

Has There Really Been Sociocultural Convergence between Eastern and Western Europe?

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Abstract. This article is a study of modernization processes in the late 20th and the early 21st centuries in which the former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have tried to catch up with the West, and the transformation of values and social restructuring that this purported Westernization has involved. The article analyzes specific forms of transition from socialism to capitalism in ex-socialist countries after the replacement of political systems in them in 1989. It focuses on the development dynamics of all key spheres of CEE society including work and employment (the sphere that has undergone the greatest change), private and family life (changes that have been part of the second demographic transition), morality, religion, politics, and civil society. The study ends with the conclusion that CEE civilization was and remains essentially different from Western European civilization. The historical experience of CEE is vastly different from that of Western Europe, and the former finds itself at a new, post-socialist or liberal democratic stage of its own trajectory of development.

Keywords: CEE, path of development of CEE, transition from socialism to capitalism, Westernization, spheres of CEE society, work, family, morality, religion, politics, civil society.

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The discourse of Westernization, primarily as a form of democratization, emerged as the dominant trend in the societies of CEE in 1989 and remained such for quite a long time thereafter. Renewal of civil society became the theme of public and academic debates, debates that ended up in the period of accession of

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former CEE socialist countries to the European Union, i.e., their symbolic entry into the Western world. Afterward there arose mixed sentiments in those countries about their inclusion in supranational European bodies and their involvement in global interactions. Crisis trends in Western countries were analyzed in CEE and the Western system came under mass-scale criticism there—the era of Western-centrist politics and economics was coming to an end.

Convergence theory, which had been in vogue back in the 1960s, claimed that it would be possible to combine the best characteristics of the Western and Eastern blocs and thereby create a prosperous and just society. However, after 1989 it was the worst characteristics of the two regimes that were synthesized in practice in CEE. Embezzlement and the degeneration of the state were the leitmotifs of the CEE reforms [17, p. 49]. The minimization of the role of the state advocated by neo-liberal ideology is, in general, mainly in the interest of tiny groups that don't have to pay high taxes. Therefore, privatizations launched by CEE's neo-liberal governments aimed to erode not only the welfare state but the state as a whole, to carry out its giant-scale dismantling. This made it more obvious that the state needed to be restored, that public interest needed its role to be rehabilitated, and that the public space concept needed cultivating.

In the first two decades after 1989, changes in CEE may be described as an attempt to catch up with the West. But this road to the West was largely a road to an unknown land. There had been no discussions about forms of property ownership or free market economics right up until the “velvet revolutions,” but it took a mere several months to come up with programs for a big leap into free-market capitalism. It was thought, for example, that a program based on the principles of Polish labor union Solidarity would take Poland further away from the West. The opposition movement of the 1980s had no realistic programs for transition from socialism to capitalism; yet it pursued a general liberal project that had no sound social foundations but was based on a general overwhelming desire for reform and, although accepted publicly, owed this acceptance to limited imagination, which liberal groups took advantage of [22, p. 18]. It was in the 1990s that the West was particularly attractive to the post-communist countries of CEE. The nineties were a singularly anti-social decade with the marginalization of some population strata and weakening public solidarity. According to German-British sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, the attractiveness of the West to the Central and Eastern Europeans was directly proportional to their demoralization with outcast *déclassé*, lumpen strata emerging in the majority of CEE European countries.

In 1989, the Central and Eastern Europeans merely imitated the West but didn't enrich it with a single idea. They idealized the West but all they wanted was to use what it had to offer. The Western Europeans, however, expected a contribution from CEE that would help them cope with the crisis of that time. CEE elites set themselves a strategic objective of having their countries quickly adapt to Western political and economic institutions. Few Central and Eastern Europeans understood what the planned economic reforms were all about, and no alternative was suggested. The governments were afraid of experimenting with a

“third path” between socialism and capitalism. The CEE economies, instead of serving the needs of their own nations, began to work for a global system ruled by supranational big business. This amounted to a brand of capitalism that had been designed in top echelons of government and had nothing to do with capitalism that would have evolved historically. This situation was giving birth to a society of consumers with dwindling incomes rather than a society of successful producers [22, p. 56]. The ideal citizen was not a bourgeois as in the classical Western European model or an entrepreneur as in the United States but an *intelligentsia* member as in post-aristocratic Poland or in Russia [29].

As regards democracy, half of Central and Eastern Europeans take a more individualistic attitude, seeing democracy as a guarantee of personal freedom and freedom of choice; 27% put a social and economic interpretation on it as respect for social rights and guarantees of adequate living standards; 12% believe that democracy means justice and equality before the law; and in the eyes of the lowest proportion, 10%, democracy stands for the Western degree of the individual’s involvement in public life.

The Central and Eastern Europeans put social and economic rights before political and civil rights. The Slovaks, for example, attach the greatest importance to every citizen’s right to healthcare and adequate living standards. The prioritization of social and economic rights means that people’s main concern is what they lack. Surveys carried out in CEE on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the events of November 1989 confirmed that negative developments after those events had primarily social roots—about 70% of respondents said that work opportunities, social guarantees and social security had become poorer, and 55% said that healthcare standards had gone down. Hence there is a clear dividing line between social and all other rights. Over the last decade, Central and Eastern Europeans have been attaching less significance to “participatory rights,” which didn’t matter much to them before either, have been taking less interest in politics, and have lost some of their ability to understand politics.

Meanwhile, social and economic rights are an increasingly burning issue. In Slovakia, 40% of the population think the country could do with a different political system, one that would bring about more order, equality and justice, even at the cost of limiting some civil freedoms. Less than one quarter of Slovaks think the country should focus on improving its liberal democratic system [4, pp. 369, 386; 9].

The Czech Republic put its economic interests higher on its EU accession agenda than other CEE countries did [13; 21]. Pride in the country being an EU member is not a dominant sentiment in Czech society. Nearly one quarter of Czechs are not proud of being EU citizens [1; 10]. When the Czech Republic was joining the EU, many Czechs assumed that the EU needed Czech membership more than the Czech Republic itself.

A study of correlation between religious and socioeconomic factors, educational and economic activity in the Czech Republic has produced what for me are interesting findings. This study is based on Max Weber’s well-known thesis about

Protestant ethics as a determining factor in capitalism. Its findings suggest that Czech Protestants, whose beliefs go back to the Hussite movement, are generally not particularly pro-capitalist. They expect help from the state more than others do. As regards economic activity, in Czech society one's economic views are not in any way related to whether one is religious or attends worship services. But religious people, no matter whether they are Catholics or not, are more often than non-religious people convinced that it is the responsibility of the state to take care of their living standards. Hence they set greater expectations upon someone else, namely the state. Expecting the state to take care of their employment and living standards is not in tune with the "spirit of capitalism." The findings gave no indication that one's status as an employee or entrepreneur had anything to do with one being religious or not. Nor did they confirm the thesis that the "spirit of capitalism" more often manifests itself in Protestantism or Weber's point that there is antagonism between Catholic and Protestant countries. Desire for state paternalism is common among religious people, both Catholics and non-Catholics. To sum up, what Weber saw as a clear connection between economic and religious behavior is not a feature of CEE society, although it is a feature of Western society. If there does exist any such connection, Czech Christians, including Protestants, show a rather anti-free market attitude [5].

Czech sociologists also point out that it is the ambition of Czech society and elites that the Czech Republic should achieve the economic development level of the more advanced EU countries but that the nation has not yet been able to do so. The reason is that no one has been able to answer the question what the Czech Republic needs to do to catch up with the West. The majority of the population and most members of the elites do not know the answer. They have practically no idea of what modern society should be like. The population mainly wants material comfort and advanced technology. Both the population and the elites imagine them as more corresponding to the values of an industrial rather than a post-industrial, information society. Neither the population nor the elites have any interest in civil activity. Key actors of modernization are largely disoriented or completely fail to understand what modernization should be all about. The Czechs realize that Westernization is inevitable but 67% of the population and 63% of elite members believe the country should have its own, Czech, way of Westernization [20, p. 60]. Moreover, 62% of Czechs want greater state control of society development, which reflects a predominant desire for paternalism or "top-down" modernization. It is the past rather than present or future of the West that both society and the elites in the Czech Republic are trying to catch up with. All this represents a strategic thinking crisis in the country. The majority of the population believes that convergence with the West is essential but is sure that it should be achieved in a Czech way [3, p. 27]. On the whole, Czech society takes a lukewarm attitude to the Western modernization model and expects the elites come up with an original, specifically Czech model. Such is the nature of the leading role that Czech society expects the elites to play.

The deep changes in CEE societies over the past quarter century are normally given either cultural, or value-based, or structural interpretations [27]. Cultural interpreters mainly claim that CEE and Euro-American civilizations undergo similar social processes, and that post-communist countries are trying to quickly catch up with the West, i.e., are being Westernized. Structural interpreters argue that development processes in CEE differ from those in Western countries not only in speed and scale but also in social and demographic consequences. In fact, structural interpretations of this kind disclose the essence of the path followed by CEE after 1989. This essence primarily amounts to social stratification and life risks such as risks of poverty or unemployment, and consequently results in the exclusion of large numbers of people from key spheres of life—work, private or family life, public affairs, and politics.

Various sociological studies have shown that the organization of society changed seriously in CEE after 1989. In the Czech Republic this happened in the latter half of the 1990s, and in Poland by 1993. This was an effect of a crisis of liberal pro-Western policies that had no sound social basis or any traditions in CEE society. The latter was falling into two categories—those who had made some acquisitions during economic and democratic political reforms and those who had become marginalized. No later than in the mid-1990s, criteria for assessing the systemic changes in CEE began to be revised in CEE societies, namely the value principle was being replaced by the interest principle as the chief criterion. Judgments based on “what’s right and what’s wrong with the new regime”? were being replaced by judgments based on “does the new regime do any good for me and to others like myself”? Moreover, in the same period it became obvious to the CEE population that the program of economic transformation threatened the vital interests of specific social groups, primarily those with a low social status, and even their existence [11, p. 282].

Around the same time, social class became an increasingly obvious factor in CEE societies. In Western Europe, the class structure of the electorate had been declining as a factor behind election outcomes since the 1970s. However, in the Czech Republic, for example, it was in the latter half of the 1990s that class was recorded to have affected voting, and since then it has been having an increasing effect on Czech elections as the country sticks to a social and economic policy that generates social conflicts. With increasing social stratification and inequality, class affiliation has become a key factor in voting and may eventually become the only factor. What has been happening in Poland also overturns the “death of class” thesis. Of course, the main outcome of post-1989 poverty and unemployment in CEE was the emergence of an underclass. The latter consists of *déclassé* and marginalized elements of the classes that formed the core of the former system—the working class and farmers. There do remain class distinctions and class barriers in CEE countries, and people’s class interests determine their political views and behavior. As a result, CEE societies have become structurally different from Western societies—the typical CEE social structure is a pyramid with

numerous lower strata, a rather weak middle stratum, and a tiny superrich group, which has drawn the most benefits from the reforms.

The source of this state of affairs is a sharp rise in unemployment. Before 1989, CEE was a region of practically full and compulsory employment. At the beginning of the 21st century, less than half the population in Poland was economically active, and the proportion continues to shrink. Sociologists in CEE point out the insecurity of shadow economy jobs—jobs under unofficial contracts or under no contracts at all, a situation that applies to one-third of Poles. Poland is one of Europe's leaders in unstable employment. Meanwhile an overwhelming majority of the population remains sure that it is the duty of the state to guarantee them the right to work, and egalitarian traditions remain deeply rooted in the essentially non-market economic culture of the Central and Eastern Europeans. For them entrepreneurship, especially during economic crises, is increasingly often a forced, negatively motivated option that they take not as a source of opportunities, prestige or relatively high incomes but as an alternative to unemployment. All this naturally fails to meet the original expectations that the “velvet revolutions” would bring about equal opportunities for personal advance based on work achievements.

What makes the employment situation more acute is the fact, that, according to studies, one's professional or vocational identity is one's main form of identity, for instance in the Czech Republic: one looks on oneself primarily as a representative of one's profession or trade. This means that in CEE, unlike in present-day Western Europe, one doesn't put leisure time or private or family life before work. Simultaneously, however, in CEE work ceases to be a form of self-realization and is increasingly perceived as mainly a source of living.

Work is the sphere of life in CEE that has undergone the greatest change over the past 25 years. Along with the family, work is one of the main values. Work is “extremely important” for 56% and “rather important” for 35% of Poles [28, p. 63], and 81% would like to imbue their children with love of work. The Czech Republic was second on a 36-country list in terms of significance attached by people to work [14, p. 23]. At the same time, work has been losing rather than gaining in significance in CEE over the last two decades. This is considered a remarkable process, and is undoubtedly a product of the transition to market economies and to new social practices. Noteworthy, decrease in the prestige of work coincided in time with a considerable increase in unemployment, in fact with the emergence of unemployment, in CEE.

Ideas in CEE of what caused poverty showed interesting dynamics, being different in the 1990s than in the first decade of the 21st century. During the market reforms, it was the predominant sentiment that poverty had personal causes such as laziness or lack of willpower, but this was gradually replaced by a feeling that poverty had an objective root—social injustice, which came to be seen as the source of the majority of social problems. This change of perception took place at the beginning of the 21st century, when, in the course of European integration, negative social processes triggered by reforms became weaker, or were

even reversed. It was an increasing belief among Central and Eastern Europeans that poverty was mainly caused by social factors and not personal factors as they had assumed at the outset of the reforms [24, p. 265]. In CEE countries more often preference is given than in Western European countries to employing their own citizens rather than foreign labor migrants. The patriarchal practice of hiring men rather than women for scarce jobs is also more frequent in CEE than in Western Europe.

Researchers have also found out other differences between CEE and Western societies. Educational qualifications are much more a criterion in work remuneration in CEE than in Western Europe. Westerners prefer independent and interesting work; to Central and Eastern Europeans it matters more how much they would be paid for a job and what career progress opportunities it involves. In the West one prioritizes “internal” values of work such as initiative or responsibility while in CEE one primarily thinks of “external” values of a job such as the amount of pay, the length of the working hours, and how much annual leave one can get. Central and Eastern Europeans are more often unhappy with their salaries or wages than Western Europeans [23, p. 213]. More people in CEE than in Western European countries would like to have more work and more money for it. At the same time, up to 90% of Central and Eastern Europeans feel that one needn’t work if one doesn’t want to, an attitude that is flatly rejected in some Western European societies. Between 50% and 70% of Central and Eastern Europeans primarily see work as a source of money [26, p. 13].

One more feature of CEE’s Westernization attempts in the private sphere was a demographic shock in the 1990s. This shock involved unprecedented changes to all the patterns of natural population reproduction, family organization partially fell apart, and some population lost their traditional life guidelines after being impoverished and sinking to underclass status because of the change of social system; however, the family remained a priority for Central and Eastern Europeans. Highly educated strata have stuck to their traditional demographic behavior. According to sociodemographic studies, Catholic Slovakia and Poland with their conservative style of private life will possibly never reach Western European demographic characteristics despite their attempts to catch up with the West. Eastern and Western Europe have for centuries had different demographic systems with consequently two different forms of family behavior, and this remains the case today.

This stems not only from the distinctive hierarchy of values of the traditionalist Central and Eastern European societies but also from the essence of CEE’s liberalization. That rapidly modernizing region has been through three quarter-century periods after the mid-20th century: industrialization in the 1950s and 1960s, urbanization in the 1970s and 1980s, and a demographic revolution that began in the 1990s and ended in the first decade of the 21st century. The change of the type of natural population reproduction and family transformation as part of the so-called stage two of the demographic transition model, which began around 1970 in the West and two decades later in CEE, were processes that were key elements of CEE’s post-1989 liberalization or democratization, in other words its

Westernization. In Poland, this was called the emergence of a “new sentimental order” of family life.

Surveys by the European Values Study (EVS) foundation confirm that marriage as an institution has undergone a significant change in CEE over the past quarter-century. In polls in Poland in 2008, 18% of respondents expressed support for the view that marriage is an “obsolete institution.” This was one third of the percentage that subscribed to this idea in a 1990 survey in the country. The proportion of those seeing marriage as a necessary condition for a happy life shrank to 65% from 73%. As many as 70% came to see unregistered relationships as legitimate, especially if there are children born in them [28, p. 51]. Polish society moved away from the traditional image of a “Polish mother,” especially the image shaped by Poland’s 19th-century nobility, that of a woman loyal to her family and serving her country at the same time. One could now come across a “managerial matriarchy” in Poland—a situation where a woman selflessly controls the life of her family. This is sometimes called an “idealist and heroic” model of motherhood and women who fulfilled this role are described as “superwomen” or “supermothers” who since the days of socialism had been carrying a double burden—looking after their family and working. Did this image change in Poland during stage two of the demographic transition?

Polish sociologists come to the conclusion that family life in their country has changed significantly over the last two decades, mainly moving toward individualism, but that this doesn’t mean the family is in crisis. There are data that belie the thesis that the Polish family is moving toward the Western model with its typical “democracy” and “freedom” for its members. Central and Eastern Europeans have obviously changed their attitudes, but Czech surveys show that what one says may differ from, and even contradict, what one does in practice. Since the latter half of the 1990s, highly educated Czechs have been following the principle of behaving in traditional ways while holding advanced views. While verbally they accept new purportedly progressive attitudes, they prefer the most conservative forms of family life and stay away from demographic transformations. The true vehicles of new trends in the Czech Republic are single mothers and women who are in unregistered relationships with men, but these are poorly educated women with a low social status who claim increasingly often that family is the meaning of life. About 80% of such women remain unmarried, and usually aren’t even in unregistered relationships, when they give birth to their first child, whereas the same proportion of highly educated Czechs are married by the time their first child is born [2, p. 47; 7, p. 8]. Czech sociologists have found out strong negative social and economic factors behind non-traditional forms of family. These factors are much more powerful than changes in values, and reflect not so much pan-European trends as differences in the dynamics and essence of demographic behavior in Western Europe and CEE.

The main negative developments were economic barriers to starting a family and having children in crisis conditions. Czech sociologists compared the demographic processes of those times to Czechoslovakia in the 1930s, which was a

period of rapidly rising social inequality and the emergence of large social strata living on welfare allowances for a long time. The demographic shock of the late 20th century manifested itself in a sharp fall of the birth rate and the number of new marriages and in mushrooming extramarital births.

Despite all this, the family remains important to Poles—90% of respondents in a survey in Poland said that family was “extremely important” to them. The traditional model of family as a married couple with children is widely accepted in CEE, primarily in Poland. According to EVS statistics as cited by Polish sources, this model is much less popular in Western Europe, especially in the Scandinavian countries—in an EVS poll in 2008, it was supported by 54% of respondents. Approval of one-parent families as the main feature of current family transformation is primarily common in the Scandinavian countries and practically does not occur in CEE [28, p. 56]. More than 80% of CEE respondents argued that having children was essential for a woman’s self-realization, while only about 40% of Western European respondents took this attitude. It is apparently the hardships of a typical family in Poland and in CEE in general that explain the fact that childless people are generally happier than parents, although children do play an important role in a family. Western Europe, primarily the Scandinavian countries, present the opposite picture. CEE women may even be considered victims of the cultural norm that prescribes that women should have children, a norm that doesn’t make CEE women happy in the current situation. One more finding concerning only CEE families is that being a married parent makes one happier than being a single parent, especially a single mother. Having a child doesn’t compensate a single parent for the absence of a spouse or partner. On the contrary, being a single parent is a source of frustration [6, p. 99].

All this prompts the conclusion that family values in CEE are still very different from those in Western Europe.

One comes to no less interesting conclusions in analyzing post-1989 dynamics of moral and religious values. This is traditionally a key range of subjects for Polish sociologists as these are particularly significant matters for Poland as a strongly Catholic country. Sociologists have argued that during the second decade of systemic changes, morality clearly lost much of its role as an instrument of public control. They have spoken about the politicization of public morality and about the rapidly increasing relativization of moral values. These developments were even described as a “moral panic” or “moral revolution” after joining the EU. More than half of respondents in surveys conducted by EVS in the majority of European countries around the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries argued that there didn’t exist any hard and fast principles for distinguishing good from evil and that good and evil were purely situational concepts. The opposite view was dominant in Poland alone—51% of respondents in a 1999 poll there said that there existed clear and unquestionable moral principles that everyone was duty-bound to follow in any situation. The proportion grew to 53% by 2008 [28, p. 165]. In other words, in Poland, unlike in the rest of Europe, relativism is not the dominant moral precept. Moral relativism is less common in

Poland than in any of the other members of the Visegrád Four—the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. Within Poland it is particularly rare among numerous practicing Catholics. On average, moral relativism is rarer in CEE than in Western Europe. Hence, statistics give the lie to the myth about moral decay in today's Poland, although there were some moral destabilization trends in evidence in that country at the beginning of the 21st century. Polish society has not experienced any deep cultural changes and remains patently conservative.

Though for the majority of Poles the church is no longer the guide through life and religion is losing its significance, they continue to consider themselves religious and Catholic. This is largely the result of a shortage of alternative forms of identity that can get people firmly established in public life. Religion remains the only system structuring Poles' everyday life and giving it meaning.

As regards political and civil society developments, data for 2009 suggest that in Poland the government had extremely low public prestige. The Poles believed that the state was incompetent, didn't deserve confidence, didn't serve the people, and failed to embody principles of equality. These feelings had been building up over the previous two decades. Confidence in political institutions is the basis for the legitimation of a political system, but confidence in the state plummeted to 30.7% in 2008 from 78.8% in 1989, confidence in parliament plunged to 19.0% from 78.9%, and confidence in the government dropped to 21.8% in 2008 from 38.7% in 1995 [28, p. 215]. Public assessments in Poland of the country's government system were marked by consistently negative dynamics that were in line with confidence statistics. At the same time, there was no decrease in expectations toward the state on the part of the population, which remained very much in favor of state interventionism. It was taken for granted that employment affairs were the responsibility of the state.

Significantly, the state has also been expected to take action to reduce income inequality. The Poles, like their CEE neighbors, assume that it is the duty of the state to guarantee equality, which is an absolute social value for Central and Eastern Europeans with their strong egalitarian attitudes. Strong sentiments against income inequality grew in scale by 20 percentage points during the period in question. These were the feeling of 61.5% of the population in 1988 but those of 84.6% in 2006 [28, p. 221]. After resolutely giving up socialist economic egalitarianism at the outset of the transformation period, Polish—and not only Polish—society increasingly valued material equality. This was a reaction to a situation where there were major and far from always legitimate differences in work remuneration, and meant the fading away of a widespread belief that minor differences in pay for unskilled and high-skilled work were unjust. Summing up, Polish society assumed that the state had a wide range of responsibilities.

EVS studies suggest that Poland and CEE as a whole are more right-wing than Western Europe. What Russian sociologist Zhan Toshchenko describes as a "paradox man" who comparatively recently acquired freedom and experienced the benefits of a market economy puts more value on them than the average Westerner but is traditionally more statist, has more confidence in the state form of

property ownership than in the private form, and expects the state to play a more prominent role in public affairs. The CEE form of public-spiritedness is different from the Western European, Scandinavian, and American forms. It combines alienation from, and low confidence in, the state with the assumption that the state should have more power and that the individual needs to be more dependent on the state and show little initiative. High expectations for the state in CEE result in negative public images of the state and politicians. But let me add the qualifier that Poland is the country where the “paradox man” syndrome, which has been discovered in Russia, is the most typical feature.

The Poles’ political self-identification is a blend of traditionalism and left-wing economic views. It is this combination that the Poles call conservatism. Polish conservatism, unlike its Western counterpart, combines tradition and religiousness with advocacy of state intervention in the economy. Remarkably, Poles’ self-identification as right- or left-wing depends purely and simply on how much they embrace political liberalism and has nothing to do with their economic views. Even supporters of left-wing parties combine conservative moral attitudes with liberal economic views to the same degrees as the rest of Polish society.

Thus, a negative connection between economic liberalism and left-wing political views is only a feature of Western European countries while in CEE declared left-wing views have nothing to do with economic liberalism [28, p. 265]. Whether a Pole identifies himself or herself as right- or left-wing depends on what party he or she votes for. This contradicts the classical theory that it is one’s political identity that should determine one’s political behavior and not vice versa. In today’s CEE, one’s political self-identification is determined by what party or group one chooses to support. This confirms the thesis that in today’s CEE countries the right-left division of electorates is not based on any stable convictions of voters. Forms of political identity in that region are completely different from those in the West.

Central and Eastern Europeans on the whole take less interest in politics than Western Europeans. Fewer respondents in CEE than in Western Europe have answered in surveys that politics are “extremely important” to them—this even applies to those Central and Eastern Europeans who are members of political parties and are closely involved in the latter’s activities. In the West, it is mainly people dissatisfied with their lives that advocate more power for the state whereas in CEE such advocacy chiefly comes from supporters of market economics, “right-wingers,” people who are happy with their own status and with the situation in the country in general. This effectively means that in the West people try to improve a state of affairs if they are unhappy with it while in CEE it is beneficiaries of the changes who take political action.

Patterns similar to those in Poland have been in place in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, according to Czech and Slovak sociologists [12]: people who were highly educated and particularly satisfied with democratic developments made up a proportion that was nearly double the average proportion of the population willing to take part in permitted demonstrations. This didn’t directly represent

protest sentiments, as protests are normally aimed at improving the protesters' own condition. The Czechs and Slovaks who wanted to demonstrate were educated, tolerant, liberal people who were the strongest opponents of traditional values and supporters of post-materialist, relativist values, the least religious people who, however, leaned toward occultism, people who supported democracy, rejected socialism, hailed post-1989 changes, and believed in free market economics as the main ideology behind those changes.

So what is the sociocultural meaning behind the concept of CEE's convergence with the West or "return to Europe?" The idea of the supposedly universal character of the "imitation model of transformation" is based on the idealization of the capitalist West, which is claimed to be a single whole that included pre-socialist CEE. In the post-socialist era, culture became the main sphere of CEE society and a site for confrontation between national and imported Western values. Changes in CEE systems of values during the region's Westernization can be considered events of this "war of cultures." As it was embarking on its transformation, CEE had two sets of values, one more important than the other. The more important values were the family, work and religion, the less important values were friends, acquaintances, leisure time, and the like. Subsequently this system was revised to match the Western European system. This revision manifested itself in the erosion of the traditional image of the family, in greater importance attached to friends and acquaintances at the cost of family ties, and in the depreciation of work values that had mattered a great deal to Central and Eastern Europeans in the past. Central and Eastern Europeans drew much less pleasure from work and felt they had less freedom in making decisions at work than Western Europeans. Perception of work as a mere source of living became much more frequent in CEE than in Europe on average. These developments were a consequence of the collapse of the socialist-era ideology of work and the subsequent domination of a consumer ideology. Secularization, albeit slow, ruined the unity of the church and religion, on the one hand, and culture and society, on the other. EVS data for 1990, 1999 and 2008 show declining interest in politics and decreasing participation in political activities. Democracy is accepted in principle but in all the CEE countries there is dissatisfaction with the way it functions. Central and Eastern Europeans generally put extremely little value on their European identity, and most of them believe it only matters to those who draw some benefits from it. Also, relatively little importance is attached to the cultural and historical community of European countries [16].

In the 1990s, self-preservation and security were the main concerns of the average CEE citizen. A general sense of happiness, trust, tolerance, a desire for political activity, and support for democracy are much rarer in CEE than in Western Europe. Central European countries—Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia—are situated between Western and Eastern Europe not only geographically but also culturally.

They represent a range of cultures—traditionalist, which is particularly firmly rooted in Poland; secular and rationalist, which is the dominant culture of the Czech Republic; materialist, which is particularly common in Hungary; and post-materialist, which is most prominent in the Czech Republic and Slovenia [28, p. 337].

In liberal sections of society in Russia and CEE there still exists the view that the post-communist transformation in CEE has ended with an exemplary state of affairs that is completely different from Russian realities and superior to them. However, sociological studies carried out in countries that are our next-door western neighbors show that post-communist developments in CEE have been largely similar or identical to those in Russia.

In this connection, it is not surprising that the bulk of the population of the Visegrád Four doesn't care about their European identity and believes that it only matters to those who can get some boons out of it. The legitimacy crisis of the CEE political systems, which has involved a crisis of confidence in democratic institutions and utter estrangement of ordinary people from politics and politicians in combination with an economic crisis, produces and reproduces critical or negative attitudes to the EU.

By and large, despite the intensive imitation of Western ideals and practices in CEE countries at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries, CEE and Western Europe remain culturally different. According to objective data on Slovakia, the character of the country's social development both before and after its entry into the EU not only differed from the nature of Western development but even ran against it. Hence, it would be more correct to say that after 1989 CEE didn't take a westward turn but embarked on a new, liberal democratic but still Central and Eastern European path.

Sociologists claim that even though Czech society is CEE's most pro-Western, less than half the population of the Czech Republic prefers democracy. In Poland, it is a dominant assumption, whether intuitive or well-thought-out, that the current system is out of tune with Polish culture.

Unlike in the liberal 1990s, over the past decade CEE countries have been experiencing deliberalization processes that run counter to developments in Western countries [8, p. 188]. The assertion of national identity; a combination of collectivism, egalitarianism, social justice and conservatism; the priority of private over public affairs; and patriotic ideal—values that at the end of the 20th century were thought to be a lot of old rubbish hindering the region's movement into Europe—are being revived before our very eyes [19, p. 14]. One also comes across an opinion that CEE countries were genuinely European in the industrial society period [18]. The collapse of socialism and democratization have failed to adapt CEE countries to Western values. Moreover, CEE nations have drawn even further away from Western Europe. As one Serbian worker said, "We were part of Europe to a much greater extent in the socialist era than today." Eastern and Western Europe remain very different from each other as they continue to follow diverging historical paths [15, p. 12; 25, p. 18].

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