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## THE DYNAMICS OF REVOLUTION IN 1989: CONCEPTUAL CHANGES

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### ABSTRACT

*The events during the “Autumn of People” have created sideration and stupor in the eyes and minds of the Western observers – who least expected the communist breakdown –, and consequently significant problems of interpretation and in deciphering the regime change in East-Central Europe. Clearly, with the “transition to democracy” process, the same observers have expressed disappointment and skepticism regarding the prospects of the countries of ECE unrestrainedly and uncritically embracing the model of Western-type consolidated liberal democracy: many have assessed that the exit from communism was not necessarily synonymous with the “return to Europe” tout court, for the very historical background, socio-economic and cultural preconditions and political conditions were not met so as to generate the complete and definitive triumph of liberal democracy in Europe. The present paper is an attempt at critically examining the regime change in 1988-1989 in East-Central Europe as an exponential case of “postmodern revolution”, following the analysis drawn by S.N. Eisenstadt in late ‘90. Breaking with the paradigm of the “Great Revolutions” (G. Pettee), 1989 lacked the characteristic features of a “classical revolution” (in the French or Russian sense), hence imposing a new species of revolution which was dominantly non-ideological, non-class-based, and non-violent, though achieving its central purpose, i.e. that of effectuating regime change. Concretely, this paper tries to introduce the 1988-1989 regime change in ECE in the general discussion of the defining and the characteristic features of a revolution, drawing extensively on the literature that preceded and followed the anus mirabilis, dedicated to the analysis of revolutions.*

### KEYWORDS

- East-Central Europe
- “postmodern revolution”
- “classic revolution”
- regime change
- conceptual change

## Introductory remarks, scope and main questions

*"In revolutions men live fast. The experience of years is crowded into hours; old habits of thought and action are violently broken."* Thomas Babington Macaulay (1898, p.115)

The intention of the present theoretical endeavor is to examine and investigate the *problématique* of "revolution", at a conceptual level, emphasizing and discussing the numerous mutations and the general metamorphosis of the notion and theory of "revolution" during more than three centuries of human history, with a special focus on the conceptual transformations the term had undergone during the 20th century, most importantly, during the last decades of the "infamous century". Consequently, the major aim of the paper is to address the most significantly theoretical shifts in the evolution and dynamics of the study, definition, and conceptualization of "revolution". These shifts were, nevertheless, determined, by various historical developments which are beyond the immediate scope of the paper, but which will be hinted to, especially for the case of the regime change in East-Central Europe, in 1989. As a matter of fact, the revolutions of 1989 will constitute a plausible illustration for the theoretical and definitional mutations and transformations suffered by the concept of "revolution": the paper will employ extensively S.N. Eisenstadt's collocation "post-modern revolution" to refer to the changes effectuated in ECE countries and to sustain the initial contention, i.e. that of radical theoretical shifts in the understanding and definition of "revolution". Just as the French Revolution of 1789 has decisively and indubitably transformed the connotations of the notion and reinvented the denotation of the word, exactly two centuries after, the Revolutions of 1989 in East-Central Europe have clearly changed the traditional, "classical" understanding of the concept, the one imposed in 1789. Nonetheless, since the "Autumn of Peoples" of 1989 is, in effect, a series of local revolutions (just as the "Springtime of Nations" of 1848), one should take into consideration the specificities, the peculiarities, and the contingencies of each of the East-Central European case, for further assessing the importance of "post-modern revolutions" in conceptually reshaping the said notion. Consequently, this paper will dwell on the nation-based specificities, in order to emphasize those characteristics that contribute to the general understanding of the new type of revolution, the "post-modern" one, and to the rethinking of the definition of the concept. Methodologically, the focus on the specificities of each East-Central European setting of "revolutionary change" is seen not as sketching case-studies (which would need undoubtedly further elaboration), but rather as some tentative illustrations of the differences among the different regime changes of 1989:

The first section presents a *breviloquent*, though necessary, literature review on the evolution of the notion of "revolution", with the central aim of sketching a very brief conceptual chronological summary and the successive stages in the definition of the concept. This first section attempts to provide answers to a series of questions central to the evolution of the concept: What was the impact of the French Revolution on the understanding of the concept? What are the main interpretations and conceptualizations of the notion of "revolution" and how have they replied to the historical changes of the studied *phenomenon*? What are, tentatively, the main features

of a “classical” revolutionary moment (i.e. as illustrated by the “Grand Revolutions” of 1789 and 1917)? The subsequent sections will discuss and will focus on the model of “postmodern revolution” proposed by Samuel Eisenstadt for analyzing the conceptual change inaugurated in 1989 (though somehow announced by the sporadic revolutionary instances after 1945) in the general understanding of the concept of “revolution”. Although all the countries of the region have undergone largely non-violent, non-utopian, and non-class-based revolutions, each nation has nevertheless experience differently the regime change, in accordance to the nature of the regime it has struggled to overthrow and to its positioning in the zone of Sovietized Europe. This is particularly the motivation behind the concise inquiries into each of the six cases of regime change in 1989 in ECE: Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. A series of questions and dilemmas arise when inquiring into the special case of East-Central Europe in 1989, interrogations that have been answered differently by the multitude of observers and scientists scrutinizing the said case: Firstly, what was the general attitude of these observers towards the overall transformations experienced by the region? What were the major changes in the conceptualization and definition of the “revolution” after the 1989 momentum? Finally, what were the prospects for democratization and market economy consolidation envisaged for the countries exiting state socialism? Although the general trend in the literature was that of being increasingly cautious in reference to the labeling of the regime change in 1989 as “revolution”, some observers and social scientists (Eisenstadt, Isaac, Benhabib, Ackerman, etc.) have put forward new venues for defining “revolutions” in the context of new movements towards change.

### **Preliminary notes: Definition of the concept, different perspectives**

*“There are few concepts over which there has been so much contention as that of ‘revolution’... Few things are so ambiguous.” (Kautsky: 1902, p. 5)*

Reaching a consensus over the definition and the taxonomy of revolution is, according to Isaac Kramnick a veritable utopia: “Revolutionaries [...] have usually devoted as much time and energy debating the nature of revolution as they have in efforts to bring one about. No surprise, then, that students of revolution have an equally difficult time in describing and defining the phenomenon of revolution.” (Kramnick: 1972, p. 26) Similarly, Sam Charles Sarkesian acknowledges that “‘revolution’ is a word that causes fear in some, exhilaration in others, and confusion in most” (Sarkesian: 1975, p. 1); Sarkesian considers as essential in the study of such a complex and emotionally charged phenomenon the analysis of the social systems. For Noel Parker, “revolution” designates “a phenomenon and an idea”, but ones which are eminently European/Western: “That is not to say that revolutions have occurred more often in Europe than elsewhere: indeed, the reverse is more likely true. Rather revolution is ‘European’ in the sense that it has to be seen in the context of ‘history’ [...]. And history at a world level must inevitably be traced back to Europe’s intrusive relationship with the rest of the world during the modern period.” (Parker: 1999, p. 1) In an inquiry with both analytical and historical features, Parker uses the definition of the studied

phenomenon only as an instrument, susceptible to change and improvement during the evolutionary process of research: “Let us say, then, that ‘a revolution’ consists of a sudden, profound, deliberately provoked crisis about legitimate power over a society, tending to produce an upheaval and change in both the political and the social spheres. [...] A revolution will usually involve specifically political change plus the threat of violence, and usually its actual use. [...] Yet crises of legitimacy, political change and political violence all occur in many circumstances without a revolution: individually, therefore, these elements are not defining features of revolution. It is their combination with a more or less successful attempt at a profound structural change which makes events into a revolution, [...] an exemplar instance of the modern experience of change.” (Parker: 1999, p. 4)

It seems that the first use of the term without its astronomic references dates from the 14th century Italy: the word “*rivoluzione*” was employed for describing an uprising in Siena, in 1355, when an oligarchic regime was overthrown and replaced with a popular one (Hatto: 1949, p. 502). Up to the 18th century, however, the primary, main, sense of the term “revolution” was linked to its astronomic definition: the movement of a planet that brings it to its starting point. As a result, the English Glorious Revolution of 1688 was referred to as a “revolution” by virtue of this particular connotation of the word, for, applied in the sphere of human action, the notion of “revolution” “referred to the return to a prior state of affairs or to the reinstatement of a certain political form.” Interestingly enough, Göran Therborn explains the roots of the word: “The prefix « re- » in ‘revolution’ or ‘reform’ actually means ‘back’, ‘rolling back’ (originally the stone in front of the grave of Jesus) and returning to the original form of the Christian community before the papacy, as was the intention of Luther and Calvin.” (Therborn: 2008, p. xiv)<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the usage of the term, particularly in its initial, Italian form – “*rivoluzione*” – was a neutral one, a purely descriptive one, hence interchangeable with numerous other descriptive notions that named episodes of mere popular disorder or simple changes in government and leadership (“*tumulto*”, “*moto*”, “*mutazione*”). Its meaning suffered a partial transformation during the 16th century of Renaissance, when it acquired also a Christian, biblical connotation, describing the inexorable succession of empires or ages towards an “immanent approach of a final age”, a Golden age, a time of perfection, in which the Christian norm or Word would be completely restored (*The Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, article “Revolution”: 2003, p. 152). This belief inflamed the Protestant reformers, being then transmitted to the theoretical background of the Glorious Revolution. From the moment of 1688, the word “revolution” became rather fashionable, without any in depth reference regarding its exact meaning; this is why, historians or writers of any sort did not bother themselves with conceptual distinctions and explanations for notions so similar as “revolution”, “rebellion”, “conspiracy” (at best, the differentiation between the three was made by their degree of successfulness, for, while rebellions and conspiracies could and generally failed, the revolutions were always successful in restoring a better and lawful regime.) The cyclic connotation of the word “revolution” was the premise for both philosophers and historians, up to 1789, to reason that “revolution” is an inevitable phenomenon, a necessity, something beyond men’s capacities and powers (hence, the

<sup>1</sup> See the labeling of “Reformation” for Luther’s and Calvin’s religious movements.

skepticism regarding the ability of the individual to construct or at least to change his own government, his way of life or his social status, regarding his contribution to the socio-political advance). This view was so widespread in the 17th and 18th centuries that even Montesquieu, the prominent figure of the French Enlightenment, concluded as a rule that “[e]very ten years revolutions occur which hurl the rich into poverty and send the poor on a rapid flight to abundant wealth.” (Montesquieu: 1773, p. 202)

“Revolution” gained a new meaning with the 1789 episode, as the French Revolution changed the then-existing sense of the word: “revolution” meant, from that moment, a radical change, a sweeping, clear, sudden and violent – what David Close compressed in a single word as “cataclysmic” (Close: 1985, p. 3) – break with the past, with the *ancien régime*, on either political, social or economic lands. Two mutations in the connotations of the term “revolution” are worth mentioning: a notion of cyclical development was replaced by a rectilinear evolution (which allowed the emergence of the idea of “progress” and which associated revolution with “irreversible change” in both institutions and values) and this new understanding, opposed the one existing up to the end of the 18th century, which “recognized little freedom in humans to change permanently their political environment.” (Close: 1985, p. 5) In other words, as Mona Ozouf puts it referring to the French Revolution, “[f]ar from repairing the chain of time, the Revolution stepped outside history in search of a new world, an absolute beginning” (Ozouf: 1989, p. 809), unique, total, universal. Thusly, in the post-French Revolution era, a revolution becomes “a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activities and policies.” (Huntington: 1968, p. 264) The change in meaning was acknowledged as soon as 1793 – during the French Revolution itself –, when Condorcet attempted to summarize what the Revolution in France actually meant: “In France, the revolution was to embrace the entire economy of society, change every social relation, and find its way down to the furthest links of the political chain, even down to those individuals who, living in peace on their private fortune or on the fruits of their labor, had no reason to participate in public affairs – neither opinion nor occupation nor the pursuit of wealth, power or fame.” (Condorcet: 1796, p. 210) A text-book definition of the concept is provided by the famous *Oxford English Dictionary*, a definition which enjoys large acceptance by the English scholars on revolution (Peter Calvert: 1970, p. 5, for instance): “a complete overthrow of the established government in any country or state by those who were previously subject to it; a forcible substitution of a new ruler or form of government.”

Using what Mark N. Katz considers “reasoning by analogy”, Crane Brinton compares, in his 1938 book *The Anatomy of Revolution*, the course of a revolution to that of fever. Brinton defines the concept of “revolution” as being “a drastic, sudden substitution of one group in charge of the running of a territorial political entity by another group hitherto not running that government.” (Brinton: 1965 [1938], p. 4) A follower of Brinton, Forrest Colburn completes his definition, by assessing that “revolution is the sudden, violent, and drastic substitution of one group governing a territorial political entity for another group formerly excluded from the government, and an ensuing assault on state and society for the purpose of radically transforming society” (Colburn: 1994, p. 6). It is worth mentioning that Brinton doubted that a

revolution could be achieved without violence. Conversely, Theda Skocpol perceives social revolutions as phenomena characterized by “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures”, as the central role in such movements are played by “class struggles” (Skocpol: 1979, p. 5)<sup>2</sup>. Strongly opposing Brinton’s perspective or what she calls “natural history” approach, Theda Skocpol labels her treatment of the concept of “revolution” as “comparative historical analysis”; for Skocpol, the major distinction between “natural history” approach and “comparative historical analysis” is to be found in their different objectives, aims: “Whereas the goal of comparative historical analysis is to establish causes of revolutions, the natural historians sought to describe the characteristic cycle, or sequence of stages, that should typically occur in the processes of revolutions.” (Skocpol: 1979, p. 37)

In fact, this very distinction served as a fundament for Jack Goldstone’s division of scholars on revolution into three generations. The first generation, opened by Brinton’s work, comprises those studies on revolution which are generally perceived as inductive, descriptive and taxonomic inquiries; these writings of the 1920s-1930s are generally coined as the “Natural History of Revolutions” School and they are the works of Edwards (1927), Pettee (1937) and, of course, Brinton. Even though usually unable to explain why revolutions happen and what actually generates their occurrence, this “Natural History of Revolution” school bears a special importance for the study of revolutions to the extent to which it identified a series of “patterns” peculiar to “all revolutions”: (1) “prior to revolutions, intellectuals cease to support the regime and the state undertakes reforms”; (2) “outbreaks of revolution have more to do with a state crisis than active opposition”; (3) “after taking power, conflicts arise within the revolutionary coalition, with first the moderates, then more radical elements, and finally military leaders coming to power”; (4) “the last phase of revolutionary transformation is one of pragmatism within a new status quo” (Goldstone: 2001, p. 142)<sup>3</sup>. A second generation of writers on revolution is represented by those political scientists and historians of the 1950s-1960s who first tried not only to point out similar patterns that would show how the revolutions arise, but also to explain why and when revolutions occur. Less descriptive and inductive, the works of these scholars are primarily based on the modernization theory. The representatives of this second generation are Smelser, Johnson, Davies, McAdam and Gurr. The emphasis in their writings falls primarily on the analysis of social processes that generally lead to the formation and wide expression of radical ideologies which, in turn, would determine radical and violent outbursts. Many of these interpretations embrace even a psychological stance, in their attempt of properly explaining social and economical modifications that can generate the radicalization of masses. The cornerstone of the second generation of scholars analyzing revolutions is Davies’s “J-curve”, coupling economic cycle of increased-decreased developments with the frequency of social revolts. Despite its significant achievements in trying of show why revolutions occur, this second generation of writings on revolution is highly criticized by Goldstone, for several reasons: they are either too vague in stating their “initiating pattern” (i.e.

<sup>2</sup> For the American author, revolution can happen only through “intense socio-political conflicts in which class struggles play a key role.”

<sup>3</sup> The general presentation of these “patterns”, citing Goldstone, can be found in O’Kane: 2000, pp. 199-200.

the “structural disequilibrium” at the level of societal subsystems) or too complex in their “hard-to-observe” critical variables (i.e. “cognitive attitudes”); they “explain too much ([i.e.] all outbreaks of collective violence) and yet not enough ([for instance,] why revolutions are so rare)”. Finally, these writings seem incapable to offer a comprehensive presentation of the “revolutionary outcomes”, of the successfulness or unsuccessfulness of these movements. Eventually, the third generation of political scientists writing on revolutions includes such prominent names as Eisenstadt (1978), Paige (1975), Tilly (1978), Skocpol (1979) and Trimberger (1978). Therefore, this recent wave of writings is marked by those works of the 1970s, usually works advancing structural theories, which introduce new explanations on the emergence of revolutions, using such phrasings as: “state structures”, “peasant society”, “elite behavior”, “the armed forces”, “international pressure”, etc. Among all the scientific products of the third generation, Theda Skocpol’s *States and Social Revolutions* qualified, in Goldstone’s perspective, as “the most comprehensive and potentially generalizable theory of social revolutions” (Goldstone: 2003, and further Goldstone: 2001, pp. 139-187).

Similarly to Jack Goldstone, whose typology of “generations” of theorists on revolution constitutes the basis for the introductory part of the present paper, Peter Calvert attempts a taxonomy of theorists of revolution. But, opposing the chronological criterion as the basis for the resemblances among diverse perspectives on revolution, Calvert adopts a typology of authors based on the disciplinary field to which their studies of revolution belong; thusly, the typology differentiates between psychological, sociological, political and philosophical theories (Calvert: 1998 [1990], pp. 95-112). The psychological attempts are largely unconvincing – a good example in this respect is J.M. Thompson’s “A Medical History of the Revolution” in “Leaders of the French Revolution” (1929) –, with the fortunate exceptions of “The Revolutionary Personality” (1967) by E.V. Wolfstein and Gurr’s “Why Men Rebel ?” (1970). Much more substantial and systematized are the sociological attempts, famously represented by Johnson’s “Revolution and the Social System” (1964) and “Revolutionary Change” (1966); the major flaw in the sociological approach is the impossibility of systematically analyze and explain the role of “catalysts” and of “accelerators”, which generally act spontaneously and unpredictably. The political attempts are represented by Charles Tilly’s numerous studies on revolution, from *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978) to *European Revolutions*. Profoundly marked by the idea of revolution justified by the pursuit of liberty, the philosophical attempts viciously gravitate around Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution*.

Regardless of the fact that he treats and analyzes revolutions undistinguishable from the other resembling forms of mass political violence seeking regime change, Ch. Tilly offers, however, a well-structured theory of revolutions unpinning on two main principle components: a “revolutionary situation” and a “revolutionary outcome”. Basing his observations on Trotsky’s idea of revolution, Tilly identifies a “revolutionary situation” in the context of “multiple sovereignty”: “two or more blocs make effective, incompatible claims to control the state, or to be the state.” (Tilly: 1993, p. 10; see also Tilly: 2002) Three are the transformations (the movements) that would generate such an irreducible situation – when the members of a previously subordinated entity proclaim its own sovereignty; when non-ruling, previously excluded contenders or

opposition elements “mobilize into a bloc successfully exerting control over some portion of the state” (e.g. certain social class(es) or category(ies)); when an existing ruling political entity splits into two or more blocs, each of them able to exercise/maintain control over “significant parts of the state” – and three as well are the constituent phases leading to a embedded, well-entrenched “revolutionary situation”: (1) “the appearance of contenders/ coalitions of contenders advancing exclusive competing claims to control of the state or some segments of it”; these opponents to the existing regime can be “patron-client networks”, local communities, religious congregations or ethnic groups, but most frequently they are some particular social classes or categories; (2) “commitment [i.e. adherence] to those claims by a significant segment of the citizenry”; and, eventually, (3) “incapacity or unwillingness of rulers to suppress the alternative coalition and/ or commitment to its claims” (Tilly: 1993, pp. 10-16). These three phases entail the causal chain that culminates in the emergence of a revolutionary situation, but the separate manifestation of each of them is by no means peculiar to a revolution. Moreover, the significance and the impact of a revolution depend on the number of revolutionary situations – for the three initial steps are inherently changeable –, on the nature, intensity and complexity of such revolutionary situations, on their persistence in time, etc. On the other hand, the other component of a revolution, in Tilly’s perception, the “revolutionary outcome”, is an equally debatable and inexhaustible subject for the theoreticians of violent, sudden and radical regime changes. However, for the American historian, there are four broad possible outcomes: (1) “defections of polity members”; (2) “acquisition of armed force by revolutionary coalitions”; (3) “neutralization or defection of the regime’s armed force”; and (4) “control of the state apparatus by members of a revolutionary coalition” (Tilly: 1993, pp. 184 and 242).

The second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century brought about new types of radical, violent upheaval seeking regime change particularly in developing and modernizing countries and, consequently, a new, broader understanding of the concept of “revolution”. Widely-used labels, such as “the Iranian Revolution” (1979) or “the Cuban Revolution” (1959) seem to express something quite different from what the usage of word “revolution” meant in 1789 or 1917. According to a significant part of the scholarly literature on the topic (most significantly, D. Close: 1985, and Dan Connell: 2001<sup>4</sup>), this important difference of understanding is due to a range of features these new “revolutions” display. One of the features is their nationalist character. As a matter of fact, this series of revolutions in the modernizing regions outside Europe in the second half of the 20th century represented a veritable, although delayed, equivalent for the 1848 “Springtime of Nations” in Europe, revolutions that were equally nationalistic (though liberal in spirit); in effect, the both revolutionary epochs marked the same modernizing phase. A second differentiating feature would be the emergence, existence and functioning, as a pre-requisite, of some subversive organizations – generally referred to as “guerilla” (“little war”, in Spanish) – able to organize the revolutionary operations and to mobilize people against the existing political regime. The hallmark of Latin American and East Asian countries,

<sup>4</sup> Connell analyzes the four models of a new type of revolution, the one characterizing the new century, a revolution of the “activists”.



these movements had given birth to some powerful, charismatic figures who became the symbols of a trans-continental or world revolution (see Ernesto “Che” Guevara, in Latin America, for instance). The “*guerillas*” (e.g. FSLN, in Nicaragua, or FMLF in El Salvador) generally embrace a socialist, egalitarian stance and their ideological backing is assured by Régis Debray’s famous idea of “*foco*”, which considers guerillas as nucleuses for popular mobilization, for large-scale revolt. Referring particularly to the movements in the Third World, T. Skocpol argues that “[s]ocial revolutions have happened in such settings when major shifts in world economic and geopolitical conditions have weakened the repressive capacities of colonial or neocolonial regimes, and when peasants have either been able to rebel autonomously through local communal structures, or nationalist guerilla movements have devised ways to mobilize peasants directly.” (Skocpol: 1979, p. 237) A third distinguishable aspect is expressed in the particular case of Islamic societies, namely, the acute conflict between “modernization and traditional loyalties”; this ideological conflict stays at the core of the Turkish reformation under Kemal Atatürk (even though outside the chronological range set here) and of the theocratic Iranian Revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. The two processes are mirrored-events, opposite to one another by their very nature: the “Turkish Revolution”<sup>5</sup> is “a sweeping secularization of the political, educational and legal systems” (Close: 1985, p. 13), a vivid attempt to modernization, whereas the “Iranian Revolution” was, in fact, a return to traditionalism, to primordial, religious values, a denial of and a definitive renouncement to modernity, as this concept is understood in the Western culture. In this aspect, the socialist ideological inclinations become irrelevant. In fact, in all the previously-mentioned examples and in numerous other contexts (e.g. illegitimate regimes in Latin America at the end of the 60s, in the 70s and 80s, Southern Europe between the 1930s and the 1970s, etc.), the usage of the word “revolution” is generally “adopted by a wide variety of governments, partly to justify their departure from legality, but also to claim originality and importance for their achievements.” (Close: 1985, p. 13) Nowadays, this use of the concept, peculiar in the modernizing countries, is completed by the adoption of the same notion in the West, with a more generic meaning which passed into the common language: it expresses vitality, spontaneity, with a certain degree of opposition to authority, all these usually carried out by youngsters, thusly rather “an idealized way of life” (Calvert: 1970, p. 109). Nevertheless, the major conceptual shift in the evolution of the notion of “revolution”, since the one triggered by the French Revolution, has been marked by the regime change of 1989, in East-Central Europe, when the general understanding of “revolution” has suffered significant transformation and a partial return to the pre-1789 meaning.

### **Postmodern Revolution: The Revolutions of 1989 in East-Central Europe. General Considerations**

As it is commonly known today, the events of 1989 were unforeseen by the

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<sup>5</sup> For the phrasing “Turkish Revolution” for denominating the modernizing reform under Kemal Atatürk, see: Mango: 1999: the first references to the reforms were employing the word “*inkilâp*”, which denotes, in Turkish, the antonym of “*ihtilâl*”; the former refers to non-violent revolution, the later stands for a violent revolution, meaning literally “disorder” (and was, consequently, employed to denote the French and the Russian Revolutions). The neologism “*devrim*” replaced both words, becoming an all-encompassing term equivalent to “revolution”

large majority of the Western academia. Any hypothetical movement towards radical change, towards democratization, was simply rejected by great political scientists, among whom, most prominently, Samuel P. Huntington proclaimed emphatically, in 1984, that “the likelihood of a democratic evolution in Eastern Europe is virtually null” (Huntington: 1984, p. 217). Soon after, in 1985, Jonathan Schell, as well, stated that “[i]n actuality, of course, the disappearance [of the Soviet domination in the region] is about as unlikely as any other event could be in our world.” (Schell: 1985, p. xxii) In a nutshell, the revolutionary changes in Eastern and Central Europe at the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s made of “post-communism” to pass “from something virtually inconceivable, to something shockingly self-evident, only to revert to something flatly unintelligible, once again” (Holmes: 1996, p. 22), during only one single decade. As a result, when the breakdown of communism became an uncontested reality, another attitude aroused among the scholars analyzing the evolutions in this European region: the rejection, the vilification or the stultification of the accomplishments of the 1989 revolutions, even casting a doubt on their revolutionary nature. A significant number of political scientists simply asked whether or not 1989 moment in Central and Eastern Europe had actually been a revolution. This overall skepticism was the inevitable result of the fact that the events in East-Central Europe in 1989 were simply unintelligible, incomprehensible, making Western political scientists incapable of understanding and then explaining the movements of change. The events evolved surprisingly rapidly, imposing the necessity of revising the existing vocabulary of the political science. All in all, the classical conception of “revolution” appeared as remote for the new historical realities, for it ceased to be relevant in interpreting 1989, just as the French Revolution changed the meaning of the same concept two hundred years earlier. Nonetheless, Aurelian Crăiuțu rightly observes the pompous, high-flown rhetoric employed to describe *annus mirabilis* 1989 and its consequences: “The array of metaphors which tries to give a sense of what followed to the breakdown of communism is, indeed, disorienting. Pandora’s box, Rip van Winkle, « the end of history », « the market shock », « the Speenhamland situation », « a giant act of bootstrapping », « the end of ideologies », « the end of dichotomies » and « the dictatorship of the market » contest for the title of the most emblematic and the most catchy image with (the Schumpeterian) « uncreative destruction », a « moment of craziness », one of « the lost moments of history », « the Genesis », « the extinction at mass scale », « a new rebellion against modernity » or « the new barbarism »” (Crăiuțu: 1997, pp. 56-79, or Crăiuțu: 1999, pp. 31-58).

In the general shock and surprise, some observers rediscovered and reinterpreted those writings that have predicted the communist breakdown some twenty or fifteen years back (it is the famous case of the French historians Emmanuel Todd: 1976<sup>6</sup> and H el ene Carr ere d’Encausse: 1978). Nevertheless, although the significance of these writings is incontestable, the rationale each of them advances for the communist breakdown is sometimes erroneous, while, at times, the prospects of the fall of state socialism in East-Central Europe and the Soviet Union are considered only as distant possibilities of future development of the Eastern side of Europe. One of

<sup>6</sup> Without discarding the importance of the writing, the book focuses on the increasing infant mortality rate in the U.S.S.R. in order to advance a theory of its final dissolution

the most important predictions of the communist breakdown, made shortly after the first upheavals in Poland in 1988, belongs to the geostrategist Zbigniew Brzezinski: “Marxism-Leninism is an alien doctrine imposed on the region by an imperial power whose rule is culturally repugnant to the dominated peoples. As a result, a process of organic rejection of communism by Eastern European societies – a phenomenon similar to the human body’s rejection of a transplanted organ – is underway.” (Brzezinski: 1989, pp. 105, 242-255) Yet, the “organic” nature of the envisaged rejection of the Soviet rule in ECE countries suggested a process of generations, rather than a rapid, all-encompassing change after a series of roundtable talks, under the mounting popular pressures. The fact that Brzezinski saw in the communist breakdown a process of generations is evident in his contributions in the 1970s (e.g. Brzezinski: 1976, pp. 337-351). In the same vein, American sociologist Randall Collins is credited of being the ones who have predicted the fall of the communist bloc, in a paper presented at the University of South Florida in 1980 and titled “The future decline of the Russian empire” (Collins: 1986, pp. 186-209). Collins’s short study of the Russian “empire” is comprehensive, touching equally political, social, economic facets, while the geopolitical one provides a clearer picture of the future collapse: “The various factors militating against the continuation of Russian power are interacting and cumulative. The activation of military crises in any area opens up vulnerabilities in other areas. If serious fighting were to break out in the Far East, or in central Asia, Russian power to deal with dissidence in Eastern Europe or the Caucasus would be diminished, thereby encouraging local efforts at autonomy. *The current dissidence in Poland fits logically with the situation in which the Russian are hesitant to intervene militarily because of expensive commitments in Afghanistan. Conversely, an Eastern European revolt would create vulnerabilities on southern and Asian fronts.*” (Collins: 1986, pp. 201-202 [italics added]) Despite the multitude of examples that have more or less correctly envisaged the fall of communist (in fact, the fall of the Soviet Union), the representatives of sovietology, as shown above, have largely failed to foresee the communist breakdown at the end of the 1980s. Richard Pipes, renowned historian of Russian dynamics, pardons such a failure by referring to the rather stochastic human element in the equation of the Soviet collapse: “It seems likely that ultimately the reason for the failure of professionals to understand the Soviet predicament lay in their indifference to the human factor. In the desire to emulate the successes of the natural scientists, whose judgments are ‘value free’, political science and sociology have been progressively dehumanized, constructing model and relying on statistics (many of them falsified) and, in the process, losing contact with the subject of their inquiries – the messy, contradictory, unpredictable *homo sapiens*”. (Pipes: 1999, p. 47).

If the regime changes in East-Central Europe were more or less a series of unexpected events, then how were they accounted for? Was 1989 a revolution or not in the general conceptualizing framework of those social scientists concerned with the *phenomenon* of “revolution”? Initially, it was widely argued that the events in Eastern and Central Europe of 1989 were wrongly labeled as “revolutions”, for they failed to produce new concepts and to advance new perspectives, they did not create innovative and original *corpus* of doctrine and manners of thinking of and organizing the political realities. In the words of political scientist Harald Wydra, “[th]e revolutions of 1989

showed the conspicuous absence of charismatic actors, eschatological recipes, messianism, or teleological intentions. No new utopia of progress shone at the horizon of expectation but the overall feeling was the conservative ‘return to normality.’” (Wydra: 2008, p. 35) In 1965, Hannah Arendt was quite categorical, when coining a particular movement towards change a “revolution”: “We are entitled to speak of revolution only where the pathos of the new is present and where the novelty is linked to the idea of liberty.” (Arendt: 1966, p. 34) In this line of thinking, a series of famous scholars rallied to the logic of the “*nihil novi sub sole*” (or “there-is-nothing-new-under-the-sun”) sophism, rejecting the revolutionary character of the 1989 changes in Eastern Europe on the sole basis that they did not display the features which defined the previous revolutions. One of the major contesters of the radical nature of the 1989 transformations and an adept of this sophism was Jürgen Habermas, who named 1989 a “*nachholende Revolution*”, i.e. “a rectifying revolution” or “revolution of recuperation” (Habermas: 1990, p. 5), a movement which failed to bring something new, to advance a theoretical innovation, a future-oriented set of ideas. What was indeed proper to the situation in Central and Eastern Europe was a need for inter-war democratic restoration, in fact “the extension of the limits of the existing Western democracy.” Emerged in countries where the democratic experience was abruptly interrupted still in its infancy by Nazism and communism, the 1989 moment, in Habermas’s perspective, “presents itself as a revolution that is to some degree flowing backwards, one that clears the ground in order to catch up with developments previously missed out on.” (Habermas: 1990, p. 26) Barrington Moore re-names Habermas’s “rectifying revolution” as “backward-looking revolution” (Moore, Jr.: 1972, p. 168), anticipating the German sociologist’s arguments, whereas Jürgen Kuszinsky labels the same series of events as “conservative revolution” (Jürgen Kuszinsky, in *Die Zeit*, on the 29th of December 1989, apud Habermas: 1990), a veritable oxymoron. As opposed to Habermas, however, Barrington Moore, roughly twenty years before 1989, observes that, in fact, revolutionaries generally “march[ed] into the future facing resolutely backward”, as each great revolution sought to restore a situation previously existing or to impose an Ancient, initial, primordial order: “Puritan revolutionaries looked back into the Bible; the French to the Romans and the Greeks, the Russians to the French and to what Marx thought he saw of the future in looking at nineteenth-century situation.” (Moore, Jr.: 1972, p. 169) Reiterating Habermas’s views on the Revolutions of 1989, Ernst Nolte further argues that changes of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe can easily and properly be categorized as what he called “*die unvollständige Revolution*” (Nolte: 1991, p. 27), an unfinished revolution, an incomplete revolution, primarily due to its pacifist nature, to its non-violent character, not necessarily due to its inability to advance new ideas for the organization of society and of the state. This latter observation is to be found in Claus Offe’s article from *Social Research* – “Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe” – in which the German political sociologist refers to 1989 as “a revolution without a revolutionary theory”: “This upheaval [i.e. of 1989, including Gorbachev’s perestroika within Soviet Union, which Offe characterizes as “revolution from the top”] is a revolution without a historical model and a revolution without a revolutionary theory. Indeed its most conspicuous distinguishing characteristic is the lack of any elaborated theoretical

assumptions and normative arguments addressing the [following] questions: [W]ho is to carry out which actions under which circumstances and with what aims? [W]hich dilemmas are to be expected along the road? [And h]ow ought the new synthesis of a post revolutionary order be constituted and what meaning should be assigned to the notion of ‘progress’? [...] The distinctly ‘a-theoretical’ character of the upheaval is reflected in the literary forms which accompany it. Entirely absent are all analytical expressions and grandiose directives by revolutionary intellectuals.” (Offe: 1997, p. 30, or Offe: 1991, p. 867) Offe, a rather moderate analyst of the 1989 moment, advanced even a justification for why the downfall of communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe was impossible to be anticipated by the Western scholarly: he argues that 1989 bears, however, an innovative aspect and that is the simultaneousness in occurrence of three types of “incompatible” decisions: (1) “the decisions as to who ‘we’ are as a community” (i.e. revising of the political, national and ethnic identities); (2) “the decisions as to the rules, the procedures, the rights, the institutions” (i.e. the revision of the constitutional framework, of the type of regime); (3) “the decisions as to the economic resources, redistributions” (Offe: 1997, pp. 32-33) (i.e. the revision of the economic system and of the economic strategies). This simultaneous occurrence made the changes in 1989 virtually impossible to predict. Moreover, the three types of revisions gave an unprecedented burden on decision-making for the new – more or less revolutionary – elite who emerged after the revolutionary wave of 1989. In this sense, the Polish dissident Adam Michnik defines the 1989 movements as an “auto-limitative revolution” (Michnik: 1985)<sup>7</sup>. Even the famous exegete of the French Revolution, François Furet is quite reserved when discussing the radical character of the regime changes in 1989; the French historian assesses that: “retourner à du connu, en bénéficiant à la fois, par imitation, de l’histoire des démocraties occidentales et, par rejet, de la faillite communiste” (Furet: 1990, p. 168). Furet’s theory, “retourner à la connu”, is summarized by Aurelian Craiutu, in an article published in *Polis Review*: “The Revolution in Eastern Europe, he [i.e. Furet] advocated, was animated exclusively by a restoring ethos based on the desire to reject the past: the restoration of the rule of law, the freedom, the elections, the private property and the market economy. Where these [features] had lacked [during the interwar period], the only solution for these countries was the *imitation* of Western democracies” (Craiutu: 1997, p. 63). Probably the most interesting phrasing linked to the existence (or the absence) of revolutionary features in 1989 in Eastern and Central Europe is Timothy Garton Ash’s paronomasia: “refolution” – or “revorm” –, a composed word of “reform” and “revolution”. A “refolution” is, according to Garton Ash, a set of “reforms from above as a response to the revolutionary pressure exerted from below” (Garton Ash: 1989, pp. 3-10). In his perspective, the emergence and manifestation of the “refolution” proves once more that the time of true revolutions has passed. Skeptical as well regarding the revolutionary nature of the events that marked the breakdown of state socialism are Kenneth Jowitt, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan. In their famous *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation in Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*, Linz and Stepan favor the phrase “pacted revolution” when referring, not only to the changes in Eastern and Central Europe, but also to the starting point in South American transitions to

<sup>7</sup> A. Michnik, “A New Evolutionism”. The term – “self-limiting revolution” – was first coined by Staniszkis: 1984.

democracy. A “pacted revolution” is described as a “four-player game composed of hard-liners and soft-liners in the regime and moderates and radicals in the opposition. Theoretically and politically, there are two structural preconditions of such a pacted transition to democracy: (1) the existence of organized, nationally known and non-violent democratic groups in civil and political society and (2) the existence of soft-liners in the regime who have the desire and autonomy to negotiate a ‘pacted reform’.” (Linz, Stepan: 1996, p. 356) Finally, the bluntest observation concerning the Revolutions of 1989 in Center and East comes from Robert Heilbroner: “Was really 1989 a great turning point in the history of humanity? I believe not. If the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe navigate safely through the hazardous gorge which leads to political pluralism, this does not mean they are the pioneers of a new era of civilization, which represented the intention, but not also the consequence, of the Russian Revolution. Moreover, it could be said that they repaired the failed revolution and, by doing this, they restored the level of Western politics and economic culture to what it could have been if, from 1917 until today, the things had followed a liberal-democratic path, one of capitalism of reforms... This is why, the revolts of 1989 are rather *counterrevolutionary* than revolutionary – in spite of all deformations imposed by a fundamentalist Marxism, in spite of any fatal utopia induced by the naïve idea of socialism. Therefore, often the most powerfully articulated feelings are heading moreover towards the past, towards a liberal capitalism, than foreword, towards an indeterminate goal.” (Heilbroner: 1990, pp. 579-586)

Contrarily, responding to the assessments presented above, another series of political scientists, political sociologists and economists identified the real importance of the 1989 Revolutions in Eastern Europe, mentioning the opportunities and prospects that would trigger and accelerate the political and socio-economic developments. Hereby, Jeffrey Isaac and Seyla Benhabib argue that considering 1989 solely a restoration would be profoundly mistaken, for, in fact, the present evolutions in Central and Eastern European countries display a different developmental model, a new path to what had been called “social democracy” (Walzer: 1990, p. 160)<sup>8</sup> or “the third democracy” (Giddens: 2000)<sup>9</sup>. Firstly, S. Benhabib, in a response to Jeffrey Isaac published in “Political Theory” warns that: “[I]t is wrong to interpret the revolutions of 1989 in East Central Europe as an uncritical restoration tout court of liberal democracies and free-market economies. Rather, one can follow events in these societies as revealing also the inherent tensions and the contradictions among three socio-historical ideals and projects, which are often listed as if they were one: liberalism, democracy and a free-market economy.” (Benhabib: 1995, p. 677) Ralf Dahrendorf, in his 1990’ *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* argues convincingly that the 1989 moment represented a veritable “trip to the unknown”, rejecting therefore the perspective of a simple restoration of democracy in East-Central Europe. Even though not capable of advancing a totally new and innovatory set of ideas on how the politics and society should be organized – i.e. a new revolutionary utopia –, the Revolutions of 1989 should

<sup>8</sup> What has been called by some Western leftists ‘actually existing socialism’ will now disappear from the political map. Ironically, it is likely to be succeeded by one or another version of social democracy, which is the only socialism that has ever actually existed.”

<sup>9</sup> Giddens mentions a doctrinal reconfiguration of social democracy, for “the third way” should assimilate the fundamental lesson 1989 is teaching.

be perceived, according to Dahrendorf, from the prism of future developments in the Central and East European countries (Dahrendorf: 2005, pp. 40-41); these countries do not have to return necessarily to the Western democratic model, but they can create democratic forms, a new facet of social democracy, a rethinking of market economy and liberal democracy.

Dahrendorf's acknowledgement of the fact that the classical meanings of the concept "revolution" must be reevaluated concretized in a new series of definitions provided by those scholars who attempted an explanation of 1989 "great transformation". It is the case of Leslie Holmes, who, in his study of post-communism, considered a short, compressed, simplified definition: "A revolution is a rapid and fundamental change of system." (Holmes: 1997, p. 131)<sup>10</sup> Coining the moment of 1989 in East Germany a "spontaneous revolution", Karl Opp, Peter Voss and Christiane Gern advance their own understanding of the concept, revising as well the existing generally-accepted definition: "A revolution is the replacement of the elite and the introduction of a new political and economic order after (violent or non-violent) protests by the population." (Opp et al: 1995, p. 225) As it is obvious, three features ceased to be mentioned anymore in these new descriptive definitions: the advance of the ideology, of the new, reorganizing vision on society and politics; the presence of a social class that desires the change and carries the revolution; the manifestation of popular violence within the various revolutionary episodes.

Close to the approaches adopted by Eisenstadt and Jeffrey Isaac, renowned political theorist Bruce Ackerman sees in the 1989 Revolutions some form of the "revival of liberal values" at the turn of the century, an unreserved embracement of liberal democracy: this is the reason why, similar to Arendt's definition – which emphasizes the *desideratum* of liberty in the revolutionary pursuit –, Ackerman's definition of "liberal revolution" of 1989 moment assumes a process of development in ECE region whose last stage of modernity constitutes the inauguration of liberal democracy, initially propagated by the first phase of the French Revolution. Ackerman largely reiterates, in the context of a now "pluralistic united Europe"<sup>11</sup>, the "non-totalistic" and "non-utopian" character of the "liberal revolutions" of 1989, the defining features of Eisenstadt's "postmodern revolutions". Enthusiastic about what has prefigured as a veritable "liberal revolution", Ackerman summarizes the logic of the 1989 regime change thusly: "By exploiting a moment of Communist weakness, the Eastern Europeans have not only destroyed a great system of oppression, but given us reason to rethink the promise of revolution itself. [...] [M]en and women can make a new beginning and build a better world – one that won't look anything like utopia but that still promises more diversity and freedom than the grim bureaucratic tyranny it has replaced." (Ackerman: 1999, p. 206 [italics in original], or Ackerman: 1992, pp. 113-123) It is the series of observations in the spirit of Ackerman's and Arendt's that revive the faith in the welcoming effects of the revolutionary movement, in the drive towards the extension of human liberties.

<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, Holmes defines the events of 1989 as "a comprehensive revolution" (Holmes: 1998, p. 167.).

<sup>11</sup> The extent to which Ackerman's optimism is similar to Fukuyama's unrestrained enthusiasm regarding the final and decisive victory of liberal democracy in human history remains to be scrutinized. What is clear is the fact that Ackerman warns against possible contestations of the liberal victorious position, coming from clericalism, ethnic fundamentalism, and even the self-congratulatory illusions. See Fukuyama: 1992.

A recent assessment on the 1989 Revolutions in East-Central Europe states that they “can be seen not as arising as a spontaneous happening, but as the result of a gradual awakening, a sort of creeping opening of the hidden spheres of society. [...] [R]egime criticism came originally from inside a Marxist discourse.” (Wydra: 2008, p. 35, citing Václav Havel and his essay *The Power of the Powerless*.) The first revolutionary expressions against the regime were to emerge with the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and with the Prague Spring of 1968; but these initial attempts were rapidly and violently repressed. The writings of a range of dissidents – particularly György Konrád’s “Anti-politics” (1984), Leszek Kolakowski’s “Theses on Hope and Hopelessness” (1971) or Václav Havel’s “The Power of the Powerless” (1985) – produced the basis of ideas that led to the revolutions in 1989.

### **The classical revolution versus the postmodern revolution. Eisenstadt’s perspective**

The study “The Breakdown of Communist Regimes”, written by Israeli political sociologist Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt represents probably the most systematic and comprehensive analysis of this new type of revolution, in what the author labels “post-modern revolution”. In Eisenstadt’s perspective, three aspects are paramount for differentiating between the classical model of radical transformation and the unprecedented “post-modern” revolutions of 1989: the absence of class consciousness among the revolutionaries; their commitment to non-violent means of resistance and opposition and the conspicuous absence of charismatic, utopian and teleological elements (Eisenstadt: 1999, p. 89), for “the ideological blueprints were programmatically rejected.” Therefore, the “post-modern revolution” is non-utopian (non-ideological), non-violent and not carried out in the name of a specific social class. By no means trying to minimize the effects of the events from 1989, Eisenstadt states from the very beginning that “the breakdown of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe has been one of the most dramatic events in the history of humankind, certainly one of the most dramatic since the end of the Second World War.” (Eisenstadt: 1999, pp. 89-90) In addition, several important similarities are identified as well, together with the evident discrepancies, between the classical, modern type of revolution and the new type. Firstly, 1989 revolutions are labeled as “revolutions” for they are indeed radical, “drastic, dramatic changes of regime” (Eisenstadt: 1999, p. 90). Secondly, the very process of change, analyzed at the social level, encounters resemblances with the social turmoil in the classical episodes of revolution, as they generally presupposed “a combination of popular uprisings with struggles at the center”, the latter centered on the idea of reformism, differently perceived by “conservatives” and by “reformists”. Thirdly, a central role in the revolutionary accomplishments, equally in 1789, 1917 or 1989, was played by the intellectuals; to some extent, the intellectuals of “Charter ‘77” in Czechoslovakia, the Catholic priests in Poland, even the Protestant ministers in East Germany resemble, in their actions (not so much in their manner of thinking), to the Puritans in England during 1941-1960, to Jacobin clubs in 1789 France or to the Bolshevik *intelligentsia* in 1917 Russia. They all signified the catalyst for popular uprisings and mass protests. Moreover, the new type of revolution, consecrated by



the fall of state socialism in East-Central Europe in 1989, acquires new significance even with the development of new technologies in communication means: these peaceful forms of radical political change extensively used the television, in order to convey the information and to mobilize an atomized society, an absent civil society, a mass of citizens benumbed inside their private spaces, within their houses. Eisenstadt tends to parallel the role of the television in 1989 Revolutions with the emergence and evolution of the printed press employed to disseminate the innovative ideologies during the Great Revolutions.

Nonetheless, as expected, the differences between 1989 Revolutions and the Revolutions of the modern era (the French and the Russian, particularly) are far-reaching than the similarities. Three of these incongruities displayed by the two models are of paramount importance. First, the new type of revolution is not the movement of a certain social class, advancing its own social, political or economic interests and using other social classes as instruments in achieving these goals. At the street manifestations accompanying the political negotiations in 1989, intellectuals participated together with professionals, workers, peasants, students.

### **The post-modern revolution. Case specificities, structural and conjunctural factors**

*“Revolution is like a stone thrown into a small pond, a phenomenon with vast secondary consequences.”*  
Charles W. Fairbanks, Jr. (2007, p. 46)

Citing Eisenstadt, Ch. Tilly provides a short presentation of the 1989 episodes, based on four main answers to his starting question: “Given this book’s [i.e. Tilly’s “European Revolutions”] concepts, do Eastern European events of 1989 qualify as revolutions?” (Tilly: 1993, p. 234, or Tilly: 2002, p. 246): (a) in each of Eastern and Central European countries, the events of 1989-1992 displayed undoubtedly revolutionary elements; (b) in order to understand and further analyze these moments and, moreover, for avoiding these recent transitions to end up as being perceived only as disorienting, Tilly suggests that it is imperious to differentiate between revolutionary situations and revolutionary consequences (outcomes); (3) the events of 1989 in East-Central Europe had definitely revolutionary outcomes, regardless of the depth of revolutionary situations; (4) in some countries, a revolution actually occurred, in others it did not. Tilly’s answers would suggest that, for properly examining the movements of change in 1989, the case study approach would be the most suitable. Each country experiencing radical change at the end of the 90s shows its own specificities (social, political, economical, cultural), a special context, hence generating a particular form of revolutionary manifestation. The aim of the present theoretical inquiry is not to detail on the complicated context, socio-political and cultural traditions of each of the six countries of Sovietized Europe (Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania), but rather to briefly acknowledge the specificities of each nation under discussion and the impact of these specificities (particularly, the tradition of dissent, the nature of the regime, etc.) on the outlook of the regime change. Not all countries of ECE experienced the same form of regime change – even though the

paradigm of “postmodern revolution”, brevilouquently presented above, inaugurated new dilemmas of conceptualizing the 1989 momentum. Generally, one can distinguish among: (1) negotiated, “roundtable talks” (Poland and Hungary), (2) non-negotiated, non-violent regime change, under the pressure from below (East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and, partly, Bulgaria), and (3) non-negotiated, violent regime change (Romania).

Consequently, for the study of the evolution of the concept of “revolution”, the general treatment of 1989 Revolutions in East-Central Europe presupposes a quite useful instrument. However, each Central and East European country that experienced a regime change in 1989 displays its own peculiarities regarding the causes and the manner in which the revolution occurred. The pattern is undoubtedly similar – popular protests followed by negotiations between two opposing parts, ended up in the overthrow of the communist nomenklatura and its replacement with a new, reformer elite –, but the case studies or, at least, the separate analysis of some groups of countries can provide a more in-depth understanding of the Revolutions of 1989. The specificities of each communist regime lie in what Ken Jowitt, in his *The New World Disorder*, identified as the mixture of causes generated by “regime political culture”, “elite political culture” and “community political culture” (Jowitt: 1992, pp. 55-56) of each of the countries facing radical change in 1989. A manner of analyzing the regime change in East-Central Europe by employing case studies of pairs of states with resembling socio-political and economic features – hence, highlighting the discrepancies among each regime change – is advanced by Herbert Kitschelt et al., who distinguish among three types of communist regime and, hence, three types of “post-modern revolutions” and of transitions: “patrimonial” communism, “national-accommodative” communism and “bureaucratic-authoritarian” communism (Kitschelt et al: 1999, pp. 23-26).

The “patrimonial” communist regimes are characteristic for Romania and Bulgaria and aroused in the context of an economy highly dominated by agriculture and of a societal composition clearly dominated by peasants; as a result, these societies were rather rural ones, featuring extensively personal rules (favored by the small ruling clique practicing nepotism, but by the Orthodox Church, as well), predominantly vertical relations of personal dependency (i.e. patron-client relations) and favoritism in the public affairs. Consequently, when the communist parties seized power after 1945, they were small in size and insignificant in the political arena, primarily due to the fact that they represented the interests of an almost absent social class: the working class. After acquiring power, the communist leaders initiated intense industrialization, in order to enlarge the size of the working class and, hence, their popular support. Both the cooptation and the repression practiced by the regime generated a weak and inert opposition.

Not by chance, the last two countries to exit from state socialism were those experiencing “patrimonial” communist regimes: Bulgaria and Romania. In Bulgaria, the Union of Democratic Forces organized itself as an expression of the civil society – virtually absent in the communist societal configuration –, under the leadership of dissident-philosopher Zhelyu Zhelev, at the beginning of November 1989. Within a month, the political power was transferred towards a new political elite, representing a

reformist, “neo-communist” stance. On the 10th of November, the communist leader Todor Zhivkov was removed; the first free elections were held in June 1990 and they were won by the softliner fraction of the former Communist Party. Only in 1992, an anti-communist party, the Union of Democratic Forces, acquired political power. Finally, the revolution in Romania signifies a special case, a veritable exception, since an important degree of violence was displayed during the popular manifestations that triggered the breakdown of the regime and of the monolithic Romanian Communist Party. The nature of the communist regime – “patrimonial”, “sultanistic” (Linz, Stepan: 1996, pp. 344-365) – may explain the violent character of the events in 1989. Moreover, in drawing observations concerning the fall of state socialism in Romania, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan argue that there is a “Romanian exceptionalism”, as opposed to the Polish one: “It had the last transition. It had the most violent regime termination. It was the only country that had nothing remotely close to a national round table. It is the country where the successor regime committed the most egregious violations of human rights. [...] It is the only country where a former high Communist official was not only elected to the presidency in the first free election, but re-elected.” (Linz, Stepan: 1996, p. 344) Due to the monolithic feature of the Romanian Communist Party no compromise and bargaining, through a roundtable talk, were possible; in such a context, no political alternative could have been advanced, in the absence of a well-organized opposition movement, and no negotiation with reformist factions could have ever taken place. This is the reason why, the regime following the violent collapse of state socialism in Romania was labeled by scholars “neo-communism”, while the revolutionary nature of 1989 was highly contested. In explaining a series of concepts, Linz and Stepan are skeptical regarding the revolutionary character in 1989 Romania: on the one hand, to use the term “scripted uprisings” for the events from Timisoara and Bucharest during the 16th-22nd of December 1989 means “to underestimate the importance of the *movements of rage* (Kenneth Jowitt) in undermining Ceausescu’s coercive power” (Linz, Stepan: 1996, p. 362); on the other hand, in labeling “revolution” the same events is equivalent with “overestimating the degree to which these *movements of rage* represented organized opposition groups with their own leaders and programs” (Ibidem). Subsequently, the concept of “captured revolution” misses “the extemporaneous opportunism and weakness of Iliescu”, while the one of “neo-communism” overstates the principled cohesion of the interim government and also does not consider the profound divisions within the National Salvation Front happened in 1991.

The second type of communist regimes, the “national-accommodative” ones, is specific to Poland and Hungary, countries in which, prior to 1945, the industrialization had achieved, at large, its goals, generating however a largely not organized working class. The rural communities did prevail here, but the urban arias sheltered intellectuals of independent thought working on governmental positions; the rational-bureaucratic procedures and the impersonal-legal relations were to be found in the governance of such states prior to the installation of state socialism, together with a certain degree of elite contestation; in the two Catholic and Protestant countries, respectively, the communist parties were small as well, but their role in the anti-fascist resistance during World War II and, then, in the post-war reconstruction helped them acquire a larger

popular support. Subsequently, after they had got in power, they found themselves incapable to fully institutionalize the regime, despite the existence and implementation of a repressive system: opposition towards the regime mounted, while being helped primarily by the Catholic Church, independent of the state's authority, but dependent on an outside (external) authority (i.e. Rome). A slight degree of tolerance of the regime regarding the dissident movements generated different violent episodes of popular outbreak that undoubtedly shook the ability of the communist state to preserve order and even, to some extent, its own existence (e.g. the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Potsdam uprising of 1956, the strike from Danzig of 1970, "Solidarity" strike of 1988, etc.). Acknowledging the domestic specificities, the leaders of such "national-accommodative" regimes adopted a policy stance that would somehow suggest a degree of national autonomy towards "the Soviet hegemon".

It is from the peculiarities of a "national-accommodative" communist regime that, when studying the special case of Poland, one can understand the so-called "Polish exceptionalism"; four main issues are to be discussed under the said label: the fact that during the state socialism imposed here, at least in four different occasions, workers raised against the regime in impressive strikes and protests, rapidly repressed (June 1956, December 1970, 1978, 1988) and that, as a result of the unique factionalism which characterized the Polish communist party, there were five heads of state in forty-four years (Władysław Gomułka – 1956-1970 –, Bolesław Bierut – 1947-1956 –, Edward Gierek – 1970-1980 –, Wojciech Jaruzelski – 1981-1989); also, Poland is the communist country in East-Central Europe in which the first trade unions emerged and where the downfall of communism itself started. The existence within the communist party of both "hardliners" and "softliners" (i.e. moderates) favored a peaceful revolution, a round-table beginning of transition. More importantly, the emergence and the activity of "Solidarity", the trade union led by Lech Wałęsa, exerted an extremely important influence towards socio-political change in the last ten years of the communist regime in Poland. "Solidarity"'s strike of August 1980 was even considered a "self-limited revolution", for it advanced a common programme – "the 21 Demands" –, but it did not ask for a regime change, fearing a Soviet intervention in Poland. Instrumental for the demise of the regime in Poland were, on one hand, the role of the Catholic Church, and, on the other hand, the impact, on the future development of the social movement, of the alliance between the workers and the intellectuals against the Communist Party. In 1976, after another rise of the prices, the workers reacted again in massive strikes; but, unlike in 1956 and 1970, major intellectual figures came in the support of the workers, by organizing the "committees for the defence of the workers". In this context, the "class struggle" became an obsolete phrase, overcome by the partnership workers-intellectuals in front of a repressive regime. Moreover, after 1978, when Karol Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II<sup>12</sup>, the Polish opposition movements and dissidence, particularly "Solidarity", enjoyed the support of the Roman Catholic Church. Under these circumstances, there is no wonder why the "snowball effect" of the regime

<sup>12</sup> The election of the first Polish Pope as the Head of the Catholic Church is considered one of the most significant conjunctual factors triggering the communist breakdown in Poland. See, in this respect, Ramet: 1990, but also the biographies of John Paul II: Kwitny: 1997; Szulc: 1995; Weigel: 1999. For the general relation between religion and the nature of the communist dictatorship, see: Ramet: 1998.

changes was initiated in Poland, specifically.

Hungary is another special case, especially when taking into consideration the Revolution of October 1956. Unlike Yugoslavia, for instance, which gathered, under the leadership of Iosip Broz Tito, five nationalities and four religions, Hungary is a homogenous nation, with a homogenous ethnicity. Moreover, Hungary was, during the World War II, an ally of the Nazi Germany and, hence, it emerged defeated from the war. During the communist regime, the country displayed the features of the “national-accommodative” type and, as a result of this and of the fact that the country was rather small, the agrarian surface was not completely collectivized. Up to 1956, in Hungary, there was no major challenge to the communist power. The Revolution of 1956, though not a revolution *per se*, managed to overthrow the communist regime for two weeks. It was exclusively an urban uprising, concentrated in the Hungarian capital-city. As a reminiscent characteristic of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Budapest concentrated 20% of the total population of the country; that is why the popular basis for the outbreak was extensive. In addition, one of the driving forces of the Hungarian Revolution was represented by the students, a social group that was hard to domesticate by the repressive regime, a quite radical group, a sort of reminiscent of the radicalism advanced by the Revolution of 1848, led by Kossuth Lajos. It was, as well, the imposing figure of Imre Nagy and his reformist spirit that made the urban masses to see in the Communist General Secretary the leader of the movement towards change. The uprising in Hungary emerged in a favorable context, for, in February the same year, the new leader at Kremlin, Nikita Khrushchev, condemned the Stalinist crimes at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party. Nevertheless, it was the Red Army, at the order of the same Khrushchev, to intervene, on 4th of November, against the “Revolution”. Despite of the repression practiced in the following years, the regime allowed a certain degree of dissidence in Hungary, in order not to upset the population and, hence, to trigger another violent and dangerous popular outbreak.

Finally, the “bureaucratic-authoritarian” communist regimes, i.e. those institutionalized in the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia, were instituted in two countries that, prior to 1945, experienced a significant democratic period (without considering the Nazi regime) and which entered modernization long before 1945. Both GDR and Czechoslovakia were industrialized states, with an extensive working class that was largely organized and unionized. As a consequence, the communist parties represented an important force on the political scene. The countries were urbanized, here the informal relations were generally abandoned, in favor of impersonal procedures and of legal-rational bureaucratic governance. Once the communist parties seized power in these Central European states, they appealed to a significant mass of workers and they constructed a highly organized and disciplined political apparatus. This is the reason why any attempt to opposition towards the regime was rapidly and violently repressed (see, in this sense, the Prague Spring of 1968 or the revolt of June 17, 1953 in GDR, singular episodes of violent opposition in these countries).

Indeed, the case of Czechoslovakia and its “Velvet Revolution” are seemingly important for the study of the new, nonviolent type of revolution. Up to 1989, the regime was seriously challenged once, during the “Prague Spring” of 1968. Just like

the Hungarian Revolution, the Prague Spring was an exclusively urban outbreak. The popular revolt of 1968 was triggered by the reformer experiment of Alexander Dubcek, the General Secretary of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party, who attempted the implementation of social, political, economical policies aimed at reforming both the party and the society; the reforms soon captured the popular support, particularly from intellectuals and students. The intervention of the Red Army (backed by the Warsaw Pact troops) in August and the subsequent confrontations with the population abruptly ended the Czechoslovakian experiment. Due to the rapid and massive repression of this first attempt (acknowledged in Kremlin under the name of “Brezhnev Doctrine”), 1968 remained the sole episode of popular outbreak in the country.

Despite the specificities presupposed by each revolution in East-Central Europe in 1989, these movements towards radical change were generated also, as any other revolutionary episode in history, by structural and conjunctural causes of revolution (Mandel: 1989, pp. 159-184). Among the most significant structural causes of the Revolutions in 1989, the repeated blows suffered by the communist regimes and briefly presented above (the episodes in Poland of 1956, 1970, 1980, the Hungarian Revolution, the “Prague Spring”, the June 1953 revolt in East Germany) influenced undoubtedly the strength of the ideological content of these regimes. The conjunctural causes of the Revolutions of 1989 stem primarily from the events taking place in USSR, after 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev became the Secretary General of CPSU. Gorbachev’s conviction, that USSR would soon perish unless a profound process of reforms, restructuring and reconfigurations was implemented, determined the abandonment of “Brezhnev Doctrine”, in favor of non-intervention external policy and of “Sinatra Doctrine”, and the adoption of “*perestroika*” and “*glasnost*”, for economic recovery and transparency within USSR. Furthermore, in April 1989, the first free elections are organized in the Soviet Union. The “restructuring” in political and economic terms determined, in turn, deep economic problems; this virtual economic collapse constituted one of the most important structural factors for the events in 1989, for it generated low levels of citizen supportability and high degree of popular dissatisfaction throughout the Eastern bloc. The reforms in USSR represented the signal for an extraordinary twist in the situation of the East-Central European countries.

The so-called “snowball effect” was evident in the case of the events of 1989: Poland was the first to enter an era of democratization, through peaceful “Roundtable Talks” coupled with large popular manifestations; Hungary soon copied the Polish model. After the negotiated revolution and the regime change, Hungary opened the borders with the Western world (i.e. Austria) and, subsequently, this measure triggered unstoppable street demonstrations and a powerful cry demanding regime change in GDR, similar to the ones in Hungary. Here, since the capital Berlin was highly surveilled, the protests started in Leipzig, in September. As a response to the pressure exerted from below, through popular protests (whose climax was reached on the 9th of November, when the Berlin Wall was destroyed), a peaceful negotiation between the leaders of the Communist Party and the “softliners” soon followed, inaugurating hence the breakdown of the regime and, on the 3rd of October 1990, the reunification of East Germany with West Germany. The collapse of state socialism in Czechoslovakia

started with street demonstrations and mass protests as well, channeling the socio-economical frustrations of the citizens. The “Velvet Revolution” was generated by the violent repression of a student manifestation in Prague on the 17th of November 1989; general strikes soon followed. The popular mobilization was supported by the “Charter ‘77”, an opposition organization gathering the most prestigious figures of the Czechoslovakian culture: Vaclav Havel, Jan Patočka, Milan Křáňko. During November 17 and December 29, two opposition forces were formed: the “Civic Forum” (in Prague) and “Public Against Violence” (in the Slovakian part of the country). The first free elections were organized in June 1990.

## Conclusions

Traditionally, since the French Revolution of 1789-1792, the concept denotes a series of aspects: (1) it represents a public contestation of and a challenge to the existing socio-political order (i.e. *ancien régime*); (2) this contestation generates a swift, violent change in the political structure and personnel; (3) the movement towards change is carried in the name of a social class, capable of mobilizing the majority of the population for large protest manifestations and violent outbreaks; (4) the change is legitimized by a set of innovative doctrines or by an ideology (i.e. revolutions generally advance new social and political utopias); (5) as long as it is successful, the revolution is institutionalized in innovative social-political and economic systems, in which the new leaders had seized the power through the use of violence or threat of violence and are backed by the large proportion of the population. Consequently, the model of “classical revolution” is *par excellence* ideological, class-oriented and violent.

In the case of the 1989 Revolutions in East-Central Europe, one should distinguish between three types of revolutions, corresponding at large to the three types of state socialism discussed above (“national-accommodative”, “welfare” and “patrimonial” or “modernizing-nationalizing”<sup>13</sup>). The first group of revolutions is represented by the peaceful, negotiated ones that took place with the “Roundtable Talks” in Poland and Hungary, during the first months of 1989. It followed, especially due to the favourable international context and to the “snowball” effect, the series of peaceful, non-negotiated revolutions, triggered by opposition movements and mass popular demonstrations in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. A peaceful, non-negotiated revolution took place in November, in Bulgaria (the so-called “*Ecoglasnost*”, although the features of this movement towards change are extremely different from the Czechoslovak and East German cases). Finally, in December, the only violent, (of course) non-negotiated revolution happened in Romania, a country experiencing a “patrimonial” dictatorship.

It is worth mentioning that recent popular outbreaks promoting radical regime change in developing countries were labeled “color revolutions”, following the model of post-modern revolutions of 1989: hence, the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. However, though expressing the so-called “right to revolution” of the people consecrated by the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, these movements marked almost exclusively the political facet of the

<sup>13</sup> The term is proposed by D. Petrescu: 2010, pp. 48 and 404.

society. Therefore and in spite of the fact that political changes indeed existed, the social structure and the dominant economical policy remained largely intact. The very goal of the two movements was only a political one.

In the course of human history, the concept of “revolution” suffered several modifications and transformations, triggered directly by empirical information that have led to changes in the understanding, the definition and the overall theory of rapid violent popular movements. It was primarily the French Revolution of 1789 that clearly changed the “cyclic” understanding of revolution into a “linear” one. In the 19th century and especially after Marxist theory became famous worldwide, the term “revolution” achieved a rather common connotation. Historians and political scientists saw revolutions everywhere; moreover, experts in different fields started to coin innovative and radical breakthroughs as “revolutions”: “industrial revolution”, “commercial revolution”, “agricultural revolution”, “scientific revolution”, etc. However, all these phrasings refer primarily to the “capitalist” era – in Marxist perspective – and they were primarily emanations of the French Revolution, as well. But the last decades of the 20th century had their conspicuous role in marking the classical connotations of the concept “revolution”. Even after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, but definitely after the Revolutions of 1989 in East-Central Europe, it became more and more obvious that the classical manner of defining revolutions was irrelevant and obsolete for the second half of the 20th century. The central objection brought to it was the role of violence in events of revolutionary nature, since both the 1979 and the 1989 instances were largely non-violent revolutions.

Impressive indeed for the evolution of the concept of “revolution” is its aspiration towards a provocative and radical idea of “*metabolé*”<sup>14</sup>, which go beyond any millenarian or eschatological, salvationist or apocalyptic seductive ideologies. What is common to any revolutionary movement is its reformist flavor, its pathos towards change enjoying a broad popular support, regardless of the methods in which this change is carried out. Ideas of political restructuring and social rearticulation and rearrangement which have been perceived as mere utopia, become viable alternatives for the organization of the polity. Aspirations towards a radical transformation into the official social, political, economical and cultural paradigm – what P. Calvert would coin “the neurosis of change” (Calvert: 1998, p. 12) – incontrovertibly triggers a heterodox, essentially mass, sometimes even internecine, movement. Concurrently, any revolution should intrinsically affect the functional system of values itself, the dominant political culture, the fashion in which individuals and groups conduct their existence. The very mutations suffered by the understanding and connotations of the concept “revolution” generate the emergence, in the historiography of the revolutions, of some well-defined, properly characterized and explained models, types or patterns of revolutionary action; two of these models are briefly presented in the present paper. On the other hand, while employing these patterns makes the analysis and explanation of other similar revolutionary movements easier, recent uprisings and violent outbreaks seem impossible to be examined in reference to the same patterns. A constant need for ever-changeable reconfiguration of traditional, consecrated models

<sup>14</sup> The term appears in Plato’s *Timaios* and in Aristotle’s *Politics* (5th Book), but, more recently in H. Ryffel: 1949. It is, indeed, that moment of radical change generating the cycle of regime degeneration from aristocracy to tyranny.



and understandings of concepts becomes vital for the comprehensive explanation of future revolutionary instances.

It remains an open question in which form will the concept of “revolution” evolve in the next decades and centuries. It is expected that, while 1789 (and, in the same note, 1917) and 1989 had produced major shifts in the understanding of the connotations of the term and in the general attempt of the social scientists and observers to properly account for the said word, the near future to continue to forge revolutionary drives. Given the advances of technology and the increased interconnectedness through communication, revolutions might appear under the form of some rapid change and transformation with global implications and involving a larger number of political actors. The recent “Arab Spring” has shown that at least the mechanisms of mobilization have changed significantly under the influence of this growing connectivity between individuals, transcending social categorization and pragmatizing ideals of change. Moreover, it might appear that revolutions are part and parcel of a process of “modernization” – understood as “catching up” with the paradigmatic West –, in a moment when “modernizing” (“peripheral”) nations have acquired a self-conscious, contesting elite who might lead the “revolutionary” efforts; on this logic of “world-system”, it might be assumed that recent protests in Hong Kong (immediately labeled as the “Umbrella Revolution”) or future upheaval in Africa and Central Asia, for instance, might inaugurate new stages of “revolution” and might trigger, consequently, new conceptualizations.

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