# 8. The Sleeping Beauty: Central European and Croatian Political Culture

*Josip Kregar*

> Water freezes, ice thaws, iron rusts, iron oxide decomposes; hay becomes beef, beef may become hay again; revolt and reaction are cyclical and opposite processes in society (...) But the temporal order of events remains immutable; it cannot be reversed. The historic process and evolutionary process are alike in being temporal in character, i.e. non repetitive and irreversible (...) From the point of view of the evolutionary process every historical event is an accident and in this sense unpredictable. (White 1949, 13–14)

## Traditions and perspectives

As part of an ancient Roman ceremony, war heroes were allowed to display their spoils, so as to impress all with the power of Rome. Throughout this public display, however, captives now reduced to live booty or slaves constantly repeated a single chant: *Te hominem esse memento* – remember that you are only human. Throughout history such voices have been subdued, and few have cared to remember their humanness in times of triumph. We are now at just such a time of triumph: the victory of democracy over totalitarianism, of interdependence over isolation, of inclusion over exclusion, and of integration over disintegration; a time at last for freedom and choice. We are, it is said, at the end of history (Fukuyama 1992).

However, the abundant spoils have not been equally distributed across Europe. Progress in some parts of the continent fall short of expectations and instead of a bright future, what we see is a decline of morale, economies in shambles, social tensions, and exacerbated political conflict. Not least, we ought to remember that in many parts of Eastern Europe, people literally struggle to survive.

While we may say that history is beginning anew in the East, we must recognize that traditions are still weighing down heavily on us. We are hemmed in by old enemies: undemocratic political traditions and culture; destruction of the moral foundations of society; corrupt and savage political elites; and inadequate as well as inefficient democratic institutions.

# Political Culture in East Central Europe

*Edited by*
FRITZ PLASSER
ANDREAS PRIBERSKY

## Avebury

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## Political culture in post-socialism

Central Europe's political culture is the fruit of war memories, of servitude to lords, kings and decaying empires, of euphoric liberations and victories, of bureaucratic routine and the apathy it has engendered. But despite such seemingly overriding similarities, Central Europe is far from being culturally or politically homogeneous. It is, on the contrary, a maze of different nations, minorities, cultural patterns, cuisines, religions, languages.

The political culture of post-socialist societies differs from Western patterns largely as a result of forty years of Leninist "democracy". Although a number of arguments support the assumption that such divergences will disappear in the future, they are, at least for now, an incontestable reality. As one commentator has put it, "[p]erhaps the beginning of wisdom is to recognize that what communism has left behind is an extraordinary mish-mash." (Ash 1992, 286)

Central Europe's present chaos of political values is, for the most part, a product of communism's monopoly of power and the means of ideological indoctrination. Not only was the "dictatorship of the people" a very real one, and one extremely brutal at various times and in various places; ideological penetration could also reach deep into everyday life, and it pervaded political institutions as well as public opinion. One's career, and sometimes one's life, depended on utter hypocrisy (Volensky 1984) and erosion of moral standpoints: at any moment, it was necessary to distinguish between the public "virtue" of ideological obedience and opinions held privately.[1] Clearly, living under such conditions could not fail to have severe social and psychological repercussions.[2]

Of course, the specificities of Central European political culture cannot be explained by reference to post-war developments alone. Dinko Tomasic saw this clearly. He suggested a distinction between "Dinaric" and "Pannonian" forms of life in an attempt to take account of long term cultural development in the region (Tomasic 1948). The former he described as a tradition of militant authoritarianism, favouring values of authority, leadership, religion, and nation.[3] Individual life, in this pattern, is of secondary importance, while risk-taking, sacrificial virtues, and idealism, however rhetorical, are instilled as primary goals during many stages of socialization. Notions of courage, petulance, passion and "dionysiac" euphoria, of heroic effort, honour and *thymos* all fit into this category.

> Thus we find that most states in Eastern Europe, from medieval times up to the present day, were and are ruled by despotic and oligarchic governments. (...) After World War II, when most of the countries in Eastern Europe were occupied by the Red Army, the autocratic and tyrannical practices inherited from the past, and supported by the self-maximizing tendencies of the mountain folk and the local military and intelligentsia, were only accentuated. In some cases, the practices were legalized in the form of new laws and constitutions. (Tomasic 1948, 117, 126)

Pannonian culture, in Tomasic's terminology (1948, 228), describes a more "Apollonian" social order of artisans and farmers, whose predominant values are rationality, hard work, diligence, respect for material goods, and security within the family or village community. "In contrast to the insecure economic and social conditions of stock breeders in the mountains, the plowmen who settled the lowlands enjoyed an autarkic economy, an egalitarian family system, and remarkable lack of sharp social differentiation. Since there is more personal and economic security and more social equality in this society, there is less incentive to struggle for status, less social mobility, and less instability." Pannonic civilization promotes obedience to fathers, priests, kings and states. Cooperation for mutual benefit and peaceful compromise are valued highly in this cultural pattern, and isolation from larger frameworks of the state, nation, and region are seen as beneficial.

It would of course be an undue simplification to conclude, for instance, that the Dinaric pattern adequately describes Russians, Hungarians, Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins, or Baltic nations, or that Panonian culture denotes Bavarians, Austrians, Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes and Poles. If cultural patterns can at all be ascribed to nations in this way, then only in order to highlight the persistence of dual and seemingly contradictory traditions of obedience and insubordination, of withdrawal into privacy and public activism. Central European political culture and its main problems can perhaps be said to have emerged from the interstices or frictions between Dinaric and Panonic traditions, which have produced, on a purely political level, a relatively consistent pattern of mild conservatism and orientation toward traditional values.

Ultimately, the mish-mash has resulted in something rather different to the sort of civic culture that seems necessary for generating the dynamics of liberal democracy.[4] The blueprint of "polyarchy" (Dahl 1956) and its dynamism, as well as that of active and discursive competition between two parties, seems at present like an anomaly in a Central European context.

## Some features of Croation political culture

Empirical research conducted between 1976 and 1989 in Croatia has identified five basic types of value orientation (Petkovic et al. 1990; Ivanisevic et al. 1986).

- Traditionalist (21.63%) with positive attitudes towards religion and customs, negative views on modernization, urban life, consumerism, and equality between the sexes.
- New Right (37.40%) favouring capitalism, a liberal market economy, entrepreneurship, and self-interest, while rejecting socialism and non-economic individualism.
- Old Left (15.16%), which may be described as a Stalinist mindset.
- Innovative (23.13%) looking toward technological improvement as a source of progress. Neutral with respect to political questions, Negative attitude towards tradition, monopoly of political power, and charismatic leadership.
- Nonconformist (2.68%) exalting individual choice of life styles while rejecting tradition, religion, and conservative order.

More recent research (Petkovic et al. 1990, 577–618; Kregar et al. 1990, 619–637; Radin et al. 1990, 99–106) conducted on the eve of Croatia's democratization has, however, produced slightly different results[5]. When the distribution of values was computed around the axis of "conservative" and "innovative" and the more narowly political polarization of "left" and "right", Croations were found to have predominantly conservative values while declaring themselves equidistant to "right" or "left".[6] Of

particular interest is the fact that there seems to be a strong connection between conservativism and leftist orientations, as well as between conservatism and authoritarianism.[7]

It must be said that, on the basis of these results, it remains questionable whether Croatia's new constitution provides sufficient foundations for constructing Western-style democratic institutions within the near future. Preference for conservatism, authoritarian leadership and a rigid social order hardly provide a firm ground for democratization. But there is still cause for long term optimism. If liberal democracy and individualism are consolidated globally, there is no reason why post-socialist societies should not follow a similar trajectory of political development.

## Destruction of the society's moral foundations

One of the most disruptive features of post-socialism has been its lack of shared value orientations. Social interaction is emptied out by a pervasive relativism. There is, quite simply, nothing to believe in. Socialist dogmas have been destroyed by their own incredibility, but these same dogmas succeeded in eliminating traditional moral foundations of society. Cynicism, doublethink, and an erosion of moral norms have spread under the influence of values imported from developed societies. It is not so much that a "Western way of life" has caused disorientation by penetrating our societies, but that it has seeped through in false images of pure leisure and entertainment, of welfare for all, of a society in which everyone is young, healthy, and busy nurturing his or her emotions, of a society full of animation and excitement. Such flamboyant images have, predictably, outshone those of technological superiority, of hard work, and of knowledge.

This caricature of a "Western way of life" has ended up hypnotizing the poor and disoriented, and has caused symptoms of anomy: material aspirations cannot be fulfilled by regular means, but only through deviant behaviour (Merton) and/or in the course of a general collapse of social norms (Durkheim)[8]. Obvious reactions to such a social enviroment have been the search for new orientations, and specifically the urge to unite and identify with new emerging leaders, cliques, clans, and nations. Many people, to be sure, have found a way back into a self-defined normality, but disorientation and a sense of insecurity undoubtedly remain endemic phenomena in post-socialist societies.

## Institutions

Jurisdiction and government – as crucial regulatory mechanisms – have been burdened with expectations that are simply impossible to meet, at least within the short term range. Radical transformation of the entire legal system has been accompanied by technical imperfections, uncritical application of institutional solutions from abroad, and numerous legal antinomies. As a factor of social stability, the government is often countervailed or thwarted by the inefficiency and size of its bureaucracy[9], as well as by the widespread distrust which government officials encounter as exponents of the old regime.

The new institutions – parliament, political parties, administration – in no way correspond to the paradigms these terms invoke. Parliament, no matter how strong the concentration of power, should prevent its monopolizing as well as mistakes made

through haste. The President, no matter how authoritarian and vile (or wise), is elected by the people and should be accountable to the people. The judiciary should strive to be independent, and should submit to the law rather than to political whim. Instead, tendencies towards presidentialism, oligarchization within political parties, circumvention of Parliament and public debate in decisionmaking, and abrupt as well as inscrutable changes in the institutional framework are characteristic of the present situation in Croatia.

But these shortcomings in democratic practice are not immediately obvious. The constitution and legal structure are comparable or even indistinguishable from those in consolidated democracies. Institutionalized civil rights and elections, a constitutional court and parliament, a formally independent judiciary and supposedly transparent administration all suggest an accomplished transformation to a modern democracy. The reality, however, looks somewhat different. Precise rules and their consistent interpretation, and generally equal treatment of citizens before the law are the exception. As a rule, rules are simple décor. They are often far too complex to be put into practice, and there is neither a routine of applying them nor a habit of being subjected to them.

It has to be said that, without pragmatic "reinterpretation" of procedural rules, very often nothing would work at all. A degree of flexibility in the application of new rules derived from high-flying declarations is an unavoidable tribute paid to the reality of a gradual transformation. While the system may well emulate Western paradigms, the pace of change will vary considerably with place and time – and will come to be recognized as a major variable in transformation processes. But divergences in development should be seen as grounded in differences of culture and tradition, or of dynamics and constraints, rather than as differences in general course and direction.[10] According to Franklin and Baun

> constitutionalism or, more simply put, the rule of law, is more likely to emerge in a state from a fertile, organic environment or political culture (...). Any institutional design will be inadequate for the development of self-sustaining democratic institutions. This proposition rest on a very special theory of constitutionalism; i.e. that a constitution is much more than a document which lays out a set of laws for the design of government. Most states, including dictatorial ones, have some form of written constitution, and it is not the written constitution in these states that has failed. (Franklin and Baun 1995, 2)

Legitimation in post-socialist societies is often pre-democratic, and neither tradition nor political culture support peaceful and incremental development. These societies are divided in a variety of ways, and people are keen to improve their personal situation and material living standards quickly. In many ways, the constitutional and legal system does not correspond to informal codes of behaviour.[11] Governments come and go, constantly trying to change a desperate situation through acts of legislation. But the problem is not primarily one of imperfect regulation or lack of administrative expertise. Rather, the conditions for reception and acceptance of these rules are unfavourable as a result of the fact that political culture and political system no longer match.[12] The gap will only be closed, however, if institutions and historical cultural patterns begin to be mutually supportive of, and adapted to, each other. Such a time will surely come, but it is just as clear that we have a long way to go before it does.

Before they can function, institutions need at least a minimum of d. ility in order to develop a precise understanding of their competences and objectives. In the short run, human resources are perhaps the most pressing problem. Senior officials discredited as henchmen of the communist regime have been replaced by newcomers often educated but inexperienced, or revolutionary in intent but lacking in specialization. More troubling still, the work ethos and other values of the new personnel reflect the intractable inertia of the old system. Everything somehow seems located "in between"; a reformed inertia is confronted with ideas and inspirations from abroad; new knowledge and expertise is contrasted with politics as usual; while change is expected, stability proves at times necessary, and at times overwhelming (Kregar 1964).

## A new class on the scene?

Change is often interpreted as the result of clashes amidst rivalling political elites (Djilas 1957). The old Central European nomenclature lost its struggle against ambitious and vigorous dissidents, who were supported by people disappointed with socialism and its economic disaster, by moral degeneration and political inefficiency.[13] But the change has been from one elite to another. Biographies of the new leaders, the structure of the new parliaments, trials against prominent former communist politicians, and the emerging *nouvelle richesse* show clearly that the main obstacle to faster change is an inadequate selection of the political elite. We have either ended up with "tacit communists" in the new institutions, or have had to face problems arising from a new elite trying to impose its own order of priorities. These difficulties have complicated denationalization and privatization, and, to some degree, help explain the chronic shortage of personnel and competent managers needed to run the new economy. They have also hampered national emancipation and identification.

A genuinely new direction of development will only come about through all-out privatization of the economy, fundamental changes in legislation, imitation of Western-generated lifestyle patterns and radical reforms in education. So far, not much has changed, and we are instead confronted with a new ruling elite seeking legitimation through alternative ideologies such as nationalism, imperialism, and/or other civic religions.

> It may happen in the history of a nation that commerce with foreign peoples, forced emigrations, discoveries, wars, create new poverty and new wealth, disseminate knowledge of things that were previously unknown or cause infiltrations of new moral, intellectual and religious currents (...) Once [this] has set in, it cannot be stopped immediately. The example of individuals who have started from nowhere and reached prominent positions fires new ambitions, new greed, new energy and this molecular rejuvenation of the ruling class continues vigorously until a long period of social stability slows it down again. (Mosca 1961, 602)

The new class structure reflects new interests hiding behind the facade of new institutions. Post-socialist societies are not divided along the lines of political opinions and visions, but along those of wealth, power, and status. This emerging polarization of society needs to be justified, but neither traditional values nor inhererited political culture can provide a basis for such legitimation. The new system does not yet have

sufficient wealth to distribute, political power to abuse. Entrepreneurship is, at present, a skill of capitalizing on legal loopholes or of importing luxury commodities, rather than an attempt at careful calculation and production for a world market. Intellectuals, journalists, or the Catholic clergy were relatively influential five years ago, but have again been marginalized. At least partly as a result of all these failures, civil society is not emerging in ways typical of liberal democracies.

However far-fetched, a comparison with post-Napoleonic Europe seems irresistible. New states and societies are emerging on the edge of Western Europe. These states are rich in inhabitants, territory, and natural resources, they are new and unsaturated markets, and they are as powerful as they are unpredictable. Two hundred years ago, Western European governments faced with a comparable situation were prudent enough to try and achieve a new balance between principles of nationhood and constitutionalism, of public order and accountability (Allot 1993, 177-211). But how are we to find a balance now? How can nationalism be accomodated? Where should we look for strong foundations of legitimacy? By what means can we guarantee public order? And, finally, how can we devise laws that will take hold in the minds and hearts of the people?

## Perspectives

Although the political and social changes at the end of 1980s were motivated economically, cultural, social and psychological causes were equally important.

> The fundamental impulse for the reforms undertaken in the Soviet Union and China was indeed economic. It lay in the inability of centralized command economies to meet the requirements of 'postindustrial' society. But even when we accept this as a long term explanation for the breakdown of communism, we cannot understand the totality of the revolutionary phenomenon unless we appreciate the demand for recognition which accompanied the economic crisis. People did not go into the streets of Leipzig, Prague, Timisoara, Bejing, or Moscow demanding that the government give them a postindustrial economy. Their passionate anger was aroused over their perceptions of injustice, which had nothing to do with economics. (Fukuyáma 1995 25)

Individual and collective passions are channeled and restrained by a complex interaction of cultural values, ethical norms, and laws. As has been shown, it is precisely this process which has been more than temporarily disrupted, and whose relaunch needs to be recognized as a political task. More often than not, sombre prognoses are merely a projection of temporary obstacles or personal prejudices onto the future. But the same is true of optimistic predictions, and if we take into account all presently identifiable material constraints (economic conditions, political development, foreign interventions) and nonmaterial factors (traditions, social memory, individual aspirations), there are simply too many contingencies for plotting the course of future development.

As a result of both the tremendous backlog and the lack of experience in problem solving, new remedies for the ills of the new nations are being devised all the time[14]. Most of these solutions are impromptu reactions and do not provide anything approaching a plausible, linear, long term perspective. It should be obvious by now that we are far from the end of history, and that the history of post-socialist pre-democracies

has only just begun. Manifestly, these are not times of triumph. Our . ⌐of authoritarian political traditions, social anomy, corrupt and savage political elites, and inefficient institutions may be dormant now, but they may rise one day as horrid ghosts of the past.[15] It will take bravery in every sense of the word to face them. "Men [and women] of real fortitude, integrity and ability are well placed in every scene; (...) they show that while they are destined to live, the states they compose are likewise doomed by the fates to survive and to prosper" (Ferguson 1966, 280).

## Notes

1  This should not be generalized to the dictum that "tyranny is produced obedience" (Montesquieu). Selection and behaviour of elites changed over time. The "dual executive type of career" (Fisher 1968) and modernization underwent profound changes towards the "end of ideology".

2  "Through their organization and ethos [Leninist regimes] have stimulated a series of informal adaptive social responses (behavioral and attitudinal) that are in many respects consistent with and supportive of certain basic elements of the traditional political culture in these societies." (Jowitt 1992, 287)

3  "Strong drives toward selfmaximation, reliance on violence and craftiness, and extreme hostility and factionalism were the outstanding traits of the warriors of Ural-Altaic origin" Tomasic, 1948, 106).

4  "Driven by the powerful urge toward self-maximation, these warriors were always ready to take advantage of the rivalries of the great powers by gaining and expand local political control. Once in position of power and control, they used first religious and later nationalist ideologies to unify and assimilate their subjects and to consolidate their rule." (Tomasic 1948, 115)

5.  These were also differences in statistical analysis. We began with factor analysis, based on 24 factors later reduced to the following: left ideology, technocracy, youth values, religion, new social movements. Proceeding at first inductively, we then defined four different clusters on a continuum of conservativism/innovation (conservativism, neutral, innovative, radical), and political orientations (left, neutral, right). We also measured the psychological profile of respondents along criteria of authority, rigidity, machiavellism, intensity of identification, anomy, etc. Multivariant analysis yielded the results presented here.

6  39.4% of respondents are predominantly conservative, as against 27.8% who are innovative. 19.9% are neutral with respect to social and political change, while 12.8% favour it in radical form. In terms of political allegiance, 31.2% are left, 31.5% right oriented while a majority remained neutral. It is of course possible that value orientations do not logically correspond to political orientation. Thus leftists are conservative, rightist innovative, and both more or less rigidly authoritarian.

7  Very high was also the correlation between defined clusters of attitudes and nationality, education and profession. Roughly, higher education corresponds to greater openness to innovation and is not related to any one political orientation. Peasants and workers are conservative and right oriented, an average of Serbs are leftist and conservative.

8  "In the case of economic disasters, indeed, something like a declassification occurs which suddenly casts certain individuals into a lower state than their previous one. Then they must reduce their requirements, restrain their needs, learn greater self-control (...). So long as the social forces thus freed have not regained equilibrium, their respective values are unknown and so all regulation is lacking for a time. The limits are unknown between the possible and the impossible, between what is just and what is unjust, between legitimate claims and hopes and those which are immoderate. Consequently there is no restraint upon aspirations (...) Appetites, not being controlled by public opinion, become disoriented, no longer recognize the limits proper to them (...) The state of deregulation or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined precisely where they need more disciplining." (Durkheim 1961, 920–921)

9  "The Balkan official regards himself as immeasurably superior to the peasants, among whom he lives and from whose ranks he has sprung. To be an official is the fondest dream of every able young son of a peasant. The balkan official does not like to work." This is not only a characteristic Balkan, but a general East European feature. (Polonsky 1975, 6)

10  "The comparative method means primarily intercultural comparison" (Waldo 1969, 18).

11  "Legal rules are treated as obstructions to be by-passed informally. The standard explanation for the variance is that the enforcers must make an informal exception because they do not have (and do not

want) the information upon which to ⌐e a rational decision. The ambiguous quality of the rules is compounded by the extraordinary mixing of traditional myths with rational standards (...) Since there is little broad-scale agreement upon the basic norms of society and many groups remain unassimilated into the nation, it is terribly difficult to get everyone to agree to abide by standard legal formulas. Control must be grabbed – through coercion, violence, money, or charismatic rule, but rarely through constitutional authority." (McCurdy, 1977, 322)

12  "The people subject to regulation become indifferent to prevalence of non-conformity with policy. Policy makers, exasperated with an intractable situation, try to correct it by drawing up more rules and passing more laws, which remain as formalistic as their predecessors." (Riggs 1964, 17).

13  "Revolutions come about through accumulation in the higher strata of society – either because of a slowing down in class-circulation, or from other causes - of decadent elements no longer possessing the residues suitable for keeping them in power, and shrinking from the use of force; meanwhile in the lower strata of society, elements of superior quality are coming to be fore, possessing residues suitable for exercising the functions of government and willing enough to use force" (Pareto 1961, 555).

14  Sometimes old ideas reappear in a new garb. "From the point of view of the interests of the peoples in this part of Europe, and from the point of view of peace in the world, it seems that the solution of the problem of Eastern Europe can be found only in internationalization and the elimination of the dominance of the military in these countries (...) But as a precondition of successful internationalization and demilitarization, the Balkan countries must advance economically and become politically independent from the great powers. (...) Demilitarized, democratized, economically and politically independent, culturally integrated, and educationally advanced, the states of Eastern Europe could be grouped together" (Tomasic, 1948, 237).

15  I am not referring specifically to the former Yugoslavia.

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