

Towards Democracy.

Lessons Drawn from Central and East Europe Transitions

By Jiří Koubek,
Charles University in Prague

Success Stories

- Czech Rep.
- Poland
- Hungary
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Baltic States

Failure Stories

- Most Asian Republics of USSR
- Belarus
- Perhaps Russia?

„Mixed-Feelings“ Cases

- Ukraine
- Serbia
- Some other countries of Southeast Europe

Transition to Democracy – Not a Victory FOREVER

- Even in success stories – huge problems 20 years after
- **Hungary**: rise of right wing extremism
- **Czech Rep.**: corruption, alienation of politics
- **Baltics**: exclusion, minorities
- **Poland**: fundamental conflict over values

What makes a success story?

- Many factors: economy, history, culture, leadership, old regime
- Much simplification needed
- Here: focus on **POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

„Happy“ combination

- Parliamentary Regime
- PLUS
- Party List Proportional Representation Electoral System

Parliamentary Regime

- Most power in **cabinet**/ council of ministers (**NOT** in hands **one person** only)
- Cabinet derived from, and **accountable to parliament elected by people**
- President = **figurehead** (symbolic ceremonial powers, usually elected indirectly, or if by people - still weak)

Party List PR system

- People **choose** between political **parties** (lists of candidates)
- Parties get seats **in proportion** to the number of votes (normally more parties in parliament)
- Usually a legal threshold: **only some** parties get seats, e.g. over 5 % (excluding very small parties – otherwise parliament „broken“ into too many groups)

Alternatives

- **Presidential regimes:** president = true head of executive power (not only symbolic head of state), elected by people
- **Majoritarian electoral systems** = candidate-based, personalized vote, small (regional) districts, **winner takes all**

Why Parliamentary regime+PR Party List? What's „wrong“ about the alternatives?

- Just **one winner** (Ukraine)
- **Conflict of legitimacies** (Russia)
- **Imperial presidency** (super-presidentialism), authoritarian backlash (Central Asia)
- **Rigidity** of Pres. Regime (Latin America)
- Politics too much **about people**, local issues and tradeoffs (**pork barrel politics**) – less about ideas
- In other words: a „super-president“ rules, corrupting local elites

Devil is in detail

- PR Party list + Parl. Regime = very **simplified** equation
- Within electoral system: **how large districts? How exclusive legal threshold? Parties or voters decide about candidates?** (Poland 1991 election)
- Within regime type: **what kind of balance between branches of government (executive and legislative)? What exactly presidential powers?** (Czech Republic – presidential powers) **Etc. etc.**

Other crucial issues/ areas / choices

- **Funding** of politics (public, transparent, well controlled) – how to reduce corruption
- **Media** access and regulation
- **Electoral cycles**, electoral calendar, number of levels (CZ – too many elections, permanent campaign)
- **Registration** rules, election access

Conclusion

- A fairly „**pure**“ **parliamentary** republic with symbolic, indirectly elected president
- **PR Party List** with „reasonable“ threshold and party-based vote
- Well-structured **system of** (more and well-shaped) political **parties**
- Solid and disclosed system of **public funding** of politics
- Stable and compact **electoral cycles**

Thank you for your attention

- Jiri Koubek, UPOL FF UK