

CONTENTS

<i>Editorial Preface</i>	8
Tamás Krausz: Foreword.....	11
<i>Eszter Bartha</i> : Transition, Transformation, ‘ <i>Postsocialism</i> ’: Theorising Systemic Change in Eastern Europe	13
I. POLITICAL AND ECONOMICAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE POST-SOVIET REGION	36
<i>Mihály Gruber</i> : The Turning Points in the Soviet-Russian Regime Change. A Draft to Help Understand the Development of Events ...	37
<i>Mihály Madarász</i> : Oil Prices at the World Market and the Disintegration of the Soviet Union	60
<i>András Radvánszki</i> : Belarus or Belorussia: Historical Roots and the Possible Causes of an Unfinished Transition	84
<i>Zsolt Szilágyi</i> : Is the Post-Communist Transition Over? Economic and Social Factors Influencing the Mongolian Democratisation Process	116
II. SPECIFICS OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN TRANSFORMATION	142
<i>Miklós Mitrovits</i> : From the Idea of the Self-management to Capitalism. The Characteristics of the Polish Transformation Process	143
<i>György Lukács B.</i> : The Slovenian Path of Post-communist Transition	171
<i>Jordán Miczov</i> : The Post-Communist Transition in Bulgaria: the Emergence and Consolidation of the Multi-Party System between 1989-1991	192

<i>Martin Klus</i> : The Republic of Slovakia – the First Fully Integrated V4 Country. Is it Justified to Call 20 years of Transition a Success Story?	227
<i>Gábor Kiss</i> : Regime change in the Hungarian People’s Army – with an East-European outlook	235

III. ETHNIC ISSUES IN THE TRANSFORMATION

OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE..... 260

<i>Csaba Zahorán</i> : Post-Communist Transition in the Szeklerland. Ethnic Aspects of the Post-Communist Transition in Romania ...	261
<i>Gábor Lagzi</i> : Majority and Minority in the Baltic States (1989-1991)	298
<i>Mátyás Binder</i> : Changes in the Image of ‘Gypsies’ in Slovakia and Hungary after the Post-Communist Transition	319
<i>Tomáš Strážay</i> : Nationalist Populism under Post-Communism: Evaluating Continuities and Changes in Polish and Slovak Political Discourse	350
Authors and Editors	384
Index	388

EDITORIAL PREFACE

The majority of the papers in the present volume are the result of a series of seminars which took place between autumn 2007 and spring 2009 at the Department of the History of Eastern Europe at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, headed by Dr. Tamás Krausz, under the auspices of the doctoral programme entitled '*The History of Eastern Europe in the 19th-20th century*'. During these nearly two years we examined the processes that had taken place during the 20th century in Central and Eastern Europe first in a wider historical context and then concentrating on the processes of the past twenty years. Each of the students chose a country or a particular question in line with his or her research interests and worked with that focus. Work in progress was discussed at the seminars, this is how the first outlines developed into rough texts and then crystallised into manuscripts. During the debates we '*took all texts into pieces*' and then '*put them together again*' and in the process the authors mutually influenced each other – each of them profiting by the ideas that surfaced and incorporating them into their thinking. It was exciting to see unexpected parallels emerging between topics which seemed rather divergent at first sight. Placing the processes of the post-communist transition of the various countries side by side we came to see the *common traits* alongside the *particular characteristics*. Economic processes, the surfacing of the ethnic issues, a whole row of similar social and political problems brought Ulan Bator, Moscow or Tallin unexpectedly close to Prague, Budapest or Sophia. While working on these subjects we were also compelled to realise that although there is much that we can talk about in the '*past perfect*', many of the processes under discussion are still living reality this very day both in the personal and the structural sense. We are living inside a number of problems inherited from the past regimes, as well as bearing the consequences of the shock caused by the transformation.

In the meantime it also became increasingly clear what would be the best way to present the products of our work to the wider public, therefore we began to organise a conference to be held at our university. In order to attain assistance with the conference and with

publishing the volume of papers we contacted Osteuropa-Zentrum Berlin and its publishing house and applied for funds to the International Visegrád Fund. In drawing up the application and involving our partners we relied on Terra Cognita Foundation which has been working for a number of years now, in the spirit of '*civil foreign policy*', on mutual knowledge and understanding in the region and on deepening co-operation between young researchers of various nationality.

The first part of the project consisted in a workshop held at the department on June 5th 2009 and attended, besides the PhD students of the programme, by partners invited from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Germany. The parallel traits of the processes that had been and were still taking place in the region also became obvious from the debates held with the participants of the workshop, all of which shed light on a shared experience which may serve as a link between various countries and nations of the region despite all differences and perceived or genuine clashes in interests. The workshop led to a line of informal conversations to be followed, on June 6th, by the conference entitled *1989 – a revolution, a turn-around or a change of systems? The transition process in state-socialist countries*. The two events were followed by compiling the volume – the working papers and conference talks turned into academic papers. Next came the painstaking process of editing and translating the completed papers. The Hungarian texts were translated into English primarily by Orsolya Frank, as well as Péter Szőnyi and Miklós Molnár. Some of the PhD students also had the chance to present their work at the international conference *1989-2009: the East European revolutions in perspective* at University of London Union in October of the same year.

The manuscript volume was complete by autumn 2009. To be sure, we are aware that the volume does not mean the end of our research efforts. It is no more than a summary of the momentary state of our knowledge and perspective. It mainly serves for these young researchers to join in with the international debate on their subject matter and to foster the emergence of a common discourse. We believe it is important that the young generation of historians born around or after the transition who did not live through the pre-1989

period as a child or young contemporary should come to play an increasing role in this discourse. A certain distance in time is an important condition for a deeper understanding of the events and processes of the time. Not only do we gain access to the sources for this exciting sequence of historical phenomena – a distance in time also allows the subject matter to shift from the boundary zone between political sciences and history clearly into the sphere of the latter, thus becoming free of daily political interests. We trust that the authors of the present volume will become active participants in shaping this process.

Budapest, January 23rd 2010

The editors

TAMÁS KRAUSZ

Foreword

Historical scholarship, particularly the branch which concerns itself with the history of the present period, has not really begun to assess the consequences of the transition processes which took place in the Eastern European region two decades ago. In a certain sense the very concepts of this subject area are still unclear. Politics has done a great deal to make it more difficult to conceptualise the new phenomena, since the process all of us has witnessed is rarely made the subject of any meaningful debate which goes beyond the self-celebration of the different power elites.

However, a group of young researchers, PhD students at the Department of Eastern European History at the Arts Faculty of ELTE Budapest University, have embarked on the brave venture of effective research into this subject matter. Refusing to deliver on ‘political order’, they have launched independent investigations regarding the entire Eastern European region. The present volume is the fruit of this research effort.

It is clear that the study of *contemporary history* cannot offer a simultaneous examination of all the economic, social, political and psychological trends in development, since in many ways the historian examines developmental forms which had not been concluded. The young authors of the volume do not have the bias of the one time eye-witness – this was partly an advantage, but partly made their job more difficult. From the point of view of the future it is an important achievement that the new generation strive to be free of all prejudice when they formulate the sphere of questions that need to be researched and identify the points of departure which may be useful for later intense explorations of this subject matter. The authors were open to the basic question without which scholarly and theoretical advancement is impossible – what were the local/national and regional/global causes that led to the political transition from state socialism to the restoration of new capitalism in Eastern Europe? They were fully aware that causes cannot be separated from consequences, thus on a methodological plane they were able to grasp the dynamism

of the historical process together with the most characteristic contradictions and special local traits.

As the lecturer in charge of '*organising*' these research efforts, I am delighted to commend to the reader the works of these young scholars – for more than one of them their first publication. I believe that their work is worth continuing and expanding toward both Eastern and Western Europe, in the spirit of creating academic dialogue and the eternal hunger for historical understanding.

Budapest, January 12st, 2010

Prof. Tamás Krausz
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ESZTER BARTHA

Transition, Transformation, ‘Postsocialism’: Theorizing Systemic Change in Eastern Europe¹

1989 – in the words of Klaus von Beyme² – was a ‘*black Friday*’ for the social sciences because of their failure to forecast the collapse of ‘*actually existing*’ socialism. To be sure, convergence theory did predict that industrialization would bring about a gradual homogenization of social structures, leading to the overthrow of political regimes in the socialist countries. These regimes collapsed, however, not because they succeeded to catch up with the advanced capitalist countries but quite the contrary, because they failed to do so.

This failure has not discouraged the social sciences from developing new prognoses for what is going to happen in Eastern Europe after the collapse of Communist rule. For reasons to be discussed below ‘*postsocialism*’ appears to be the least controversial term although it was argued that we might actually live in the world of ‘*post-postsocialism*’.³ This is for one clear reason: postsocialism is an accurate term when applied to Eastern Europe after 1989-1991: state socialism collapsed in the region, even though fear of a possible Communist restoration or a leftist turn certainly existed for longer than the actual danger of it did. While it is obvious what has *not* happened in the region, it is less obvious what social and political processes took place in the past twenty years. The term postsocialism gives less indication as to what kind of regimes and societies have been formed in Eastern Europe than the ideologically more (over)loaded transitology.

¹ A previous version of this paper was published in *Kelet-Európa: Történelem és sorsközösség. Palotás Emil 70. születésnapjára*. Ed. by Krausz, Tamás, Budapest, ELTE Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék, 2006. 12-27.

² Beyme, Klaus von: *Transition to Democracy in Eastern Europe*. Houndmills, Macmillan, 1996. 6.

³ For a discussion see Hann, Chris-Humphrey, Caroline-Verdery, Katherine: Introduction: Postsocialism as a Topic of Anthropological Investigation. In: *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practice in Eurasia* Ed. by Hann, Chris. London, Routledge, 2002.

Postsocialism can be, of course, used in many ways, not just a time indicator. For the purpose of this paper, I would like to stress two points, which are relevant for the dispute on terminology. The first is the intention to liberate postsocialist studies from the universalistic and teleological implications of transitology. The second is the reference to the '*special*' status of the ex-socialist countries in the capitalist world-economy. One can ask the question of whether it is necessary to make this distinction at all. After all, the accession of most of the former Soviet satellite countries to the European Union can be interpreted as an end to any special status or distinction from the developed Western states that were considered to be role models after the collapse of the socialist regimes. The paper, nevertheless, adopts the thesis that Eastern European integration remains peripheral integration, and in that sense the special status of Eastern Europe in the capitalist world-economy continues to exist. In this respect, the differentiation indicated by the term postsocialist still remains meaningful.

The conceptualization of postsocialist change is complicated by the fact that one needs an adequate theory not only of change but of actually existing socialism as well. I will introduce four great paradigms and try to critically evaluate them with respect to how they can inform the analysis of the ex-socialist societies: (1) transition theory (2) new institutionalism (3) the '*developmental state*' approach and (4) the world-system perspective. While the first three are well known in the literature, the world-system perspective is less often used with respect to East Europe. In this sense, the essay intends to give not just a critical discussion of existing paradigms but also to introduce in somewhat more detail a non-mainstream perspective on postsocialist change in the Eastern European region. I would like to note here that the paper focuses on the critical evaluation of these four paradigms, and it does not seek to give a review of the rich literature on transformation.

Out of the four paradigms, it was undoubtedly transition theory that counted as a mainstream paradigm in Eastern Europe for a relatively long period of time. As many critics of this theory showed, this dominance had much more to do with the political than the

academic merits of the paradigm.⁴ The myth of dominance, did, nevertheless, prove to be persistent, and therefore critical scholars still feel a need to distance themselves from transitology. ‘*Rethinking*’ became a very fashionable term after 1989. In order to adequately conceptualize postsocialist change, I would argue, one needs to ‘re-think’ the socialist system itself – because only a historical perspective can give us a key to understand the ‘*beginning*’ of the political transformation: the collapse of Communist rule, which took even contemporary experts by surprise. Transitology solved this problem by adopting a neototalitarian approach to actually existing socialism. Apart from its highly ideological content, totalitarianism, however, falls short in explaining the collapse of the socialist regimes, and it suffers from basic theoretical weaknesses.⁵ From the 1970s onwards, a new generation of Sovietologists in the English-speaking world made considerable efforts to discredit the totalitarian paradigm in the Western academy. After the collapse of the socialist regimes, totalitarianism has experienced a new renaissance in Eastern Europe. This is all the more to be regretted in the light of the impressive amount of research done in the past, which showed that totalitarianism had little potential to explain the dynamics of socialist societies.⁶ It seems that Eastern Europe (again) successfully adopted a model, only when it had become outdated in the West.

⁴ The book *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* spends much more time discussing the connection between the totalitarian school and the ideology of Cold War (and funding institutions) than the totalitarian paradigm (Gleason, Abbott: *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.). A similar book on transitology may not be a task for theorists but it would definitely be useful to deconstruct the myth of the dominance of this theory.

⁵ There is a voluminous literature on the critique of totalitarian paradigm. For a thorough review see: Gleason, *Ibid.* 1995.

⁶ It is not accidental that many social scientists became ‘*revisionists*’ of the totalitarian paradigm. For an excellent review on the development of Soviet labor history in the Anglo-Saxon world see: Siegelbaum, Lewis H.: The Late Romance of the Soviet Worker in Western Historiography. *International Review of Social History*, no. 51. (2006) 463-82.

Transition Theory

By the late 1980s it became clear that the modernization project of state socialism had failed, and the system possessed neither the ideological nor the economic resources to prevent the reintegration of the Eastern European semi-periphery into the capitalist world-system. The collapse of Communist rule in Eastern Europe replaced the old and somewhat dusty idols with a firm conviction that everything had to be done differently from what had been done before. The ex-socialist countries, having failed with the Stalinist type of modernization, placed a renewed hope to catch up with the advanced Western world through the transition to capitalism. The adoption of Western institutions facilitated new ‘expectations of modernity’.⁷ These expectations, as Bryant and Mokrzycki rightly argue, combined the aspiration to achieve the Western level of material welfare with the maintenance of universal employment.⁸

The capitalist modernization project received ideological support from transition theory, which dominated the discourse on transformation in the first few years after 1989-1991. To be sure, the theory of ‘*big bang*’ or ‘*genesis environment*’ formulated a markedly different prognosis for the future of the Eastern European countries. For reasons to be discussed below, this theory can, nevertheless, be seen as a variant of transition theory rather than a new, critical paradigm.

Two weeks after President Mitterrand had unveiled to the world the vision of a European confederation from the Atlantic to the Urals in his New Year’s Eve address, Sachs published an article, in which

⁷ I adopt the term “expectations of modernity” from Ferguson’s analysis of the success and failure of the modernization project in Zambia, see: Ferguson, James: *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999. As Ferguson rightly argues, the myth of modernization was never only an academic myth. It provided a set of categories and premises that continued to shape people’s experiences and interpretations of their lives well after modernization had become a discredited theory in the academic world. These “*expectations of modernity*” were very influential in Eastern Europe after the failure of the Communist modernization project.

⁸ Bryant, Christopher G.A.-Mokrzycki, Edmund: *The New Great Transformation? Change and Continuity in East Central Europe*. London, Routledge, 1994.

he outlined a plan very different from the French concept. As Peter Gowan argued, Sachs's ideas for transforming the region dovetailed nicely with the geopolitical and economic policy objectives of the Bush administration.⁹ These included the following: to break what came to be known as the Visegrad states from Moscow and require a shock transition to capitalism there; to continue to exclude the USSR from a reorganized Europe and to work instead for the absorption of East Central Europe into the Western sphere; to pressurize Germany into footing the bill for the rapid transformation of East Central Europe, while an IMF-led restructuring program would create exporting tigers competing on the basis of cheap labor costs, which would lead to the relocation of production from Germany eastwards, and would thereby exert pressure to reconstruct the EC's institutional order along American lines as a minimalist safety-net, neo-liberal zone. All of these were elements in the Sachs plan, though more delicately put.¹⁰

The triumph of the Sachs plan determined the dominant strategy followed in East Central Europe and the major paradigm of conceptualizing change in the first years after the fall of state socialism. The path of neo-liberal reform adopted by most of the states in the former Communist bloc was expected to deliver not only rapid economic restructuring, but with it, *'the unleashed energies of the East would be channeled into peaceful and constructive purposes'*.¹¹ In this respect, transition theory predicted a brilliant and much desired future for the transition countries: after some *'pain'*, which was anticipated in the course of shock therapy, the Visegrad states would *'catch up'* with the advanced Western countries with respect to industrial development and – most importantly – consumption and the standards of living.

The major elements of shock therapy included the liberalization of markets, the replacement of COMECON with western markets, rationalization, the closing down of unprofitable factories, the

⁹ Gowan, Peter: Neo-Liberal Theory and Practice for Eastern Europe. *New Left Review*, 213. (1995) 3-60.

¹⁰ Sachs, Jeffrey: What is to be done? *The Economist*, 13 January 1990.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 23.

reduction of the ‘*prematurely born*’¹² welfare state and rapid privatization. Since the transition theory has been widely criticized (especially after economic reality in most Eastern European countries showed a very different picture from what had been anticipated), it is not the purpose here to repeat major arguments.¹³ Criticism is limited to two basic issues: what was the theoretical background of transition theory and why did it receive such a warm welcome in Eastern Europe from the beginning?

According to Offe, the transition theory was based on a normative concept of capitalism that could have been achieved regardless of the starting conditions. Transformation was expected to follow the evolutionary path of ‘*designer*’ rather than ‘*actually existing*’ capitalism.¹⁴ While the theory was originally developed to conceptualize transition from autocratic rule to democracy¹⁵, advocates of its application to the Eastern European changes such as Adam Przeworski paid little attention to the specific problem of the transition to capitalism.¹⁶ As the voluminous writing on economic transformation shows, in the first years of transformation few authors challenged the neo-liberal view that shock therapy was the best way to get rid of the state socialist legacy.

It is an interesting question and a topic of future investigation, why belief in the capitalist miracle was so prevalent in Eastern Europe. According to Offe, one reason was the former planners’ receptiveness to ‘*designer*’ capitalism.¹⁷ I would go further to argue

¹² The concept of the ‘*prematurely born*’ welfare state was invented by János Kornai, and wholeheartedly adopted by neoliberal ‘*mainstream*’ economists in Hungary.

¹³ For various critical assessments see Nowotny, Thomas: Transition from Communism and the Spectre of Latin-Amerikanization. *East European Quarterly*, vol. 31. (1997), Lessenich, Stephan: Strukturwandel in Transformationsgesellschaften: Vom Süden zum Osten und zurück. In: *Deutschland im Wandel: Sozialstrukturelle Analysen*. Ed by Glatzer, Wolfgang-Ostner, Ilona. Opladen, Leske und Budrich, 1999., Lomax, Bill: A tranzitológia válsága. In: *Rendszerváltás és társadalomkritika*. Ed. by Krausz, Tamás, Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó, 1998.

¹⁴ Offe, Claus: *Varieties of Transition: The East European and the East German Experience*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996.

¹⁵ O’Donnell, Guillermo-Schmitter, Philippe C.-Whitehead, Laurence: *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives*. Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1986.

¹⁶ Przeworski, Adam: The Choice of Institutions in the Transition to Democracy: A Game-theoretic Approach. *Sisyphus: Social Studies* 1. (1992).

¹⁷ Offe, *Ibid.* 1996.

that the reasons were more deeply embedded in the state socialist past. The essence of Stalinist ideology was a break with the concept of the world revolution and the declaration of the program of catching up with the West. By the 1970s, it became clear that this program could not be realized; outright failure was admitted with the collapse of state socialism. Having abandoned the socialist modernization project, the Eastern European countries placed a renewed hope for '*catching up*' with the advanced Western countries in the transition to capitalism.

In the former satellite countries nationalist ideologies were also used to raise the (existing) antipathy against the USSR. In this political atmosphere, the sole blame for the underdevelopment of the region was put on state socialism and unilateral dependence on the COMECON market. It was widely believed that with the removal of these legacies, rapid progress would be inevitable. In short, it can be argued that transition theory was attractive to the Eastern European countries precisely because of its teleological implication widely criticized in the later literature.

Transition theory also brought totalitarianism back into the academic mainstream. Although it did not have an explicit theory of socialism, the urge to get rid of the old system as such and uproot all of the socialist institutions was very much in line with the totalitarian concept of the '*evil*' Communist rule. While the transition theory was somewhat eroded by the experience of peripheral integration, totalitarianism, as I pointed out above, became a dominant paradigm in Eastern Europe. It is not my intention here to discuss the political implications of the Eastern European totalitarian myth but rather to stress the point that more research on the socialist past is needed to surpass the old and somewhat dusty arguments, which take us back to the waxworks of the Cold War.

Kenneth Jowitt puts forwards a radically different scenario of change, which can be labeled the theory of '*genesis*' environment or the theory of '*big bang*'. In his book Jowitt describes the situation in the postsocialist countries as a state of perfect deconstruction comparable to the situation when the '*earth was deserted and empty*'. In this conception what is expected is a situation in which people are only passively involved and are not able to control the course of events. This impotence is exhibited both by the ruled and by that

section of the external elite, which possesses neither the means nor the ambition to foster modernization, but instead attempts simply to limit the damage and avoid disasters.¹⁸

Since the deficiencies of the transition paradigm were discussed at length, the criticism of the '*big bang*' will be limited to pointing out three major common theoretical premises. First, both have teleological implications. Second, both show a disregard for continuity: the theory of '*big bang*' even more overtly than the transition paradigm. Third, neither theory is prepared to take into account the unintended and unforeseen consequences of transformation and both deny the agency of local populations. Given these similarities, it can be argued that the theory of '*big bang*' was a variant of the transition theory rather than an effectively new paradigm.

The Crisis of Transition

After the first years in transition, it became more and more evident that reality turned out to be very different from the optimistic prognosis and the Eastern European countries were, in fact, very far from reaching pre-1989 levels of economic performance – let alone from catching up with the capitalist West. The increasing social and human costs of shock therapy called into question the optimistic notion that Eastern Europe was on the route to economic recovery. The greatest shock was the abandonment of full employment: by 1994, unemployment figures had reached 10-15% in the Visegrad countries. The impact of the decline in real wages and aggregate demand was a dramatic drop in output. Thus, in the mid-1990s, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) reported that only Poland and Slovenia were close to regaining what had been lost during the early 1990s and it would take at least a further 2-4 years to return to pre-reform levels. In 1996, for Eastern

¹⁸ Jowitt, Kenneth: *The New World Disorder: the Leninist Extinction*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992.

Europe as a whole, real GDP was still 15 per cent below the 1989 level.¹⁹

The social costs of transition called into question not only the optimistic prognosis of catching up with the West, but also the validity of transition theory and the practice of shock therapy. At the political level this was reflected in the electoral triumphs of the successor socialist parties; at the academic level, in the search for new paradigms. The following part will introduce three major rival paradigms.

New Institutionalism

New institutionalism stresses the institutionally embedded nature of social change (hence also its slowness) and the need for both analysts and policy makers to build upon past legacies rather than reject them.²⁰ One of the chief advocates of the '*path dependent*' nature of transformation, David Stark was explicitly critical of the universalistic implication of transition theory and its disregard for the particular institutional legacies of state socialist countries, which structure transformation. In place of transition he recommended the use of transformations, in which '*the introduction of new elements takes place most typically in combination with adaptations, rearrangements, permutations, and reconfigurations of already existing institutional forms*'.²¹

Stark and Bruszt supported the thesis of the '*path dependency*' of Eastern European transformation with an analysis of changing property relations, which they interpreted as reconfigurations of institutional elements. They argued that the different national

¹⁹ For a critical assessment of the economic consequences see: *Theorising Transition: The Political Economy of Postcommunist Transformations*. Ed. by Pickles, John-Smith, Adrian. London and New York: Routledge, 1998., *The Transformation of the Communist Economies: Against the Mainstream*. Ed. by Chang, Ha-Joon-Nolan, Peter. London and New York, Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 1995.

²⁰ See for example Bryant-Mokrzycki, *ibid.* 1994.

²¹ Stark, David-Bruszt, László: *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998. 83.