in society. They should be isolated and limit the possibilities for their organizational integration. The situation in the dissident movement is defined as the gradual politicization of the activities of the “internal enemies”, which are managed and supported by diversionary and emigrant centers. It decides to counteract them through a combination of political, administrative and, if necessary, repressive means³⁴. It is the latter measures that have been resorted to by the authorities to thwart or disperse the demonstrations since mid-January 1989 during the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of Jan Palach's self-immolation³⁵. The

³³ Informal relations are undesirable and relations with non-communist countries are completely impossible. Since the fall of 1969, restrictions have been introduced that make it impossible for Czechoslovak citizens to travel to the West. The regime has no interest even in contacts between its citizens and citizens or institutions of socialist countries if there political and economic conditions differ from those in Czechoslovakia. Therefore, travel to Yugoslavia and later to Hungary and Poland is restricted. J. Rychlík, *Rozpad Československa. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1989-1992*: monograph. ě (Bratislava: Akademické Elektronické nakladatelství, 2002), 17.

³⁴ Milan Otáhal, *Opozice, moc, společnost 1969/1989* (Praha: Maxdorf, 1994), 86.

³⁵ On January 2, 1989, 13 representatives of independent civic movements sent information to the Interior Department of the First Prague Regional People's Council on the organization of a commemorative act for the sake of Jan Palach, self-ignited in a protest against the Soviet

opposition leader Václav Havel was also arrested, who was sentenced to nine months in prison a month later, though without evidence. Instead of frightening the opposition, this act moves the public and unites even the so-called supporters of *perestroika* in a common front with dissidents against the will of the ruling elite. The Prague Spring activists are also stepping up, who (although isolated from public life) also express their dissatisfaction with the delay in reforms. The campaign to release Havel in early May is a success and he has been released.

Until the fall of 1989, dissatisfaction with the regime was expressed mainly through the organization of subscriptions, the main request of which was for the release of political prisoners, as well as for dialogue with the authorities and for the legalization of self-published magazines (most notably “Lidové noviny”)³⁶.

The new situation in the region, outlined by the reforms in Poland and Hungary, inevitably affects the Czechs and Slovaks and during the demonstration held on August 21, 1989, which marks the 21st anniversary of the defeat of the Prague Spring, alongside the condemnation of the foreign military occupation are also made political demands - for a “round table” and for free elections. Despite the violent dispersal of the manifestation³⁷, the opposition formulates a further strategy - the public must put pressure on the governing parties through petitions. The priority of peaceful means is to make dialogue with the authorities possible, as a result of which the Poles and Hungarians begin a gradual change of system.

Activation of alternative organizations and movements (albeit mainly in the capital) coincides with the formation of the non-communist government in Poland, with the opening of the Austrian-Hungarian border and with the conclusion of the “National Round Table” in Budapest. In vain, however, remain the hopes of the opposition the Czechoslovak party and state leadership to follow the example of their counterparts and make some concessions in the spirit of *perestroika*. The 15th plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which began on October 11, 1989 (just days after the HSWP was dissolved), addresses only the traditional problems of such forums. In its report, Miloš Jakeš, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, stated that *the political situation in the country as a whole is stable and the people support the CPCz policy*³⁸. It outlines the most important tasks for the party – preparation for the

occupation in 1968. The department prohibits its conduct, but the civil movements decide that, by law, organizing such an event does not require special permission. E. Krizeova, Vatslav Havel poet i president: biograph (Sofiya: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1992), 196.

³⁶ The most significant document from this period is the *A Few Sentences* petition prepared in June by a group of dissidents with the participation of Václav Havel and other members of Charter 77. The document stresses the need to change the social climate as a major condition for meaningful transformation (from a new constitution to economic reform). The petition also calls for the release of political prisoners, for recognition and for the emergence of independent initiatives, including independent trade unions. There is a demand for the abolition of censorship and political manipulation of the media, for the legalization of independent information sources, for freedom of assembly and for religion. The authors declare themselves open to public discussion not only during the 1950s, but also on taboo issues - the Prague Spring and the subsequent “normalization”. Petice Několik vět (text) http://www.totalita.cz/txt/txt_nvett.php

³⁷ 376 people were arrested and two FIDESZ Hungarians, who joined the demonstration in solidarity, were detained and beaten by the police. As a result of this incident, 500 people were on hunger strike in front of the Czechoslovak embassy in Budapest.

³⁸ P. Proks, “Československo na cestě k demokracii (listopad 1989 – červen 1990)”. Slovanskí přehled num 5 (Bratislava: 1990), 420. These allegations by the party leader are far from true.

forthcoming 18th Congress in May 1990, implementation of the socio-economic development plan, creation of conditions for the introduction (from January 1, 1990) of the new economic mechanism. No issues are discussed regarding the activities of informal groups and the pluralism of opinions. A few days later, on behalf of the Central Committee, Jozef Lenárt flatly rejected any possibility of a “round table” similar to the Polish or Hungarian ones. In a speech to the leaders of the ruling National Front³⁹, another representative of the Communist elite, Karel Urbánek, stated that under the pretext of reform and democratization, members of Charter 77 and other opposition groups aim to destabilize and liquidate the socialist system⁴⁰.

The most bizarre explanation of what differentiates Czechoslovakia from Poland and Hungary is provided by the CC's ideological secretary, Jan Fojtík. According to him, thanks to his democratic traditions and the shorter-lived direct influence of Stalinism in the country, Czechoslovakia has a chance that Stalin's deformities will leave much less trace than in neighboring countries⁴¹. The party functionary probably does not take into account the fact that it is the Czechoslovak political elite who continue to adhere to the methods of governance introduced by Stalin. His opinion is further evidence of the regime's refusal to really assess the situation in the country and in the region and take action that will allow it to remain an important political factor in the future. Accustomed to the long-standing “patronage” of the USSR, apparatchiks continue to nourish their illusions about the stability of the system. They link democratic change to the end of the communist monopoly (as in Poland and Hungary) and seek to “protect” their country from a similar perspective.

The regime misses the last opportunity for equal dialogue with alternative groups, sending law enforcement agencies against peaceful protesters marking the 71st anniversary of the creation of Czechoslovakia (28 October 1989)⁴². The repression has long been ineffective, and the next day the opposition again takes to the streets. Tensions continue to rise⁴³, and the gap between “us” and “them” becomes insurmountable. In mid-November 1989, Czechoslovakia remained the only Central European country isolated from the democratic processes that swept the Eastern Bloc. Quite unexpectedly for both the ruling and the opposition, the student demonstration of November 17 marks the beginning of the cardinal political changes that have liquidated the communist system. On November 17, 1989, authorities authorized a demonstration to mark the 50th anniversary of the murder of Jan Opletal by the Nazis⁴⁴. Following the end of the demonstration, a section

Various sections of Czechoslovak society, including ordinary party members, strongly criticize the policy of the governing bodies and demand decisive personnel changes. Miloš Jakeš himself has no authority among the population. He was considered to be an insufficiently cultured and educated person, which affected the formation of the notion of the entire communist nomenclature.

³⁹ The National Front is a coalition that officially ruled Czechoslovakia after World War II. After the February coup of 1948, when non-communist parties were ousted, only parties and organizations that recognize the leading role of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia were included.

⁴⁰ François Fejto, *Fin des démocraties populaires...* 298.

⁴¹ François Fejto, *Fin des démocraties populaires...* 298.

⁴² With the intervention of police and security forces, protesters respond with spontaneous “Gestapo” cries. Milan Otáhal, *Opozice, moc, společnost 1969/1989...* 62.

⁴³ Between 11 and 17 November 1989, demonstrations against catastrophic living standards were quickly organized in Teplice, Litvinov, Most and Dečín, which were rapidly becoming anti-communist. J. Rychlík, *Rozpad Československa. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1989-1992: monograph* (Bratislava: Akademik Elektronik Press, 2002), 68.

⁴⁴ Medical student Jan Opletal was fatally wounded during an anti-fascist rally and died on November 11, 1939. His funeral on November 15 turned into a mass protest against the occupiers. In response, on November 16-17, the Nazis arrested 1,200 students and, at the behest of Hitler,

of students headed to the Wenceslas Square in central Prague, which confused the law enforcement authorities. They cannot respond adequately and brutally disperse demonstrators. The fake news spread by some Western media about the death of one of the demonstrators has led to an escalation of tensions, resulting in strikes by students and artists who set off the “gentle revolution” in Czechoslovakia.

While students and actors respond to crackdowns on peaceful demonstration with increased activity, demanding (mainly to investigate security forces on November 17) and seeking means of achieving them, the opposition responds with some delay. Remaining in the periphery of events⁴⁵, it is surprised by their initial development. The rapid spread of protests against the regime of Miloš Jakeš has stepped up independent initiatives and they have accepted the challenge of leading the discontent.

In the evening of November 19, 1989, representatives of various opposition groups⁴⁶, some non-communist parties from the National Front⁴⁷ and individual communists who disagreed with the policies of the governing, set up the Civic Forum (CF). The appeal, adopted that evening, states that the new movement expresses the ideas of *that part of the Czechoslovak society that constantly criticizes the policies of contemporary Czechoslovak leadership and is deeply shocked by the brutal slaughter organized by the Prague police against the peaceful demonstration of students*⁴⁸. The founders of the Civic Forum are ready to begin negotiations with authorities on the country's critical situation.

The much weaker and non-conformist Slovak opposition, represented mainly by environmental clubs and cultural figures, also responded to news of a violent feud with protesters in Prague. On November 19 (before finding out about the establishment of CF) it organized a subscription against police brutality in the country's capital, and the following day in Bratislava the Public Against Violence (PAV), the Slovak analogue of CF, was formally established⁴⁹. The new unification emerged independently of CF as a direct reaction of intellectuals in the Slovak Republic to the “slaughterhouse” in Prague. Although expressing their solidarity with the victims of repression in the Czech Republic, it reflects the independent development of the Slovak opposition in its fight for democracy.

Although they advertise (in principle) readiness for dialogue and proclaim political solutions to existing problems, the three governments (Czech, Slovak and federal) agree on activities aimed at restoring order, preserving the property and life of citizens. Such a

closed all higher education institutions on the territory of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in what is now the Czech Republic.

⁴⁵ Since the opposition is not the organizer of the demonstration, many of its activists are not in Prague, including V. Havel, who is at his villa in Hrádeček.

⁴⁶ Charter 77, Helsinki Committee of Czechoslovakia, Independent Intelligence Circle, Civil Liberties Movement, Artforum, Revival (Obroda), Czechoslovak Independent Initiative, Independent Students, etc.

⁴⁷ Representatives of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People's Party, as well as the church, are present.

⁴⁸ J. Suk, *Občanské forum. Listopad-prosinec 1989. II díl. Dokumenty: doc. 1* (Praha: Doplněk, 1998), 13.

⁴⁹ Jan Rychlík, Jan, *Rozpad Československa... 72-73*. VPN units do not emerge throughout Slovakia. In Košice, where cultural ties with Prague are stronger than those with Bratislava, the opposition creates an “affiliate” of CF. A large part of the Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia remains outside the PAV, uniting in the *Hungarian Independent Initiative*, whose program largely resembles the demands of CF.

position is much closer to the traditional “normalization” policy than to any attempt to rebuild the system, and inevitably widens the gap between dissatisfied citizens and the government. As a result, on November 20, 1989, a series of thousands of demonstrations began that overthrew the communist regime in the country. Protesters carry banners and chant slogans condemning the intervention of law enforcement against the student demonstration. They demand the resignation of some CPC and cabinet leaders, declare themselves in favour of a coalition government and free elections.

The extremely complicated situation they are in - daily demonstrations against the authorities, increasing the wave of strikes throughout the country, lack of foreign policy support, forces the Czechoslovak rulers to take urgent decisions. On November 26, 1989, a government delegation led by Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec began negotiations with the opposition.

However, the communist elite has already lost control of the country, as evidenced by the success of the general strike announced on November 27, 1989 (from 12 to 14 hours). It reaffirms the main political slogans that emerged during the first “revolutionary” week - *End of Party Control and Free Elections*. The way out of it breaks the illusion of party and state leadership that workers are on its side and will not engage in anti-government activities of the opposition. The fall of the “normalization” regime is now a matter of time.

At the last of the many thousands of rallies that took place at Wenceslas Square after the end of the general strike, addressing the Prague demonstrators, the CF Coordination Center announces that *the stage of major national events is slowly coming to an end*⁵⁰. The main goal of the movement is to *finally open up the space for the emergence of political pluralism and the holding of free elections*⁵¹.

The implementation of the new strategy of the democratic forces is carried out at the next meetings of the joint delegation of CF and PAV with the representatives of the governors. The opposition proposes that the crisis be resolved by the creation of a new cabinet and threatens to strike if its demand is not met⁵². Worried by the turn of events, the prime minister calls for an end to the strikes so that life can be normalized and dialogue will not take place under pressure from the “street”. After much debate, the negotiators agree to change the composition of the government, with more representatives of other parties from the National Front as well as non-party experts taking part in it.

On December 9, the final talks on the composition of the new federal government, headed by Slovak lawyer Marián Čalfa, a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, are held⁵³. Of the 20 ministerial seats, 9 were for Communists, 2 were for the Czech Social Democratic Party, 2 were for the Czechoslovak People's Party, and 7 were for the formally non-party experts, i.e. for CF and PAV representatives⁵⁴. The coalition formed in this way, in which the Communists are a minority, suggests a strong influence of the CF. Its representatives head the important Foreign Ministries (Jiří

⁵⁰ Jiří, Suk, Občanské forum. Listopad-prosinec 1989...

⁵¹ Jiří Suk, Občanské forum. Listopad-prosinec 1989...

⁵² V. Hanzel, Zrychlený tep dějin. Reálné drama o deseti jednáních. Autentické záznamy jednání představitelů státní moci s delegacemi hnutí Občanské forum a Verejnost' proti násiliu v listopadu a prosinci 1989: docum (Praha: OK Centrum, 1991), 50.

⁵³ M. Čalfa left the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in January 1990.

⁵⁴ Kronika sametové revoluce 2 (Praha: ČTK, 1989), 42

Dienstbier) and the Treasury (Václav Klaus), as well as the Labor and Social Welfare (Petr Miller). Of the key ministries, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia retains only control of the army (Gen. Miroslav Vacek), and Richard Sacher of the Czechoslovak People's Party was appointed to the position of Minister of the Interior (December 30, 1989). As agreed at the meetings between the ruling and the opposition, the mandate of the government is limited to the date of free elections, the preparation and holding of which are its main task.

The Czechoslovakian counterpart of the Round Table ends much faster than in Poland and Hungary, and brings more benefits to the opposition. Its initial purpose, the formation of a socially acceptable government, is radically changing under the pressure of the November events. Without having a strategy or concept in place to participate in a roundtable, OF sees the dialogue as a means of exiting the crisis. However, the complete helplessness of the ruling allows the newly formed coalition to gain power unconditionally (unlike Poland and Hungary).

On December 10, 1989, Czechoslovakia completely broke with “normalization”. After appointing the government of the national accord headed by Marián Čalfa, President Gustáv Husák resigns. The choice of its replacement becomes a major domestic political issue over the next three weeks⁵⁵.

After extremely intensive work of the deputies, on the same day, on December 28, 1989, the Federal Assembly closed its 19th general session, began its reconstruction⁵⁶ and elected as its chair the symbol of the Prague Spring Alexander Dubček. On December 29, it endorsed Prime Minister Marián Čalfa's proposal (on behalf of the government, not CPC) and elected dissident Václav Havel as president of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In just a few weeks, the appearance of Czechoslovakia is radically changing. The ruling Communist leadership, which for two decades has refused to carry out real economic and political reforms and flatly rejects any pluralism of opinion, is helpless in the face of the only serious challenge. Having completely lost the confidence of the citizens and realized its own weakness, it is an unequal partner in the negotiations with the opposition. Unlike Poland and Hungary, compromise is impossible in Czechoslovakia. The most conservative regime in Central Europe has nothing to motivate its future contribution to the government of the country, and after nine round-table meetings, power is relinquished. As the French political scientist Jacques Rupnik writes, *the rapid destruction of the communist system stems from its very essence. The totalitarian system cannot be reformed and cannot be destroyed in any way other than total*⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ According to the Constitution of the country, within 14 days (after the resignation is accepted) the Federal Assembly must elect a new head of state. The problem arises because of the radically different positions of the Communists and the democratic forces on the election procedure. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia proposes to do so by popular vote (which requires a change in the Basic Law). However, the opposition represented by OF opposes the direct election of a president. Jiří Suk, Občanské forum. Listopad-prosinec 1989...

⁵⁶ Jan Rychlík, Rozpad Československa. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1989-1992... The Czechoslovak Parliament's first “co-optation” initiates the process of personal renewal of legislatures at all levels. The holding of 24 parliamentary seats, vacated by the most compromised representatives of the old regime, has the primary purpose of securing a parliamentary term for Al. Dubček, which is a condition for his election as chairman of the Federal Assembly. Jiří Suk, Občanské forum. Listopad-prosinec 1989...

⁵⁷ J. Rupnik, “Rok 89 jako klíč k četbě historie”, Přítomnost num 5 (Praha: nakladatelství Přítomnost, 1990), 2.

The withdrawal of the Communists allows the united opposition (though not having sufficient political experience) along with the institutional changes to form a new political elite (mostly from dissident intellectuals), which will make the transition to democracy and a market economy. Thanks to the desire for consensus and constructiveness shown by the whole society, the change of system in Czechoslovakia is peaceful and legitimate (sanctioned by the parliament), and the antagonism between Czechs and Slovaks remains in the background. Benefiting from its backlog, the country manages to outstrip its neighbors and meet the 1990s with a non-communist government, a renewed parliament, and an opposition president.

The political life in Czechoslovakia in the first six months of 1990 is subordinated to the main task - the preparation and holding of free elections that will legitimize the change of political system in the country. Political pluralism is also restored. On January 23, 1990, an act on political parties was passed, according to which *"citizens have the right to unite in political parties on the basis of the principles of democracy"*⁵⁸. On February 26, 1990, Czechoslovakia made another important step towards its national emancipation. Foreign Minister Jiří Dienstbier and his Soviet counterpart Eduard Shevardnadze sign an agreement in Moscow to withdraw the troops of the Soviet army from the "Brotherhood" Central European country by June 30, 1991, with the main contingent leaving the territory of the country by May 31, 1990⁵⁹.

A sound economic base allows new governors to combine radical economic reform with some of the provisions for a gradual transition to a market economy and to limit the negative effects of the transition.

In the parliamentary elections of June 8 and 9, 1990, the CF in the Czech Republic and the PAV in Slovakia definitely won, which clearly shows that the Czechs and Slovaks choose (just like the Poles and Hungarians) the "path to Europe". However, according to V. Havel, *poetry ended and prose began*⁶⁰.

Already in the early 1990, the first signals of the forthcoming contradictions between the two republics appeared - differences in political and industrial structure suggest different priorities in the future. The electoral victory of CF and PAV does not smooth the differences. The Slovaks' pursuit of emancipation and rejection of Prague's centralism exacerbates the national problem. The question of the principles of building up the federation, which fully reveals the divergence of interests and goals of the Czech and Slovak statespeople, comes to the fore. The adoption of the compromise law on the powers of the federation and of both republics on December 12, 1990 only delayed the inevitable dissolution of the Commonwealth.

Disagreements between Czech and Slovak politicians regarding the rule of law, as well as difficulties in pursuing economic reform, break unity among the new political elite, lead to the gradual split of the CF and the PAV, and mark the beginning of the end of the federation. Although polls show the desire of Slovaks to preserve the common state, after

⁵⁸ The adoption of the act approved the procedure for the formation and registration of political parties but did not affect a number of important provisions such as the mechanism for termination of activities and the ban on a party or movement. These shortcomings were made clear by the Act on Associations in Political Parties and Political Movements, adopted on October 2, 1991.

⁵⁹ Jan Rychlík, *Rozpad Československa. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1989-1992...*

⁶⁰ V. Havel, *Vážení občané. Projevy červenec 1990 – červenec 1992* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 1992), 10.

fruitless negotiations on the powers of the two republics and the federation, and without holding a referendum in October 1992, the Czech and Slovak rulers signed an agreement with Czechoslovakia to cease to exist from January 1, 1993.

Conclusions

In 1989, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia began their transition from different positions arising from the specifics of the internal political conditions in each of them. In Poland, the difficult economic situation largely predetermines both the authorities' willingness to give concessions and the strong influence of the opposition. In their attempt to preserve "state socialism", the government began to liberalize the regime, but the failure of economic reforms diminished their prestige. Aware of their inability to cope with the situation and under the pressure of the hard-fought opposition, they are forced to formally acknowledge their political opponents and share power with them. In the course of the changes in the much more economically stable Hungary, the leading role undoubtedly belongs to the traditionally flexible party and state leadership. Being a non-typical foresight for Eastern European authorities, the region first recognizes political pluralism and allows passive opposition to governing the country. This allows the HSWP to control the actual transformations for the longest time and to create the conditions for the smoothest system change in the region.

For the illegitimate "normalizing" regime in Czechoslovakia, which rests solely on Soviet patronage, Moscow's refusal of the Brezhnev doctrine means deprivation of vital support. Although it is in the best economic condition throughout the Eastern Bloc, the country also falls victim to the crisis of extensive development, which means that the authorities are violating a kind of "public contract" "concluded" after 1968 (in exchange for a relatively high life expectancy standard and guaranteed social security for citizens to opt out of public-political life). With the disappearance of the reasons for a certain loyalty to the hardliners and the catalytic influence of the events in the neighboring countries in the Czechoslovak society, the social forces that destroyed the old regime were released. Along with the legal specifics in the individual countries, there are also clear trends in the transformation processes in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Transformation in all three countries was initiated after the "Round Table" negotiations, which largely predetermined the peaceful nature of the transition. The categorical rejection of a failed system inevitably leads to a change of political elites. The party nomenclature is replaced by representatives of dissident organizations, coming mainly from intellectuals' circles. Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as well as other socialist countries, replace the failed bureaucratic system with its opposite - parliamentary democracy combined with a market economy, without seeking country-specific approaches based on its own history, national traditions, etc. The uncritical application by the East Europeans of a new foreign model is an attempt to overcome the complex built over four decades that they live behind the "Iron Curtain". The rejection of communist regimes gives them a sense of return to Europe, which is why they define the difficult transition as the "Road to Europe". The pursuit of successful change, in turn, determines the advantage of political reform as a basis for efficient economic reform. Therefore, the primary task is to organize and hold legislative elections.

In the first democratic (semi-free in Poland) elections in Central Europe the new right-wing political forces convincingly won, which legitimized the changes already made and determined the speed of transition. However, the "honeymoon" does not last long. As economic stabilization programs enter into force, as well as the lack of financial support

from the West, on which new democracies place too high hopes, public euphoria begins to fade and the frustration of change increases. It leads to a return to power of the renewed left after the next parliamentary elections (in Czechoslovakia, the left remains second, but has made significant progress since its launch in 1990), but this does not prevent the most important objective from being achieved – joining the European Union and NATO.

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