

Transition of Post-Soviet Transition Concept¹

A paper for the panel “Making Sense of Three Decades of Post-Soviet Transition”

ASN World Convention, May 5–8, 2021

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1. The concept of “pos-Soviet/post-communist transition” relies on transition studies of Latin American, South Korean, and Taiwan societies in 1970-1980ies.² However, the concept of post-communist transition have also had some novelties that changed the concept significantly. Among the common features of the concept were:

- A view on political dynamics as the one aiming at consolidated democracy and stronger rule of law.
- A view on economic dynamics in terms of becoming more (or less) free market.
- A view at sociocultural dynamics in de- or post-colonial context.

Among the specific features of the concept of pos-Soviet/post-communist transition were:

- The political development was seen in terms of transition from totalitarian politics toward pluralist democracy.
- The political development was seen in terms of transition from centralized, autarkic administrative-command economy toward free market open economy.
- The sociocultural dynamics was viewed in terms of Europeanization and overcoming the Cold War rivalry with the West.

In early 1990ies, the concept of pos-Soviet/post-communist transition was widely interpreted a term referring to the deep and comprehensive transformation of Central-Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern European, and Western Eurasian societies measured by democratization, marketization, and Europeanization.

2. More specifically, each of the elements of post-communist transition included:

- Democratization was measured in terms of stronger consolidation around the liberal, electoral, and participative democratic practices; creation of pluralist politics and ideological pluralism; establishment of nation-states.
- Marketization included elements of fast privatization of the post-communist state-dominant economies, their opening to international trade, creation of legal and administrative conditions for the fair economic competition, creation of private owners’ class, and establishment of rather “small government”.

¹ This paper is based on the research fully described in a text accepted for publication as a chapter “The Transition of “Transition”: Assessing the Post-Communist Experience and Its Research” in the following book: Kushnir, O., Pankieiev, O. (eds.). *Meandering in Transition*. Lanham, MA: Lexington Books (forthcoming).

² Russell Bova, “Political dynamics of the post-communist transition: a comparative perspective,” *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations* no 1 (1991): 113-138; Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe*. Washington, DC: JHU Press, 1996.

- Europeanization was first seen as some merger of legal and political systems around core values of the Council of Europe, and, later, as accession to EU and/or NATO.

3. Based on the analysis of post-communist transition publications in 1989-2021, I conclude that the concept (as well as the related research and the related societies) has gone through at least three stages:

- Idealist, non-critical construction of the transition concept as “deep and comprehensive transformation” during and soon after the transition started.
- More critical and humbled transition concept as democratization and marketization that had their achievements and some drawbacks (nationalism, etatism, corruption etc.) approximately ten to fifteen years after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc.
- Critical transition concept aware of specific common post-communist political, legal, and economic dynamics with its own patterns of state-, nation-, and economy-building, understanding of democracy and rule of law, — twenty to thirty years after the transition prophecy was formulated.

4. Living through the Change (1989-94)

Since 1989-91, the political imagery of peoples living in CEE has changed dramatically. Tony Judt has called this alteration of a spatial perception in post-communist Europe a “rediscovery,” providing a new map to the new reality.³ Alexander Etkind and I have described this rediscovery in the terms of transition from a collective imagination controlled by a monopolistic Soviet Marxism to a period of multiple clashing imaginations which spread “individualism, neoliberalism, democratic liberalism, libertarian anarchism, ethno-nationalism, religious conservatism, and anti-progressivism, all of which combined frivolously or even merged in a public sphere that had been long deprived of critical discourse.”⁴ Afterwards, in the first months of transition, the redundant symbolic diversity caused some fatigue; the need arose for the crystallization of some overarching imagery, which ended up in the all-encompassing post-communist transition combining democratization, marketization, and Europeanization.

The public statements of intellectuals and political leaders from 1989 to 1991 highlight a mixture of concepts which the people living through the Change – or witnessing it from outside – used to describe the surrounding chaos. They were surprised by the speed and depth of the transformation. Yet that surprise was manifested through the criticism of “real socialism” and attacking loopholes in the Soviet system.

The participants and beholders of revolutionary events in the Eastern Bloc (1989-90) and the USSR (1989-91) presented their experiences and observations through two interconnected images.

- First, the Change was seen as the end of the division between the West and the East. The Cold War had ended and a new era of peace in One Big Europe was about to start. The economic and political “Berlin Wall” had to crumble, and the norms, institutions, and practices from Western Europe were to be extended to all parts of the continent, “from Lisbon to Vladivostok.”⁵ This prophecy was also expressed as a “return to

³ Tony Judt, “The Rediscovery of Central Europe,” *Daedalus* 119, no 1 (1990): 23-54.

⁴ Alexander Etkind and Mikhail Minakov, “Post-Soviet Ideological Creativity,” in *Ideology After Union* eds. Alexander Etkind and Mikhail Minakov (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2020) 10.

⁵ Bruno Coppieters et al., *Europeanization and Conflict Resolution: Case Studies from the European Periphery*. Vol. 3. (Brussels: Academia Press, 2004); Stefanie Schmahl and Marten Breuer, eds., *The Council of Europe: Its Law and Policies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) 7ff.

Europe” with many national and sub-national meanings coined within this ideologeme.⁶ The creative destruction in the East involved de-constructing norms and institutions built between 1945 and 1988, thus returning post-communist societies to the idealized inter-war past, or else, installing a neo-liberal political-economic model regardless of local culture.

- Second, the Soviet Marxist vision of the future was substituted by the prophecy of moving from authoritarian politics, state censorship, political police, and administrative economy towards civil freedoms, liberal democracy, pluralist politics, and a free market. This was called an “all-encompassing transition” in 1989-91. As Charles Fairbanks expressed it in the debates on the pages of the *Journal of Democracy*, “as communism collapses, democracy and a market economy are emerging as the next political formula to be tried.”⁷

The social engineering founded on the early concept of post-communist transition had internal contradictions and debates around several questions. First of all, how fast should the reform be conducted – “shock therapy” or “rapid reform”? Second, how should privatization, which would lead to the creation of a proprietary class and a new enterprise sector, be carried out? Third, what are the limits with respect to the social costs of the transition? Finally, should market institutions, democracy, and the rule of law be created simultaneously, or in a specific order during the transition?⁸ Answers to these questions were supposed to define a theory and policy model for an all-encompassing transition.

4.1. For left intellectuals (predominantly non-communist and post-Marxist), the fall of the Eastern Bloc and the USSR was an existential issue. The profound anxiety for the Soviet-led “Second World” was, to some extent, emphasized by Immanuel Wallerstein and scholars from his circle.⁹ The leftist intellectuals who disagreed with “real socialism” and undermined its legitimacy – Daniel A. Bell, Ralf Darendorf, Jürgen Habermas, Václav Havel, Tony Judt, and Leszek Kolakowski among them – welcomed European reunification and, though somewhat less enthusiastically, saluted the transition to democratic capitalism as an opportunity for the rectification of communist crimes and distortions of socialism.¹⁰

From the left perspective, Europe’s East and West were to establish a common space where the best of the two would create a region of peace, shared values, and political cooperation – an agenda institutionalized by the Council of Europe.¹¹ However, in the idea of progress through *transition*, the left also sensed a danger to their cause: the anti-communist revolution of 1989-91 was hostile to non-communist socialism as well, it promoted a

⁶ Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999) 20ff; Katherine Verdery, “Transnationalism, Nationalism, Citizenship, and Property: Eastern Europe since 1989” *American Ethnologist* 25, no 2 (1998): 293.

⁷ Charles H. Fairbanks, “The Suicide of Soviet Communism,” *Journal of Democracy* 1, no 2 (1990): 23.

⁸ Oleh Havrylyshyn, *Divergent Paths in Post-Communist Transformation*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 21-22.

⁹ See, e.g.: Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Politics of the World-Economy: The States, the Movements and the Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 90-94.

¹⁰ Here I will mention just several, highly visible texts of the time: Jürgen Habermas, “What Does Socialism Mean Today?” in *After the Fall: The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism*, ed. Robin Blackburn (London: Verso, 1991) 25-46; Tony Judt, “The Dilemmas of Dissidence: the Politics of Opposition in East-central Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies* 2, no 2 (1988): 185-240; Leszek Kolakowski, “Uncertainties of a Democratic Age,” *Journal of Democracy* 1, no 1 (1990): 47-50.

¹¹ Philippe C. Schmitter and Alexander H. Trechsel, “Green Paper on the Future of Democracy in Europe for the Council of Europe,” EUI official website, October, 2004, <https://www.eui.eu/Documents/DepartmentsCentres/SPS/Profiles/Schmitter/GreenPaper.Pdf>.

conservative orientation toward the past, and lacked any positive objectives which could guide post-communist social development.¹²

At the same time, the Change of 1989-91 provided the left with an opportunity for building a Europe of social equity and justice. They saw the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc as a chance for reformed social democracy.¹³ For the left's vision of a socially just Europe to win in the competition of the future, Bell and Darendorf called upon their colleagues to rectify the misdeeds of communism, to think as "the revisionists", outside of Marxist dogmas.¹⁴

4.2. If the leftist intellectuals watched the events in the East with hope and fear, the liberals and neo-liberals saw huge prospects for their cause there.¹⁵ For them, European integration was less important and too abstract as an objective. Instead, they sought inspiration from Hernando de Soto, Francis Fukuyama, or Samuel Huntington, whose ideas – in spite of their disciplinary context and academic hypotheticality – were perceived by neo-liberal politicians and experts as guidance for the shift toward free economies, open societies, and pluralist democracies.¹⁶ Liberal ideas of that time were hastily translated into neo-liberal practices due to the growing hegemony of the "Washington Consensus."¹⁷

From the outset, the neo-liberal economists looked at CEE through the lens of transition toward a capitalist, free market economy. One of the most telling documents that fixated intuitions of this group was probably Deutsche Bank's report assessing the prospects of the Soviet republics' economic development in 1990.¹⁸ The report stated that "six of the republics have a high economic potential, five a moderate potential, and four a weak one."¹⁹ Among the Soviet republics with the best prospects, the neo-liberal analysts identified Ukraine.

4.3. Thus, in 1989-91, the post-communist transition concept was constructed through combination of the elements of transition (internally oriented economic and political processes) and Europeanization (a multilateral externally oriented process). Both elements of the concept radiated confidence that a new era had come, and the new progress would improve all life in all spheres of post-communist nations.

5. Humbled conceptualization (1995-2003)

The great expectations connected with the initial concept of post-communist transition soon met with the brute reality of poverty, conflicts, disorganization. The expectations from the transition were still alive, although their ambition humbled. The humbling of the transition imagery started well before 1995, especially among the leftist intellectuals. Their vision's encounter with reality is well described in Havel's confession, published already in 1992. There

¹² Habermas, "What Does Socialism Mean Today?" 26.

¹³ Habermas, "What Does Socialism Mean Today?" 45.

¹⁴ Daniel Bell and Ralf Dahrendorf, "Wir sollten endlich alle Revisionisten sein," *Die Zeit*, December 29, 1989, <https://www.zeit.de/1990/01/wir-sollten-endlich-alle-revisionisten-sein/komplettansicht>.

¹⁵ Since in the context of this chapter they are not relevant, I will not address the differences between the liberals and neoliberals in the times after the "Washington Consensus," and hereafter I will call them by the common name of neoliberals.

¹⁶ On this reception please see: Milada Anna Vachudova and Tim Snyder, "Are Transitions Transitory? Two Types of Political Change in Eastern Europe Since 1989," *East European Politics and Societies* 11, no 1 (1996): 1-35.

¹⁷ For details of its amalgamation in US foreign policy, Latin American social experience, and Eastern European early transition plans see: John Williamson, "Democracy and the 'Washington Consensus,'" *World development* 21, no 8 (1993): 1329-1336.

¹⁸ Jürgen Corbet et al., *The Soviet Union at the Crossroads: Facts and Figures on the Soviet Republics* (Frankfurt/M: Deutsche Bank, 1990).

¹⁹ Corbet et al., *The Soviet Union at the Crossroads* 7.

he wrote that the “return of freedom” has brought many unpredictable “explosion of every imaginable human vice”.²⁰

5.1. The left scholars and intellectuals were among the first to review critically the beliefs connected with the transition. David Bell described the result of the clash between the initial vision and the ensuing reality of societies in transition as leading to an unexpected crisis: “The collapse of communism was not initially seen as a crisis for social democracy,”²¹ yet the latter came along with the disappearance of the “Second World” and even infected political orders in the West.²² In other words, in the course of the post-communist transition, hegemony was achieved by neo-liberalism in the economy and nationalism in politics, while the social democratic alternative lost its influence in all parts of Europe.

However, the leftist alternative’s decline was much more visible in the respective movements of the “Third World.” Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi analyzed how the disruption of the Eastern Bloc and the following post-communist transition re-divided the world-system to the benefit of the West, which turned into the global North; simultaneously, the periphery adopted the form of the global South and accommodated some of the post-communist countries.²³

By 2001, the idea of One Big Europe was implemented in the form of membership for all European states in the Council of Europe. The EU was also enlarging to Central and even to Eastern Europe (i.e. the Baltic states, which are now Northern).²⁴ From the formal point of view, the ongoing Europeanization was a success. Yet with the humbling of expectations, transition studies became much more empirical, and thus started registering problems. Ten to fifteen years after the Change, the post-communist states developed into a variety of regimes, from autocracies to liberal democracies. The Balkans went through painful ethnic wars and NATO military operations. The global dichotomy between the Northern and Southern actors re-divided Europe. The post-Soviet core (Russia) started its own re-integration process which would soon collide with the EU and NATO centripetal locomotion.²⁵

5.2. The critical approach towards all-encompassing concept of transition was later shared by the neo-liberals. By 2003, the academic studies of the post-communist transition saw their partisan affiliations dwindling. The researchers of the regional processes went through their own, disciplinary “transition.” As Richard Sakwa rightly pointed out, “[t]he actual course of transformation proved more complex than was assumed in the early post-communist days. The reform process itself generated new phenomena that raise questions about the received wisdom of the political sciences and economics.”²⁶ This self-critical turn can be described as a gradual dropping of the all-encompassing transition concept and moving toward a reality check on where democratization and marketization have led the post-communist societies.

This tendency is especially evident in the change of tone, vocabulary, and subject of publications in the three pivotal journals for transition studies during that period – *East European Politics*, *Journal of Democracy*, and *Demokratizatsiya*. The analysis of these

²⁰ Václav Havel, “Paradise Lost,” *New York Review of Books* 39, no 7 (1992): 6.

²¹ David S. Bell, “Post-Communism in Western Europe,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 12, no 2 (1996): 247.

²² Bell, “Post-Communism in Western Europe,” 252.

²³ Arrighi et al., “Industrial Convergence,” 4ff; Pranab K. Bardhan et al., *Globalization and Egalitarian Redistribution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006) 77ff.

²⁴ Coppieters et al., *Europeanization*, 17ff.

²⁵ Mikhail Minakov, “Big Europe’s Gap: Dynamic Obstacles for integration between EU and EAEU,” in *The Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union: Moving Toward a Greater Understanding*, eds. Angela Di Gregorio and Angela Angeli (eds) (The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, 2017) 47ff.

²⁶ Richard Sakwa ed., *The Experience of Democratization in Eastern Europe* (Berlin: Springer, 1999) 7ff.

journals' content from 1995 to 2003 shows a decrease in the use of the term "transition" with every year; the term "democratization" was often substituted with "political pluralism" or "electoral democracy." More and more publications were looking into nationalism and Euroskepticism, as well as "systemic corruption." By 2003, the latter subject became the center of everyone's attention. Moreover, the tone of the publications was drastically different from those of 1989-93.

- In 1989-93, the journals were open for debates among (a) the older generation of Kremlinologists and communism scholars inclined to use concepts from the times of the Cold War; (b) former dissidents and ascendant political leaders in Central and Eastern Europe; (c) a younger generation of post-communism scholars; (d) development experts and practicing economists. At that time, publications varied from standard academic papers to intellectual journalism. One of the most significant outcomes was the creation of a common language and visions, often ideologically biased, which scholars and practitioners of politics and economy were using to describe the new social reality in the East of Europe.
- After 1994, and especially after 1997-8, the publications lost their open partisanship and became more reality-oriented. The dialogue between scholars, experts, and politicians dropped to a minimum. The papers were more descriptive, less analytical in character. By the time of the "tenth anniversary" of the Change, the contributors seemed to develop a reservation towards the victorious speeches of political leaders from back then.²⁷
- Finally, by the time of the "color revolutions" and authoritarian turn (2003-5), the academic community swayed from its initial post-communism enthusiasm to the collection of data, critical analysis, and reflection on its own conceptual apparatus.

This final stage of the transition studies' humbling was critical to both: political agents directing the reforms and post-communist scholarship itself. The social reality was constantly becoming richer and more volatile, while the academic theories lost their ability to keep pace. Therefore, the post-communist studies were to become instantiated, fine-tuned to prevent scholars from taking political sides. These points were articulately summarized by John Pickles and Adrian Smith as two issues of the political economy of the post-communist Change:

- lack of any proven theory for the "neoliberal view of transition wielded by Western multilateral agencies and advisers to governments in ECE [East Central Europe]," and
- ungrounded simplification of transition as "a one-way process of change from one hegemonic system to another."²⁸

Around 2002-3, the heated debates started over the issue of whether the transition paradigm had any scholarly value at all. The harshest critique of this paradigm came from Thomas Carothers who dared calling for the review of the five core beliefs of the transition theory:

- that moving away from a certain form of authoritarianism necessarily means progress toward democracy;
- that democratization happens in the order of certain stages;

²⁷ See, e.g.: Ian Jeffries, *The Countries of the Former Soviet Union at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2004).

²⁸ John Pickles and Adrian Smith, eds., *Theorizing Transition: the Political Economy of Post-Communist Transformations* (London: Routledge, 2005) 1-2.

- that elections are key for democratic consolidation;
- that “economic development or ethnic composition, as well as historical experiences” do not influence the pace and quality of democratization; and finally
- that a “third wave” of democratization takes place in a functioning state.²⁹

5.3. Even though this call was not widely supported right away, it added to the pulling of post-communist transition study “outside of the box” of the 1989 prophecy. The 1995-2003 period of understanding and assessing the post-communist transition concluded not only with Carothers’ repeating Bell’s call for revisionism (this time revision of transition theory biases), but also with more attention to

- the role of ethno-nationalism in Eastern Europe,
- the contradictions in post-communist state-building (also of *de facto* state-building),
- the political culture and its place in democratic/authoritarian consolidation,
- the contribution of Western international agencies (f. e. the IMF, World Bank, USAID, and TACIS) to the developmental agenda in the East,
- the growing dissatisfaction with democracy and the market economy among post-communist elites and societies.

Ten to fifteen years after the Change, the transition of “transition studies” happened once again – not only due to the discussions described above, but also through the wave of “color revolutions” and the emotional response to them, in particular the response of post-Soviet authoritarian leaders. In turn, the accession of some CEE states into the EU challenged the transition scholars to grasp the region not only in a more *sober* way, but also with a revision and redefinition of the transition’s meaning.

6. Questioning post-communist progress (2003-2021)

The wave of “color revolutions” provoked events which were probably decisive for the evolution of assessment of the post-communist transition. These mainly peaceful, civic protests incited the well-forgotten enthusiasm of the transitologists, politicians, and activists. The revolutionary momentum offered the chance to rectify the failures of the post-communist developments; it showed that the transition itself – with the lessons learned from the previous decade – might be restarted in more cautious and effective way.³⁰ However, this enthusiasm did not last nearly as long as in the beginning of the 1990s: revolutionary promises sank in the political struggle among the winners, in the endemic corruption, and the authoritarian reaction in Russia and other non-revolutionary countries.³¹ Such a short cycle from hope to disenchantment was therapeutic for the transition scholars: the numerous publications on the “color revolutions” demonstrate how fast enthusiasm was supplanted by balanced analysis.

Simultaneously, the enthusiasm of those post-communist countries becoming an integral part of the European Union was outbalanced by concerns as conservative and populist parties showed their grip on power in the region, regardless of all *acquis communautaire*. The crystallization of Euroskepticism, growing evidence of the informal links between the CEE and

²⁹ Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no 1 (2002): 7ff.

³⁰ Vicken Cheterian, “From Reform and Transition to ‘Coloured Revolutions’,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 25, no 2-3 (2009): 136-160, 157-8.

³¹ Donnacha Ó. Beacháin and Abel Polese, eds., *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics* (London: Routledge, 2010); Mikhail Minakov, “‘Tsvetnyie Revoliutsyi’ v postsovetskom mire: prichiny i posledstviia,” *Obshchaia Tetrad* 12, no 2-3 (2012): 59.

Russian corruption, and the vibrancy of right-wing ideologies became the center of attention for the new transition studies.³² In 2009, Vladimir Tismaneanu bitterly acknowledged that – in spite of the wealth differences, belonging to different geopolitical networks, and depth of reforms – the CEE region remains united from the Visegrád to Russia.³³

6.1. The new understanding of transition grew up in the West and East simultaneously. This was a transitology of disenchantment: the CEE societies, after breaking with communism, were sliding into new political regimes founded partly on original and partly on old political-economic elements. Socialism and capitalism were not seen as mutually exclusive anymore. They overlapped, amalgamated, and gave birth to the political economy of the new Eastern Europe with its own conflict dynamics (including wars in Georgia and Ukraine) and collaboration.

6.2. First of all, the new transition studies evaluated political and economic processes less in terms of democratization, and more in terms of illiberalism, authoritarianism, and patronalism. Thus, the concepts of “competitive authoritarianism,” “patronalism,” “neopatrimonialism,” and “mafia-state” became instrumental for description, analysis, and forecast of political and international security processes.³⁴

6.3. Secondly, the concept of Europeanization, which had for so long eschewed critical debate, is also being revised by contemporary transitologists. For example, Richard Youngs demonstrated how “European integration” has changed its forms and contents after thirty years of developments in the East.³⁵ Based on the analysis of today’s political and administrative practices of Europeanization, Youngs identified five forms, some of which neither fit into transition nor correlate with democratization: (1) a *residual Europeanization* (that still preserves the transitional and democratic gravity towards the EU, but less and less so); (2) a *politically neutral Europeanization* (an influential practice that can form real political processes, but is “detached from macro-level political trends, either in a democratic or anti-democratic way”; (3) an *anti-democratic Europeanization* (“illiberal trends within the EU [that] are giving oxygen to illiberal actors in the wider European space”); (4) a *reverse Europeanization* (the practice in wider Europe, where the EU and its policies develop decreasing relevance; (5) a mixture of the above forms.³⁶ This critical account of

³² Here are some of the most symptomatic publications: Laure Neumayer, “Euroscepticism as a Political Label,” *European Journal of Political Research* 47, no 2 (2008): 135-160; Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart, eds., *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism*, Vol. 1. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Bojan Bugarcic, “Populism, Liberal Democracy, and the Rule of Law in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41, no 2 (2008): 191-203.

³³ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009) ix.

³⁴ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism. Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 355-7; Oleksandr Fisun, “Rethinking post-Soviet Politics from a Neopatrimonial Perspective,” *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no 2 (2012): 88ff; Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 64-67; Bálint Magyar, *Post-Communist Mafia State* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016) 22ff; Uladzimir Rouda, “Is Belarus a Classic Post-Communist Mafia State?” in *Stubborn Structures. Reconceptualizing Post-Communist Regimes*, ed. Bálint Magyar (Budapest: CEU Press, 2019) 247-274; László Magyar, “The Romanian Patronal System of Public Corruption,” in *Stubborn Structures. Reconceptualizing Post-Communist Regimes*, ed. Bálint Magyar (Budapest: CEU Press, 2019) 275-319; Nikolai Petrov, “Putins Neo-Nomenklatura System” in *Stubborn Structures. Reconceptualizing Post-Communist Regimes*, ed. Bálint Magyar (Budapest: CEU Press, 2019) 179-216; Minakov, Mikhail “Republic of Clans: The Evolution of the Ukrainian Political System,” in *Stubborn Structures. Reconceptualizing Post-Communist Regimes*, ed. Bálint Magyar (Budapest: CEU Press, 2019) 217-245.

³⁵ Richard Youngs, “The New Patchwork Politics of Wider Europe,” *Centre for European Policy Studies website*, October 28, 2019, <https://3dcftas.eu/publications/the-new-patchwork-politics-of-wider-europe>.

³⁶ Youngs, “The New Patchwork Politics of Wider Europe,” 5-7.

Europeanization, as once pertained to the transition concept, opens up an entire new realm of research on its forms in the One (for now) Big Europe.

6.4. Finally, a greater role in the new understanding and assessment of transition is being played by the leftist camp outside the West. One of the most influential critiques comes from Dayan Jayatilleka, a bright representative of the contemporary decolonial movement, whose revision of the old transition concept is framed as the deconstruction of the global North's hegemony in assessing the post-communist development. Jayatilleka argues that the Western control over the memory of the Soviet Bloc and over the evaluation of post-communist transition is a part of the North's power strategy, which undermines the progressive socialist movements in the South.³⁷ Jayatilleka and scholars alike offer their counter-hegemonic explanation and argue that the origins and driving forces of the crisis of communism were not in the North, but in the Eastern Bloc itself. This means that the Eastern Bloc was not "beaten"; rather, it collapsed due to its own internal reasons. Thus, the Northern belief that socialism crumbled due to capitalism's economic superiority is not necessarily true, since the post-communist countries remain poorer than the core Western nations in spite of their third decade of capitalist hegemony. Jayatilleka's conclusion is: socialism was not doomed, it could have been reformed, and this hypothesis needs further study.³⁸

Also, the Chinese academia has its own transition studies. I can judge these studies only from sporadic English-language publications which, nonetheless, demonstrate the constant interest of contemporary China in the dissolution of the USSR and Eastern Bloc, as well as in the post-communist transition. An example of such interest is the series of research programs on the Soviet Union's crisis and post-Soviet development initiated by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and conducted from 1993 to 2006.³⁹ According to Guan Guihai, those studies were directed at the historical causes of the USSR's collapse and the lessons of post-communist transition in CEE and Russia.⁴⁰

7. Transition studies appear to be a vibrant transdisciplinary academic field, where students of social sciences and humanities face two constantly changing yet interrelated subjects – progress and regress in post-communist societies and in transition theory itself. The societies continue dealing with challenges of local, regional, and global significance, just like other human communities around the world. Their lasting transit is as open-ended as the progress of any other society. The theory and the concept has turned into a reliable academic practice that is quite critical with regard to its subject, methods, and concepts. It gradually gets rid of Western hegemony and involves more alternative approaches to the assessment of any given transition. Finally, the new transition studies have opened up a number of fresh critical research areas where they can achieve a better understanding of the post-communist development forces and patterns compared to previous periods.

³⁷ Dayan Jayatilleka, *The Fall of Global Socialism: A Counter-Narrative from the South* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 2.

³⁸ Jayatilleka, *The Fall of Global Socialism*, 2-4.

³⁹ Guan Guihai, "The Influence of the Collapse of the Soviet Union on China's Political Choices," in *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949–Present*, eds. Thomas P., Bernstein, et al. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010) 1060.

⁴⁰ Guihai, "The Influence of the Collapse of the Soviet Union," 1061.