

FOREWORD

This third edition of the CEU Political Science Journal focuses on the importance of institutions in building post-communist democracies. It is to be welcomed not only because of the information it presents, but also – and perhaps most crucially – because of the questions that it asks.

The topics covered in the four articles presented here appear at first sight familiar, both from the conventional literature on western democracies, and from more recent analyses of the democratisation process in Central and Eastern Europe. Elena Prohntichi looks at the effects of modes of transition on the choice of electoral systems in Central Europe; Gabriela Borz concentrates on political parties in Central Europe, and concludes that electoral systems do not have the effects on party behavioural unity that might be expected, and that other factors need to be analysed; Irina Ionescu presents a case study of the parliamentary behaviour of opposition parties in Romania during the periods of democratic transition and consolidation; and Elgun A. Taghiyev concentrates on the post-Soviet area and the relationship between presidentialism and authoritarianism.

All four articles illustrate how far political science analysis of Central and Eastern Europe has advanced over the last 15 years, and the particular contribution to the academic study of this field that can be made by the generation of young scholars who are able to combine their own experiences of observing political developments in their home region with a thorough grounding in political science methodology and theory. The authors are conversant with existing literature relevant to their research topics, and are able to utilise it constructively to frame their own propositions. This does not necessarily mean that they are able to fit their own research findings into established paradigms of how political systems work. In many cases, more familiar theories of the interplay between the ‘building blocks’ of democracy – constitutional arrangements, electoral systems, parties and parliaments – merely provide the means for articulating the fact that *something else* or *something just slightly different* may be happening in societies that have been through a different path of development. They constructed their democratic systems not only in the peculiar conditions of post-communism, but also within a framework of modernity where somewhat idiosyncratic political elites automatically use new methods of communication with a literate electorate. These factors impact on the way institutions work, but their influence may be temporary, and it is therefore

important to establish methods for determining whether convergence is taking place.

Explaining and analysing both what is happening and why in the exercise of political power is the foremost task of political scientists. But finding the right answers depends on asking the right questions. It is here that the work that a new generation of scholars, with different perspectives and insights, is particularly important.

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