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Re-Building the Polity:
A Comparative Study of Mayors in the Hungarian, Czech and Slovakian Republics

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

EUI Working Paper **SPS** No. 93/8

Re-Building the Polity: A Comparative Study of Mayors in the Hungarian, Czech, and Slovakian Republics

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1. Introduction

The political changes that are going on in East Europe since 1989 have incited a wide interest in several fields of political science. (1) Comparative studies on transitions to democracy are popular and numerous, and fit into a wide, already existing literature. (2) In this tradition, the emphasis is laid, almost exclusively, on studies of the central organs and institutions of government: the role of political leadership, the establishment of the new party systems, the working of the parliament, the performance of the new government, and so on. There is much less interest in the re-organisation of local political or public life.

This assessment of the relative importance of the two spheres seems to be almost obvious. The hierarchy established between local and central politics, just like between local and national or international history, is one of the oldest traditions in academic life. One could also argue that the special circumstances of the East European case only underline the importance of this distinction. In the former, centralised system, the subordination of local authorities to the central organs was strict and extensive. Therefore, the establishment of a new system can only be done from the centre. In this way, in the field of politics, the central dilemma of economic reform is repeated: for a market economy, private property and propertied classes are required; but in the present state of affairs, it is only the state that can "create" private property. The very making of the actors of a decentralised economy becomes a task for central authorities. (3)

Moreover, this paper, and the research project of which it is a part, has a particularly strong theoretical interest. One could study changes at the level of local politics on its own right. But this is not the aim of this project that wants to re-pose some of the fundamental questions, at the level of methodology and even political philosophy, related to the possibility and the modality of political and social change; that tries to develop an approach to study continuities and discontinuities in transitions. From this perspective, the difference between the centre and the locality is

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only even more pronounced. It is taken almost as an evidence that theoretical studies should focus on the central organs, working more closely with problems of general relevance, while studies of local government and local changes are more concrete, descriptive, less abstract. Yet, the particular way this project poses its theoretical and methodological questions suggested to reverse the established wisdom, and set out to study the process of change at the local level. The perspective of this paper is given by the problem of legacy.

The choice of this issue as a starting point may look dubious for at least two different reasons. First, the question of legacy is very much present in current discussions. But it is contained in political propaganda speeches, in justifications of particular actions, in blaming of the opponents, the others - always the others! - of being communists either in form or in substance. It is present in journal articles and interviews, in media talks and presentations. It has been so much abused and trivialised that any further reference to the "communist past" seems to be devoid of value and sense.

But there is an even stronger reason to leave the whole question of legacy: the need for pragmatism, for attention to real, concrete problems, and forget about rhetorical, de-constructive debates about the "meaning" and the "truth" of the past. This approach looks extremely sympathetic, and is only reinforced by the current, low level of the discussion on "communist legacy". If only this attitude could be accepted without reservations; if the current situation in East Europe would be compatible with such an outlook. However, it is disqualified in the most obvious way, in the simplest manner in which the value of a pragmatic approach is tested: it does not work. It does not work, as the two poles presented above are not arguments reinforcing each other for the choice of one of the alternatives (the "good" pragmatism reinforced by the "bad" discourse of legacy), but two instances of a vicious circle. If we look at the events of the last few years in post-communist societies, we'll find that no matter which pole we

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take as a starting point, we'll arrive at the other, and back to the first, without making any advance.

Thus, if we start as adherents of the first view, as ardent accusers of the communists for all present wrongs, then we'll find that this has no end. We'll encounter communists everywhere - in governmental posts, in the central and local administration, in schools, and we'll realise that most of the enterprises are still run by "communists", whether in the state sector, or salvaged into the private sphere. After a time, anyone who has just a bit of sense will realise the futility of this witch-hunt, and opt for a pragmatist position: let us forget about the communists, all that matters is expertise, and of getting things done. However, as soon as this is accepted, one will realise that things simply cannot be accomplished, that nothing is working properly, that again and again, one stumbles into the legacies of the past in the most unexpected places and manners. Nothing is left, but joining again the chorus for "getting finally rid of communism".

If one is starting from the opposite end, the same circle emerges, only run through different phases. Here, one starts with the claim for a complete tabula rasa, with an attitude of forgiving and forgetting: let us not even mention the past. However, one is soon realising that such a naive attitude does not lead anywhere, as business as usual is most often done still in the old fashion; and even when there are changes, more often than not these are simply peculiar inflexions of the old manners, only combined now with extreme rudeness and cynicism, nothing resembling a genuine civil society. So, one is changing to the opposite extreme, and goes around blaming the communists. But one will soon realise that this will not be of much help. Thus comes the return of pragmatism, by that time combined with the "proper" degree of cynicism, and a settling with the idea that it is not possible to change anything.

The main purpose of this paper, and of the whole research project, is to find a way to overcome this impasse. Let us start with two assumptions, two necessary preconditions for a way out. First, it is

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necessary to gain some distance, both from current political life and the discursive formulations that accompany it, whether in the sphere of politics, journalism, or (pseudo-scientific) political commentaries; and second, it is necessary to take the issue of legacy seriously. It seems that what unites, among other things, the two approaches to the question of legacy mentioned above is that they both fail to take it seriously into account: one by side-stepping it, while the other by the all-too-easy solution offered. This paper has a different starting point: it proposes to bracket the problem of the legacy temporarily, and to take instead as the direct object of analysis the discourse on legacy.

As a first step, let us look into some facts; the most simple, objective facts, about which there is no controversy. The first concerns the present state of affairs in political life which is judged insufficient not only by its protagonists or by the population at large and political commentators within the countries, but by practically all serious external observers. (4) Many of the high expectations voiced in 1989 were obviously unfounded. But even the worst scenarios did not picture not only in 1989, but even before and after that year, what followed the collapse of communist rule: the incomprehensible war in Yugoslavia, the kaleidoscope of local conflicts in the former Soviet Union, or the near-paralysis of political life in Hungary and Poland, especially concerning its ugly rhetoric. All this leads to the conclusion that the presence of legacy is undeniable; it does make a difference today, therefore all pragmatic approaches must take into account.

The second point, even more important for our purposes, concerns the effect of the current discourse on legacy. The aim of any discourse is to provide an answer, a solution. This has certainly not happened in case of this discourse. It led to nowhere, though, as the previous paragraph made it evident, the problem which it tried to address was real. The effective impact of the concrete discourse was to render impossible the serious addressing of this issue; it led to a paralysis of thinking, an immunisation against the very possibility of finding solution.

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The bracketing of the direct discussion therefore gave us a significant result. Instead of taking sides in current debates on legacy, it is necessary to take the state of the whole discussion as a symptom. This suggests that if we have a symptom, we can also talk about a disease. But is there a point in using medical analogies in political discourse? Is it not a return to an of obsolete biologism that has been long surpassed in the development of both political science and sociology? But, as a matter of principle, medicine is not same thing as biology; and concretely, there are a number of indications that medical analogies may be particularly helpful in analysing the current East-European situation.

First of all, the use of such medical, as opposed to biological, analogies would not be out of contact with some analyses of the socialist systems, made before their demise. Elemér Hankiss, who has written a number of highly influential articles and books during the last ten years of the regime, has very often used such analogies, especially in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. (5) Both his arguments and imagery indicated that in his view, contemporary Hungarian society was not simply under foreign or domestic oppression, but was an entity that wore symptoms of profound sickness. Eventual recovery required the proper diagnosis of this sickness, that was not at all obvious, and required new tools; tools that were different from both the Marxist and liberal vocabularies widespread before and after 1989.

Second, some of the terms, often used with respect to the transition process, should be finally taken seriously. The first is that of "regime", and the difference between a political "system" and a political "regime". (6) Today, the term "regime", when applied in political discourse, has an overwhelmingly negative connotation. The specificity of this all-too-obvious point can be understood by paying attention to the original meaning of the term. According to the OED, "regime" first of all means "the regulation of such matters as have an influence on the preservation or restoration of health; a particular course of diet, exercise, or mode of living, prescribed or adopted for this end". (7)

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It refers to a whole manner of regulating existence, of what people do, and not simply a way to overcome an illness. Due to the frequent borrowing of medical analogies in political life, "regime" or "regimen" was applied through centuries in political discourse, but only in the very specific sense of regulation, and not applied to the form of political rule until the French Revolution. It was only in 1792 that retrospectively, it was used for the former system of rule, due to the widespread influence it exercised over various spheres of life (see especially the well-known expression "Ancien regime"). Since then, whenever the term "regime" is applied to a political system, these two (positive and normative) aspects are interwoven: a "regime" is a type of political rule that extends to all spheres of existence; therefore, it is not simply a political system, and is to be condemned.

In current political discourse, the term "regime" has lost its specificity, as part of a much broader trend of linguistic imprecision. In a supposedly positive science, the terminology applied to political systems, or forms of government, devolved into a peculiar duality of good and bad, where all terms used for "bad" forms of government were indiscriminately lumped together (tyranny, dictatorship, despotism, regime). The word "regime" became applied to all type of political systems, therefore the finer, but ultimately more important questions about the partial survival, the lasting impacts of a particular system were lost. However, for the East European countries, the term "regime" is to be used in the original, medical sense. Communism was not just a political system, but a "regime" that defined, succeeding even in its failure, the whole mode of living in the country. Therefore, if the rejection of Communism is to be taken seriously, it is necessary not only to change the political system, but to change the "regime": the way people are living, to the extent that this has been and is still shaped by communist practices. Italy today may need a change in its political system, but nobody is proposing a change of the "regime" of the country, in the old medical sense of the term. In East Europe, it is exactly this change that is required. (8)

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The second medical term to take seriously is the expression "shock therapy". In its contemporary use, this term is has a very narrow meaning. Restricted to the sphere of economics, it is interpreted in the sense of a stabilisation policy, and is impregnated by a profound belief in the "market". The proponents of "shock therapy" have an ideological conviction that the market is the only solution to any social or political ills; that the proper and complete reliance upon the market or market forces is at once a sufficient and necessary condition for the government of social and political life, implying that "health" is equivalent to a correct system of prices. However, a proper attention to the terms could help to relate this debate to a much broader context. First, the word "therapy" is taken again from medicine, with the very precise meaning of curing. There is a revealing difference between "shock therapy" and simple measures of economic policy: the idea that in this case, the question is not merely a discussion of alternatives, or the correction of an earlier policy, by rational means and calculations, but the prescription of a specific course of affairs beyond matters of policy: it is the prescription of a change of regime.

The expression itself, therefore, if we strip it from the economic ideology in which it is enveloped, seem to be particularly adequate to the current situation in East Europe. How to operate such a change of regime, and who are those that these changes are primarily targeting? It is here that the other word of the expression gains importance. The change has to be quick, sudden, a rapid overthrow of the established order of things.

The first question to answer concerns the level at which this operation is to take place. Is this the whole society, beyond the political order? If this were the case, then we would encounter a serious problem. It would amount to a simple preaching of revolution, the phenomenon that has been rejected by all political and moral philosophers who ever considered applying medical analogy to social life, and a return to the very idea of revolution whose validity has been questioned, it seems, for ever, by the experience of East Europe. It is in this context that one can

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understand why proponents of shock therapy are often called "liberal Bolsheviks".

But this whole discussion seems to be out of place. The target of the revolution was always the social or political order, while the target of the free marketers is individual human conduct. They are quite properly following the medical analogy implied in the expression "shock therapy": there is no reference to social and political factors, the focus is exclusively on single individuals. A "shock therapy", in the medical sense, means the pulling out, by a sudden movement, an individual from a state of being that is sick, and that the given individual, left on its own, is unable to leave.

Let us conclude the discussion so far. By taking the issue of legacy seriously, and its current discussion as only a symptom, we were led to the realisation that in spite of the changes in the political, legal, and economic systems, the countries of East Europe are still manifesting symptoms of a profound "sickness", due not simply to the previous political system, but the "regime"; a kind of "sickness" that they are not only unable to overcome, but even come to terms with it; that prevents its own diagnosis from the inside.

The next point to be discussed concerns the concrete diagnosis. The easiest solution would be to follow upon the expressions "social body", or "body politick", so often used in the history of thought, before and after Hobbes. However, that would lead us too far into using metaphors. This paper suggests a different road, more consistent with the interpretation given here on "shock therapy" and "regime": the "sickness" concerns not the social body, not even the individual soul, but the will.

This point can be elaborated using a text of Seneca. (9) He calls this sickness of the will *stultitia* . This state that has three characteristics. First, one who has this sickness is unable to stand straight, is moved by all sorts of external influences, is not able to select, to separate, to discriminate; is open to "all winds". (10) Second, this person is dispersed not only in space, but also in time,

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is unable to give unity to his existence, is without memory, is in a state of perpetual change, fluidity. Finally, he/ she is unable to focus his will, as does not possess a proper relationship to himself; is not free in his will. The emphasis is placed on this last point: the relation to oneself, the problematisation of the link between self and will.

Its absence, *stultitia* , has a peculiar characteristic: it is impossible not only to change, but even to notice it from the inside. A diagnosis implies both a knowledge of what is healthy, and a will to change. In the condition of stultitia, it is this knowledge and will that are missing. This suggests an answer to the problem we started with, as post-communist countries show all signs of a "disease" that they are not even able to address.

However, at this point, it seems that our analysis led to a impossible position. We arrived at the diagnosis of a lack of a will to change, even pretending to claim that such a will could not even exist; and yet, there are all signs to show that the majority of the population of these countries in fact opted for the change, whenever they had a chance to express their opinions. The three most significant instances are Solidarity in 1979-81 in Poland; the second economy in Hungary, since the 1970s; and the events of 1989-1990, culminating in the first free elections and the overwhelming votes for change. These three points are important not only as facts showing the will to end communist rule, but also since they served as the major reference points for practically all external and internal analysts to side-step the significance of communist rule, and, in spite of all reason to the contrary, to consider it as a simple form of despotic government that can be swept away without a trace. For different reasons, this naive scenario overwhelmed even the few acute observers of the situation: Solidarity became a fairly tale especially for the socialist left, already under strong pressures due to the Gulag-effect; the "second economy" was believed to be the stepping stone for a real market economy and civil society by many; (11) while the revolutions of 1989 provided heroic and uplifting images to the

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whole media world, saddened just a year earlier by pictures of Tienanmen square.

However, the modality of these changes, especially the peculiar fall of the system could be also used to support an opposite scenario: communism broke down when the gap between communists and non-communists became almost invisible; where it no longer had any difference to erase, could no longer find motivation, fuel for its activity. It is this hypothesis that serves as the guiding thread for the research project pursued since the late 1980s which this paper is part of. Such a perspective is no doubt much less popular, and is also more difficult to substantiate, than other available theoretical and ideological positions that provide easy diagnoses and clear blueprints for the future. Also, it requires, beyond the search for the guilty, or self-culpabilisation, the explicit incorporation of self-reference. Yet, it was the pursuit of this path that intellectual honesty, understood in the sense of Nietzsche and Weber, required.

Such an approach means, instead of applying existing frameworks on transitions in a concrete empirical study, or being engaged in a normative undertaking about the desirable roads, or even criticising the existing approaches and policies, the pursuit of a dual path. First, it was necessary to do theoretical and methodological research about the way in which, beyond the taken for granted assumptions of the literature, a serious study (i.e. one incorporating self-reference) of continuity and discontinuity at the level of daily experiences would be possible. (12) Second, empirical studies must be done to assess the real continuities and discontinuities at the level of daily existence; studies that keep a distance from actual political life, but that nevertheless try to stay, as close as it is possible or desirable, to current events. This is the reason why this highly theoretical project chose to study changes in local government as its topic. (13)

The concrete line of investigation was the following. The target of the research project was not politics, not even directly the

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creation of politics, but the precondition of democratic politics: the formation (or re-formation) of the political body itself - the polity. Such a study could be pursued in two different ways. One could start from the top, focusing on the centre of decision-making, the elite, and investigate the attempts to create and shape this political body. Alternatively, one may emphasise the grass-roots, movements and processes started from below. However, this project selected a third, intermediate road: the study of the formation of local elites, particularly the newly elected mayors.

This choice can be supported by a number of reasons, the main being, in line with the arguments presented in the Introductory section, the legacy of the past. On the one hand, in one sense, the former regime was truly unique and successful: it has effectively destroyed the previous social, political, and economic elites. The result is that currently there is no elite in these countries that could take up on itself the role of the building of the polity; a real elite itself has to be created, which may well be the most difficult element in the whole transition process. On the other hand, due to the systematic mis-civilising or de-civilising and de-moralising project of the former regime, one cannot rely upon whatever comes from below with full confidence, as truly "grass-roots" movements often only reproduce, now without external conditioning, the worst aspects of the former regime. This suggested us the choice of mayors: a group of people who, as opposed to much of the current intellectual and political discussions taking place in the centre, do know what they are talking about, and in general lack the ideological garbage; but who are also members of a new elite, possessing in the majority of cases the real confidence of people who voted for them, and standing in fact out of their environment.

The central part of the previous line of arguments can perhaps be reformulated in a programmatic proposition: the only possible way out of the vicious circle left by the communist legacy is provided neither in the hope of new groups or parties taking over the centre and devising new and new global programmes, nor by relying upon non-existent, exaggerated, or even dangerous

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popular sentiments, expectations and wills, but by re-building manifold and multilayered elites; a process that in this particular sense must rely upon the responsibility of each and every individual - toward others, but also oneself.

This paper contains a first, descriptive analysis of some of the main findings of the survey. (13) A number of different items will be analysed, all having a common focus: the emphasis on the creation, the building of the very field in which political activities could be performed. In the analysis, we'll try to check whether the will to contribute to the solution of problems that are common for a locality exist, to assess the extent to which it is damaged, and to map the circle between the problems of will, and the scarcity of the means at disposal to achieve the end.

2. The point of entry

As the focus is on the formation of the very field of politics, social background variables assume a smaller role, even on theoretical grounds. Some available empirical evidence also supports the claim that social background is of less an influence than in a contemporary Western setting. (14) Instead, two points will be reviewed here in some detail: the motivation to make the decision to run, and previous experience with public office.

2.1. The motivation to run

For external observers, the high degree of political apathy that characterises several post-communist countries defies comprehension. One expected that the fall of communist dictatorship would be followed by a strong sense of relief, and an upsurge of activity. However, considering the trajectory of the former system, the phenomenon looks rather obvious. (15) In light of this, it is well worth starting our overview with the question of what made people decide to run for a mayoral seat. There were two points in our interviews that provided preliminary insights and a hypothesis. The first was the high

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degree of the re-election of former local council heads, the high level of continuity - or inertia - at this level of local politics, making the study of mayors a particularly relevant area for a study of legacy. (16) The second was that our interviewees quite often stated that they only got their position accidentally, by yielding to external pressures, or due to a lack of proper candidates. The question was to what extent could these findings be verified, not simply at the level of the continuity in the job, but also that of the "subjective" reasons given for the decision to run.

On the basis of the interviews, seven reasons were listed in a set. The option for "other" reasons was also open, but in all three countries, only about 10% of the respondents chose this possibility. The first striking thing in the response patterns of all three countries was the relatively low level of initiative taken by the respondents. First, a high proportion of respondents (1/4 to 1/3 in each country) were asked by local organisations. Second, about the same proportion in Hungary and Slovakia - mostly the former council heads - just stated that they have continued their previous experience with local public affairs. Third, however, the call to enter the race did not come from national politics. In all countries, there was practically none who had a specifically political career in his mind when making this selection, (17) and the influence of national political organisations was also minuscule, ranging from negligible in Hungary (2%) to small Slovakia (7%), the latter being due to the remaining power of the Communist Party and its local organisations.

Of the personal reasons, a relatively high percentage stated "the desire to solve problems related to the whole community" in Hungary and the Czech republic (around 30%); much less so in Slovakia (18%). This statement does give a personal motive, related to the affairs of the whole community, but has a somewhat dubious ring in the context of East Europe. After 40 years of communism, it is hardly possible to talk about the "common interest" or the "public good" without raising suspicions. The remaining two items, both expressly stating a default choice (running in order to prevent the election of a mayor who would

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have been politically or professionally incompetent), were selected by a non-negligible minority. This was the smallest in Hungary, 8.7% altogether, divided more or less evenly between political and professional reasons. In the other two countries, the percentages are higher, and the distribution uneven. In the Czech republic, a considerable proportion of respondents (12%) decided to run in order to prevent the post to be taken up by a politically unsuitable person, and half as many for professional reasons; while in Slovakia, the terms were changed, preference being given to professional deficiency (8% vs. 5%).

In the perspective of this paper, the previous discussion gave two rather surprising findings. First, most current mayors ran for their seat not driven by a concrete, positive purpose, a deliberate decision, an act of will, but were swept or kept there by external circumstances. Second, there was a decisive absence of political career considerations, as if politics was still a four-letter word. Under such conditions, one can hardly speak of the presence of a will so necessary to create the absent sphere of politics.

2.2. Former public office

Three variables were used to tap the dimension of continuity and discontinuity at the level of former political activity and intentions (communist party membership, the filling of public offices, and prior thinking about taking up a public function). The responses gave two major results. First, they reconfirmed a relatively high level on continuity in personnel in all three countries. This was the highest in Hungary, with half of the mayors being formerly members of the communist party, and 2/3 of them altogether taking up some public role before. The Slovakian numbers are almost exactly the same, and even in the Czech republic, 1/4 of the mayors were party members, and 46% of them public office-holders in the former system.

Second, the contrasting of the questions about filling a public office and thinking about taking up such a position pointed out an intriguing discrepancy: in each country, there were about twice as

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many respondents who actually took up public offices than those who ever thought about filling such positions. This fact leads us beyond the previous section. There, the problem was the refusal to enter politics; here, we add the same attitude concerning any public role, when we already know that such offices were not connected to considerations of political career. How to make sense of this peculiar fact?

Let us first have a look at a simple 2x2 table of the two variables of former public function and the consideration of taking up such a function. One of the four cells should be relatively empty: those who have never thought about taking up an office, but actually having filled one. However, apart from the two options defining a correspondance of thought and action (never being in office, and not even thinking about, and both thinking about and actually filling it), one would expect a relatively high portion of those who were thinking about this possibility, only never having the opportunity to do so in the past. This cell could indicate the strength of a potential pool of a new political elite: individuals who had the will to take part in public life, but considered the price to be paid under the existing system too high, and were de facto elected in the first free elections.

Table 1. Public activity and deliberation

Number of mayors who:		thought of taking up public function					
		HU		CZ		SL	
filled		YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
public	YES	72	74	29	84	51	90
role	NO	12	66	21	112	16	72

In all three countries, the results were the exact opposite of the expected (see Table 1). Everywhere, of the four cells, by far the smallest number of respondents were in the one specified by the presence of thinking and the absence of activity; while the opposite cell was the largest in both Hungary and Slovakia, and the second largest in the Czech lands. In other words, very few of

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our mayors were considering taking up a public function before, without actually doing so, and a very high proportion never ever thought of such a move, but actually ended up filling it. One could expect the former cell being much larger, but there were 4-5 times more cases in the latter.

In order to explain this rather perplexing result, another variable was brought into the analysis, former communist party membership. This variable, not surprisingly, was quite strongly related to former political activity. The question was the extent to which it could explain the surprising results discussed in the previous paragraphs.

The following hypotheses were formulated in advance.

1. Those who were both politically active in the past system and were planning this activity in advance should mostly be former party members, while those who were "apolitical" on all counts in the past should be former non-members. In other words, among party members, the first cell should predominate over the second, while among non-party-members, we expect the opposite.

2. Those few who were actually thinking about political activity, but never took up actual positions, should almost exclusively be non-party members. The opposite option - someone who was a party-member, thinking about political activity, yet failing to do so, and eventually being elected as a mayor by popular vote - simply does not make much sense.

3. The surprisingly many respondents who never thought about political activity, yet ended up doing so, should be overwhelmingly party members. The opposite cell again should be close to zero, for more or less the same reasons: why should someone who has not been a party member and never thought about taking up a public office find oneself in one?

The first hypothesis was fully confirmed in both Hungary and Slovakia. In the Czech lands, however, there was a peculiar result:

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half of the few respondents who were deliberately politically active were non-party members. The second hypothesis was upheld in all three countries. In Hungary, there wasn't a single respondent who was a party member, thinking about public office, but not fulfilling it, and in the other two countries, there were only a few marginal cases. The third hypothesis, however, was refuted everywhere. In no country was there a considerable difference between former party members and non-members among those who took up public office without premeditation. In Hungary and Slovakia, the differences were only slight, 60% vs. 40% in both cases, as opposed to the hypothesised wide gap; while in the Czech lands, there were actually more than twice as many non-members among those who ended up in public positions.

Thus, even a short glimpse at the political, as opposed to social, background characteristics of mayors pointed out a number of peculiarities of both the former and the present political systems, peculiar continuities beyond the changes. In any advanced society, there are a number of public offices to be filled. The taking up of such a position offers both a possibility to exercise influence, power, authority, and is a personal honour. This assures that the most energetic and widely respected persons are to be selected for such offices, at each level. In the former socialist countries, the formal emphasis on filling such public roles and functions was even greater, the private - economic, professional, academic - possibilities for career were even more difficult than elsewhere. Still, something obviously was not working. There was a dire lack of supply, of volunteers for such positions. Under such circumstances, individuals were not selected for posts; they were found, convinced, and nominated. Party members, of course, were a primary pool of potential nominees, but non-party members were not exempt of this practice either. The institutional forms of this practice, the "cadre bank" and the "cadre development programmes" of the communist party have, of course, disappeared with the collapse of the former regime. (18) But they had a lasting effect: a disappearance of the political will, the absence of a pool of individuals who wish to act politically. By the time a space

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emerged in which politics was again possible, the political will has been seriously damaged. (19)

3. The ideal mayor

Before going into the actual work of mayors, let us present the picture they gained of their job after about two years of experience. We asked two questions about the "ideal mayor", one referring to the "best" occupational background, the other to personal characteristics.

On the basis of the interviews and the experiences of the former system, we drew a list of seven occupational categories, and asked our respondents to select one among them. Out of these, only three were chosen by more than 10% of the respondents in all countries: manager, economist, and lawyer; with some internal variation. In one case, there was almost unanimity: in all three countries, about 1/3 of the respondents thought that managers were most suited to become mayors. Concerning the other two professions, there was a difference in emphasis. In Hungary, there was a strong preference for economists over lawyers (40% vs. 13%), while in the other two countries, the numbers were basically turned around, especially in the Czech republic. One cannot help generalising from this fact, by comparing it to the characteristics of the French revolutions. It is well-known that the 1789-93 Parliament was an assembly of lawyers, while the 1830 revolution and the subsequent July monarchy was rather associated with, if not economists, but financiers and bankers; professions quite close to the contemporary Hungarian functions of "economists". This difference can be interpreted in two ways. One could say that it shows the advantage of Hungary over the other countries, of being a step ahead. But the question is whether the first phase has been accomplished in Hungary, or only side-stepped. (20)

The second relevant questionnaire item contained a list of eight personal characteristics that were recurrent in our interviews:

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audacity, readiness to act; good nerves; patience, understanding; professional competence; the willingness to serve the citizens; generally respected personality; the ability to reach compromises; and thoroughness. These were the characteristics mentioned in our interviews, with quite surprising regularity. Respondents were asked to choose three characteristics. Here again, the differences are strong between Hungary and the other two countries, and are theoretically important (see Table 2).

Table 2. The characteristics of the ideal mayor

	HU	CZ	SL
- audacity	21%	64%	54%
- good nerves	56	46	56
- patience	41	52	51
- prof. competence	43	53	62
- willing to serve	52	6	11
- resp personality	18	16	13
- able to compromise	47	21	19
- thoroughness	22	69	48

Let us start with the common points. In all countries, the overall distribution of responses was quite peculiar. The eight items did not follow the usual, even distribution, ranging from those accepted by the large majority through the mid-range until those selected only marginally, but were divided into two groups: five items, each selected roughly by half the respondents, and the other three items selected by only a small, but not insignificant minority of 10-20%. There were no characteristics selected either in the 20-40% range, or much above 60 %.

Three of the items were highly valued in all countries: good nerves, patience, and professional competence, the first being a little bit less important in the Czech lands, while the other two in Hungary; while one of the eight was not considered important in any of the countries: a well-respected personality. One a first look, one could be quite happy with this general picture, stating that this is a very democratic set-up, where the "authoritarian",

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discretionary, personal characteristics of the mayors are underplayed, the emphasis being on receptivity, the enduring of the suffering of the others on the one side, and on professional competence on the other. Taking into account the considerations and results of the previous sections, however, the picture becomes different. It is, in fact, a very strange kind of democracy taking shape in front of our eyes; a system where personal activity and initiative, together with positive, active, generally respected characteristics are underplayed and replaced by two character traits: a saintly passivity and forbearing on the one hand, and mere professional competence on the other. Colours, energy, innovation and imagination are not only actually missing from this public sphere, as far as the most important common characteristics of all countries are concerned; they are not even solicited, though at stake is the re-construction of the very field of politics, and not simply the professional continuation of existing politics.

This picture is modified for the individual countries by the differences in the selection of the other four items. In Hungary, the other two items preferred by half the respondents were the willingness to serve the citizens and the ability to reach compromises. In the other two countries, however, only a small minority selected these two items. There the remaining two characteristics were selected by large numbers: audacity and thoroughness. This is especially true for the Czech lands, where both of them were selected by about 60% of all respondents; but even in Slovakia, the numbers are around 50%. In Hungary, these two personal properties lagged far behind, appealing only to a mere 1/5 of the sample.

For Hungary, this only reinforces what was stated in the previous paragraphs, making it a particularly acute case of "paralysed" democracy. The great dilemma of democracy, since its birth in ancient Greece, is the question of initiative, or ascendancy. (21) Democracy implies equal rights, and in the modern age, also equal opportunities, or at least the relative symmetry of life chances. Still, the very survival of democracy depends on the ability to

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handle, stimulate, channel activity and initiative. Where this fails, and the equality implied in democracy extends even to this level, the result will be a paralysis of activity, where everybody will only look at the others to prevent any advance and advantage; ultimately, a complete and closed system of counter-selection will emerge. Such a system, of course, was the very fabric of socialism or communism, one could say. But the question today is the extent to which these aims, these attitudes have become ingrained deeply in a population, even beyond the system's existence; or to what extent they have become rejected now altogether, perhaps even excessively.

If the first problem is characteristic of Hungary, in the Slovak and especially the Czech cases, there are clear signs of the presence of this latter problem. The willingness to serve the citizens, the ability to reach compromises are not negative characteristics in themselves; quite the contrary, are necessary, internal parts of any democratic political system. Still, because of the connotations they gained in the former system, they were almost single-handedly rejected in these two countries.

Hungary, here again, may be one step ahead of the others. The problem is that it is not very clear in which direction. (22) It is obvious that in the communist period, these two statements gained the same, overwhelming, negative connotation in Hungary as in the other two countries. Compromises and adaptability were synonyms for opportunism, and the expression about serving the citizens smells the worst slogans of the communist party. Why, then, this *volta face* ? It is a sign of a "genuine democratisation"? Or it is just a new fad, a new expectation about how to behave, just another sign of the democratic paralysis, an expectation of a general state of servility of all with respect to each, without any initiative, performance, spirit, energy, innovation?

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4. The actual work of mayors

Let us start our analysis with an overall assessment. We asked our respondents whether their new job caused any surprise to them immediately. The differences were again great between the countries: in Hungary, there was a clear 2/3 majority of those who did not encounter any surprises. In the Czech republic, the situation was just the opposite, while Slovakia was in between, though closer to the Czech case, with a clear majority of those who were "surprised".

We performed a supplementary analysis. In order to see whether this difference was due to background effects, we controlled the results for party membership. In fact, in all three countries, former party members on the average were much less surprised by their new job than non-members, but the differences between the countries still remained quite strong. Thus, for e.g., still only 40% of those mayors who have not been communist party members earlier expressed such a surprise in Hungary, while in the two parts of the former Czecho-Slovakia, even among the former party members, this percentage was 55-60%.

The questionnaire contained a large number of questions, many of them open-ended, that tried to tap in detail the actual work of mayors, the conflicts and problems emerging there. The present analysis will centre on three areas: the relation between the mayor and the elected body; an assessments of the obstacles mayors may have encountered in their work; and a short glimpse into the state of local ethnic conflicts.

4.1. Relations with the elected body

The way the links between the mayor, the "first citizen" of the community, and the elected body are established is a crucial question in all types of local governments with a mayoral system, as it has a profound impact on the possibility of solving the problems of the community. This is especially the case in post-communist societies, and for a number of reasons. First, before the

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elections, the role to be assigned to the "first man" was debated at length. The dilemma was the following. In the old Communist system, too much emphasis was placed on one-man leadership; on the other hand, in the new process of transition, there is a need for some kind of effective direction. The result was an opting for the mayoral system, but with strong emphasis on checks and balances. Therefore, considerable power was vested in the council. This prefigured the possibility of two types of conflicts: that of a "reformer" mayor vs. the conservative elected body; or of a conservative, "former communist" mayor vs. the newly composed council. (23) Second, after the elections, it turned out that a large part of the former "Communist" council heads were re-elected. This had a considerable impact on the way the government assessed the results of the local elections, especially in Hungary.

The questionnaire contained a series of closed items tapping different aspects of the relationship between the mayor and the elected body. In the first, we asked our respondents to characterise the council meetings. The results show a marked similarity in the three countries, with some persistent, coherent, and important differences. First of all, in the majority of the cases, the relationship between the two authorities was satisfactory in all three countries, though in about 10% of all cases, the meetings were characterised as having a very bad, even hostile atmosphere. Within this general trend, in Hungary the unity seems to have been even stronger, the solution of the problems and the conflicts even quicker than in the other two countries.

The second point is about the connection to national politics. Both concerning the level and the dynamics of this impact, the results are uniform and unambiguous. National politics seems to have had relatively little role in the local council discussions even in the past (the question was explicitly only about dynamics), and this impact is rather decreasing. In about 30% of the cases, such a link to politics was strong in the first period in all countries, but this has disappeared since, while in about 15% of the cases, this impact has grown since the elections. In both items, the link to national politics was somewhat stronger in Slovakia.

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Third, there was a recurrent complaint in our interviews about the often endless deliberations in the meetings, their frequent turning into "complaint-sessions", the lack of focus in the interventions of many council members; to problems of political culture in this narrow sense, referring not to general values and mentalities, but the more matter of fact question of how to behave in a public meeting, how to form and execute a proper speech. (24) This, in fact, turned out to be a crucial concern, left-over, sign of continuity or legacy, especially in the former Czechoslovakia, where over 50% of our respondents indicated the presence of this problem. In Hungary, this problem was less present, but still 30% of the respondents acknowledged it.

Two further questions were posed on the unity and division within the elected body, both of them taken out of an American survey of city council members, therefore providing some comparative data. (25) The results are coherent, reinforce and even help to interpret the previous findings (see Tables 3 and 4.).

Table 3. Cleavages in the local council

	HU	CZ	SL	US
- no real cleavages	61%	51%	50%	19%
- some cleavages	31	41	38	36
- strong cleavages	8	8	12	44

Table 4. Decisions made unanimously by the local councils

	HU	CZ	SL	US
- > 75% of cases	69%	51%	50%	42%
- 50-75%	26	32	32	31
- 25-50%	4	11	11	14
- < 25%	1	5	7	12

According to them, it is in Hungary that the highest degree of unity is reigning in the local elected bodies. There are no cleavages in 61% of the councils, and in about 70% of the localities, most of the decisions are made practically unanimously. These

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percentages are somewhat lower in the Czech and Slovak republics, both numbers being around 50% respectively. In the US, the differences appear not so much in the eventual decisions - the number is above 40% -, but concerning the cleavages. Only a small minority of communities (less than 20%) have elected bodies without strong cleavages, while in 44%, the cleavages are very strong (this number for the East European countries is around 10%).

Concerning the cleavages, due to their strong dependence on concrete issues, it was not possible to make an exact comparative set; some changes had to be made even between the East European countries. Still, the available data offer a chance for indirect comparisons.

First, there is a major difference not only concerning the number of localities with or without cleavages, but the number of cleavages actually present. In the East European case, no restriction was made on the number of cleavages one could have chosen, but the majority of those who actually stated the presence of any cleavages only chose one. In the US, there was a limit of three, but the large majority of respondents in fact made three selections.

Differences were also marked in the type of cleavages mentioned. In the US, these were mostly economic: between tax cutters and their opponents, supporters of businesses and of neighbourhood conservation, development interests and others. In the East European countries, on the basis of our interviews, it was difficult to find even issues of economic programme that divided the locality, and the one included in the questionnaire, about supporters of reliance on external capital vs. neighbourhood interests, was only selected by a very few respondents. Needless to say, this does not mean that economic questions were not important, but that these were not the questions that mobilised thinking, leading to the formulation of clear alternative programmes among the elected representatives.

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If the main dividing line is not economic, it should be political. It would even be easy to propose a simple scenario: in such transitions, political matters are to be settled first, and only then comes economics. Both the American and the East European questionnaires tapped national politics in two statements, one about party affiliation, and the other in terms of political ideology. Perhaps surprisingly in the tradition of the "end of ideology" thesis, less so if considered in the context of Reaganism, while party affiliation had little role in the cleavages in the US, the differences between liberals and conservatives were quite crucial, second only to economic questions. In East Europe, broadly speaking, the situation was the opposite. Questions of political ideology played a minor role everywhere. The opposition between liberals and "nationalists", dividing so strongly the top political sphere in Hungary, persisted only in a small minority of even those localities that actually had cleavages (taken altogether, in only 7% of all localities sampled was there a cleavage in the local council along these lines); and even in the two parts of the former Czecho-Slovakia, where the question was about the supporters and opponents of separation, interest was minimal. It is perhaps less surprising that such a cleavage was practically absent from the Czech republic, where this debate was not significant; but even in Slovakia, just a few months after the elections, and at the time when political discussions about the actual separation were at their height, only 12% of all respondents (and 24% of those who mentioned a cleavage at all) claimed that such an issue existed in their locality. We consider this as a good indication of the kind of "grass-root" importance this question had even in Slovakia.

The cleavage between left and right was exactly as marginal in Hungary as the previous ideological division, being selected by the same - small - number of respondents. There were about twice as many respondents selecting it in Slovakia, and three times as much in the Czech Republic, where this distinction was quite important. But, in all countries, and in distinct opposition to the US, affiliation to the national political parties was much more important than ideological belongingness. In both parts of the former Czecho-Slovakia, this was the most preferred response,

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chosen by well over half the respondents who answered this question. In Hungary, this proportion was much lower (34%), but it was still the second most important cleavage.

Finally, there was another political question, related specifically to the post-communist condition, the question of the survival of the past. This was about as important in all three countries as the presence of the left-right continuum, with which it was strongly correlated.

Politics, therefore, has in fact taken the role of economics as the most important source of cleavages in East Europe, especially in the former Czecho-Slovakia. But in Hungary, it still played a markedly smaller role than in the other two republics. If not economics and politics, then what divided most council representatives in Hungary? Nothing, one could say, they seem to be so united; and we'll return to this point in the conclusion. But there is one item chosen in Hungary more than in any other country, which is the most important reason given there: conflicts between the representatives of the different areas of the locality.

This finding should first be situated in a proper perspective. In no way is this division of an overwhelming importance in Hungary. It is only selected by 41% of those respondents who claimed that there were cleavages at all; and as a percentage of the total respondents, this is at the same number (around 20%) as in the US sample. In other words, this issue divides US and Hungarian localities with about the same strength; except that in Hungary, this is the strongest division, while in the US, there were a number of different economic, political, and ideological questions creating much stronger cleavages. It was the absence of other possible sources of division in Hungary that promoted this item to the top.

This fact can be read in two manners. It may be a sign of increasing parochialisation. In a country where national politics has discredited itself and lost all appeal, where there is no innovative thinking at the level of economic or social policy,

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localities lose inspiration, severe themselves from the centre, and become enclosed into their own provincial debates. This sketches the vision of a political field disintegrating even before it had fully emerged. But with the collapse of high-level politics, such a return to the basics, to reality, the actual conflicts of people living together could lead to a different result: the re-start and re-invigoration of political life, a new ability to handle and solve conflicts and debates. This is by no means a romantic return to the grass-roots, the traditional communities, the "local society". The proposal is the opposite: not the reconstruction of a former, ideal community, but the creation of the ability to handle conflicts. (26)

The previous discussion about the importance of politics at the level of local government in post-communist societies can be summarised in three points, forming a coherent and not very cheerful picture. First, local politics is weak, the very expression of politisation has a bad connotation, and is opposed by calls for unity - when, in fact, it was exactly this search for the ideal of unity that was characteristic of the former system. This points out a dual legacy at the level of political culture: due to the earlier lack of political and public sphere, people forgot to express themselves in public, and engage in a debate whose aim is not the elimination of the other, while the style of current top-level political debates only serves to reinforce a by now grass-roots will for "real" unity, opposed to all sorts of political divisions.

It is in the context of this search for unity that, paradoxically, the current processes of disintegration can be situated properly. The daily life of East European countries in the former system has been dominated by enforced, false unity kept together only by the communist party. At this level, there is no difference in principle between the Soviet empire, the false federal states, and the different kinds of regional administrations, going down to the smallest segments of local governments. Today, when all these entities are collapsing, we should be aware that this is done not in the name of division, but in the spirit of the search for unity: the smallest common denominator where a true, real, and unbroken

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unity can be maintained. On the one hand, this can be denounced, quite correctly, as another deep legacy of communism. On the other, it has its analogies with Western history. The same kind of atomisation in search of a true source of unity happened there, centuries ago, leading to the eventual solution of finding the subject as the natural, ultimate and irreducible entity. This reduction (or extension) or the concept of sovereignty to the self finds still today expression in the concept of "consumer sovereignty". It is at this point that recent historical studies about the reinterpretation of the experience of the Western civilising process, and theoretical-philosophical works questioning the naturalistic and universalistic claims of this specific model of subjectivity, but not questioning its importance and value, can be connected to the analysis of recent East European events - with a promise of possible theoretical and practical gains in both regions.

Second, whatever still exists as local politics, is only some kind of pale reflection of national politics: second or third-rate discussions of the same empty, general debates that preoccupy national politicians. If this is all there is in "politics", one can agree that it is better for these debates to go unnoticed and not repeated. Finally, the only political issue that raises local interest is the question of the communist left-overs, a topic that only reinforces passivity. There is no political debate about programmes and alternatives, to stimulate thinking and acting, the facing of the existing problems. In this situation, the only possible source for renewal can come from the most down-to-earth differences: between the different areas of the locality. This helps to explain the current, incessant drive for fragmentation, and a possible, eventual mobilisation due to economic deprivation and inequalities. The problem is that due to the destruction of even the attained level of political culture, one can only be extremely dubious about the way such "genuine" conflicts will eventually be formulated.

4.2. Obstacles

Questions about the possible obstacles our respondents may have encountered in their work were asked at two different places in

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the questionnaire. First, in an open question, we asked them to tell in a few sentences the three most memorable conflicts they had in their work, and then asked three closed questions on its evaluation. Second, a few pages later, we returned to this topic, but now only at a general level.

In the first occasion, we asked the mayors whether they were satisfied with the actual solution, whether they had the proper means to solve the conflicts, and if not, what were they lacking most. Concerning the first two, it seemed that the solution of actual conflicts was much more satisfactory in Hungary than in the other two countries. The Czech and Slovak responses were distributed along an almost perfect normal curve, with a slight skew toward more satisfaction with the actual solution, but dissatisfaction with the means at disposal. In Hungary, however, about 70% of respondents expressed satisfaction with both solutions and means.

Among the factors that were missing for a proper solution, the similarities were quite remarkable. In all three countries, there were two items chosen by about half the respondents: material resources, and the proper legal means of competence. There was only a slight difference of emphasis, in the direction already suggested by the previous results: in Hungary, economic, while in Slovakia and especially in the Czech lands, legal aspects were more problematic.

Among the remaining possible sources of conflict, there was a clear difference between local and national factors. In all countries, it was considered that the possible influence of high-level political influence, or the presence or absence of influence by the local political parties was not a major point of concern. Among the local factors, the relatively most important sources of trouble were the elected body and the own apparatus, especially in Slovakia. The support of local managers was less missed (present in about 20% of the cases in each countries), while the support of the electorate, perhaps apart from Slovakia, caused only marginal problems.

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The second set of questions differs from the first set in two respects. First, these are not connected directly to the evaluation of a concrete example. Second, there is a two-fold, slight displacement of perspective: instead of asking about potentially missing sources of support in solving conflicts, the question was directly about obstacles in daily work.

These differences in shade did not have a major impact on the results. Here as before, Hungary is the country with the least obstacles. The distribution of the responses, discounting the acquiescence bias, is almost exactly mirroring the previous. In Hungary, a small majority of the respondents stated that they rarely perceived obstacles around their work, while a much more considerable majority in Slovakia and especially the Czech Republic were complaining about such obstacles.

This picture is reinforced by the next question, asking in detail about the possible obstacles. On the average, Hungarian respondents mentioned less than two obstacles, while Czech and Slovak respondents two and a half. Like in the concrete case, the two factors that generally cause most troubles are the lack of proper material resources, and of a proper legal empowering. But in their relative importance, there is a marked change. On the general level, economic factors are the single most important sources of obstacles in all three countries. Without any difference, 85% of respondents in each country listed the lack of material resources as an effective obstacle in their work; a number that is as close to unanimity as possible in a similar type of question. The lack of legal possibilities was also quite important at the general level, but not nearly as important as economic reasons. In the former Czecho-Slovakia, 2/3 of the respondents mentioned this factor, while in Hungary, about 50%.

In itself, this could only mean that in a more general question, respondents listed more factors than in a concrete case. However, as we have already seen, the average number of problems listed was about the same in both cases, therefore the increased

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emphasis on these two factors did entail a general decrease of mentions related to the other six possible sources. Instead of simply adding more and more potential sources of problems or conflicts at the general level, our respondents rather polarised their opinion: there were two overwhelming sources in all countries, the remaining factors being classified as accidental, secondary.

A detailed analysis of the rest of the responses reinforces this picture. References to upper level politics and national political parties decreased at the general level. Concerning the other, local factors, there is a considerable drop in the mention of the apparatus and especially the elected body among the sources obstacles, except for one case: at the general level, in the Czech sample, the incompetence of the apparatus was said to create much more troubles than in the concrete case. Here the Czech results deviate strikingly from the others. While related to concrete conflicts, problems with the apparatus were mentioned in the Czech republic at the same frequency than in Hungary, and below the Slovakian case, at the general level, it was mentioned more than twice as often than in either Hungary or Slovakia. The only other item where there was no decrease of mention, rather an increase in the Czech and especially the Slovak republics was, not surprisingly, another item with an economic reference, concerning local managers.

One of the most important and surprising finding so far was the very peculiar, erratic "behaviour" of economic matters in the different places of this questionnaire. When asked about the cleavages in the local council, economic matters are hardly mentioned: there are no different, conflicting, clearly formulated economic policy visions available in these countries. Concerning the concrete sources of conflict, economic factors are mentioned, but by no means in an overwhelming way. The insufficiency of material resources is a major trouble at the level of day-to-day work, but not overwhelming. But when a broad question is asked

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about obstacles, it suddenly becomes the standard response by everyone.

The following interpretation tries to explain all these responses in a consistent manner. Economic problems seem to be the matter of daily existence, the horizon, the taken for granted in the countries of East Europe; facts of life that exist as the ready-made explanation for all sorts of ills, close to the monsters in the fairy tale that can be freely evoked at any moment whenever difficulties emerge; that are so much present that nobody is thinking seriously about really getting rid of them for good; factors that even if are not the sole sources of all problems of daily life, are present frequently enough so that their constant evocation could again and again find support in daily reality. It would be easy to dismiss this finding by the claim that there is nothing specific in it; that economic matters were always and everywhere important. But that would be a mistake. The specific situation and importance, the role and place of "economic life" in East Europe is radically different both from that in the advanced Western countries, and in the countries of the Third World.

In advanced societies, economics is crucial as the basic logic of social and political existence. Economics is the horizon of daily life; it defines the rationality of daily existence, most people's attitude to their work and life. Economic models try, and with considerable success, to model human behaviour in the most different situations. It is often argued that by today, politics became nothing more than a matter of debate about the budget, and social relations are but generalised cases of rational choices. All this is debatable, of course, both on factual and ethical grounds; but it is beyond doubt that the rationality of economics is ever-present and overwhelming in all spheres of social reality, is a fundamental principle of the way modern societies work.

In the countries of the Third World, the situation is quite different. The general horizon is still defined by economic considerations, but it is not a question of economic rationality, but of poverty. From Latin America to the Far East, from the South of

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Africa to Middle Asia, it is the presence, the ineradicable fact of poverty that marks daily existence, that strikes any external observer, uproots his stable beliefs, and defines the fundamental dividing lines in social and political life.

All this, one could say, is support for the neo-classical and Marxist truism that everywhere, economic matters and relations are predominant. But, in fact, a more precise analysis of the different meanings associated with the term "economic life" can help both to understand the specificity of the concrete situation in each cases, and to overcome the bias of the economic prejudice. Because the horizon, the taken for granted background is fundamentally different in all three regions. The case of East Europe can be used like a "conceptual catalyst" to bring to the surface and clarify this horizon. Let us therefore proceed by contrasting East Europe with the other two cases.

In the advanced countries, it is economics, its specific rationality, its way of handling and solving problems that is the background of daily existence. In East Europe, the situation is not identical, neither opposite, but orthogonal to it. It is not the logic of economics that is the taken for granted reference point, but the facticity, the overwhelming, ineradicable presence of economic problems. This is a true "Alice in Wonderland" world, where everything is moving in a reverse gear. The background of daily existence is not a stable, logical pattern (economics), or a fact of daily life (poverty), but an unstable situation, a permanent crisis, a "problem". (27) The purpose of thinking, of intellectual work is not to map and solve problems, but to arrive eventually and always at the point when it can be shown that the question can be traced back to the same reason, the economic "problem" or "crisis", therefore remains insoluble. The standard reference to "economic" reasons is not a way to apply a practical, pragmatic type of knowledge - often even beyond its potential use -, but rather a part of a ritual to evoke the devil, and therefore leave everything untouched.

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The same kind of difference can be shown by contrasting East Europe with the Third World. The identification of the two cases would be wrong on both sides of the supposed equation. On the one hand, the problem of East Europe is not poverty. Of course, some kind of poverty does exist there, as practically in all advanced countries. But the three phenomena cannot be identified in any meaningful way, at the level of socio-political analysis. In East Europe, the type of utmost, dire, ever-present poverty characteristic of most Third World countries is, apart from cases of war, completely absent from the contemporary scene, and was most probably not present in the 20th century at all. The systemic and systematic problems of East Europe cannot be rendered intelligible from the perspective of poverty or inequality.

On the other hand, poverty in the Third World is not an "economic problem", either in the Western or the East European sense. First, because it is not really a "problem" or a "difficulty" in the sense of a partial factor that can be isolated, diagnostised, and solved. It is rather an integral part of the whole of social, political, and cultural life. Second, it has nothing of the ritual, "mystical" characteristic of the East European discourse on "economic problems". It is as real and evident as anything can be. It is not a matter of discourse, of mutual and reinforcing expectations, but a basic fact of existence.

As a conclusion, we can state that economic matters are not primary, universal facts of reality, identical in the three major regions. They rather form three specific, circular systems, all of them following their own logic. In the West, this logic is defined by the way all problems are reduced to matters of pragmatic, economic calculation, and solved accordingly. This way of handling the problems can be taken to task by the limits it reaches (environment, culture, human personality), and its inability to give account of its own specificity, leading to the claim of its universality. In the Third World, the central element is poverty, and the way the fact of poverty reproduces itself, preventing to break the circle. (28) The East European circle is quite different. It is not a primary reality, rooted in poverty, but is fundamentally discursive, logical. But the East European logic of economics does

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not give a rational solution to problems, even if with certain limitations, but, on the contrary, is a discourse about the impossibility of a solution. This "economic problem", the standard source of popular complaints and elite reforms, is one of the deepest, most ingrained legacies of communism. Nothing is too high a price to get rid of; any shock therapy is acceptable as long as it destroys the trap of the background logic of the "permanent economic problem".

Two further points can be added to support the previous argument. First, among the three countries, there are enormous differences in the presence of unemployment. As it is well known, unemployment figures are much lower for the Czech than the Slovakian parts, while the Hungarian figures are even higher. These come out of the findings of the survey. In Hungary, a large majority, 73% of the respondents stated that unemployment represents a serious problem at their locality. In Slovakia, the number was still above 50%; but in the Czech republic, this problem was negligible (8%). One could expect that this leads to radical differences in attitudes related to economic matters. However, in fact, nothing of that came through in the other economic questions. No matter how high or low is unemployment, the logic of the "economic problems" reigns still sovereign in post-communist societies.

Second, Viktor Orbán, leader of FIDESZ (the Federation of Young Democrats), the party that is by far the most popular currently in Hungary, several times made recently the remark that with the help of a liberal government, FIDESZ would raise Hungary within four years to a Spanish or Portuguese level of development. (29) Leaving aside the issue of promises, such a statement looks devoid of sense. First, the per capita GNP-s of Spain and Portugal are so different from each other that their mentioning together would only prove that the statement is not to be taken seriously - analogous to a mistake of confusing Budapest or Bucharest, and therefore indicative of the distance from which the promise was made. (30) Second, a time horizon of four years seems to be completely insufficient for realising a serious plan for economic

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development. Still, all this becomes comprehensible if we interpret it as a claim about breaking the logic of the "economic problem". (31)

As a final point, lets call attention to a peculiar difference in the three countries concerning the left-overs of the former apparatus and the nomenclatura, at the level of both reality and ideology. This can be done by a joint analysis of the items related to the assessment of the behaviour of the elected body, the local managers, and the apparatus. The results are interesting, even if they rather just reinforce the accepted picture. It seems that in Hungary, both questions create only little trouble, both at the level of daily work and general ideas. The parts of the former Czecho-Slovakia, however, behave differently at both levels, and in a different way. At the level of concrete daily reality, neither the former apparatus nor the nomenclatura seem to cause much problem in the Czech lands - each number is practically identical with the respective Hungarian ones -, but both do so in Slovakia. At the general level, the situation is different. Here, in the Czech parts, the apparatus is mentioned much more as an obstacle in work than the former nomenclatura, while in Slovakia, the opposite case holds true. It suggests that the ideological debate about the survival of the past is cast in the language of "nomenclatura" in Slovakia, while in that of the "apparatus" in the Czech republic.

4.3. Ethnic problems

In the last few years, problems of ethnic differences and conflicts, the fate of ethnic minorities have suddenly sprang to the centre of attention. As such questions could be relevant for all three countries - especially for Hungary, due to the substantive Hungarian minorities living in the surrounding countries, and for Slovakia, both on account of the recent separation, and the presence of the Hungarian minorities - , two sets of related question were included in the questionnaire, about the presence of minorities and the possible conflicts their presence causes.

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As Hungary, in its given borders, is thought to be a predominantly homogenous country, with no substantive minorities, the answers to the first question may look surprising: while 58% of the Slovak and 52% of the Czech mayors stated that there are ethnic minorities present in their locality, in Hungary, the answer was much higher, almost 70%. However, this is clarified if we look at the distribution according to ethnic groups. There was one group that was almost everywhere present wherever there were any minorities at all: gypsies. In Hungary, this was the only significant minority, present in 88% of the localities concerned, and being the only minority in 70% of the cases. There was no other minority present in more than 10% of the localities. In the former Czecho-Slovakia, there were Germans and Poles in around 20% of the cases, while in Slovakia, there were also Ukrainians and Russians in about 15% of the localities concerned, and a much more significant Hungarian minority (in 48% of all localities that had a minority at all, and in 28% of all localities).

Concerning tensions, the overall response rates where very similar in all countries: 55% of the Hungarian and Czech respondents, and 50% of the Slovaks acknowledged its existence. The breakdown of this data into ethnic groups also revealed a coherent pattern. First of all, in all cases where the existence of ethnic minorities caused conflicts, there were gypsies present. Second, even if the other side of the equation does not hold up, and conflicts were not reported in all the localities which a gypsy population, still, this was mentioned in more than half of them (the exact numbers for the three countries are 64%, 59%, and 53%). Finally, there were hardly any cases where conflicts were reported in Hungary or the Czech republic that did not concern gypsies. Even in Slovakia, there was only one exception: in about 9% of the localities with reported Hungarian minorities, such tensions existed. Finally, let us mention a result that may be obvious today, but that has some relevance for historical reasons: there was no single case mentioned in any of the countries where the presence of German minorities was reported to be the source of tensions.

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In sum, there is one ethnic group in these East Central European countries who does have a very strong presence everywhere in the region, and which is a constant source of conflicts at the level of day-to-day existence: gypsies. Even if the region is quite heavily populated with a number of different other ethnic minorities, there is hardly any antagonism between them and the host population. Whatever conflict emerges between these groups is not rooted in daily existence, but is stirred from the centre. At the time of our survey, there was no evidence of wide-spread inter-ethnic hostility.

5. Links between local and national politics

Several of the questions discussed so far have already touched upon national issues, both related to political ideologies and the political structure. Now, by a few additional question, a direct analysis will be made about the strength of the links between national and local politics. Two topics are singled out for importance: the current party membership and voting record of our respondents, and their assessment of the presence of national political parties in local political life.

With respect to the votes cast in the first free parliamentary elections, the most significant result is that in all three samples, voting patterns were quite similar to the national averages. Just by the votes of the mayors, the same government would have won the elections in all three countries. Nevertheless, there are some systematic differences. In Hungary, two parties gained somewhat more votes (6% points each) among the mayors than the general populace, the Democratic Forum and the Socialists. The latter is due to the high degree of continuity between former council heads and mayors, while the former shows that it is by no means the case that mayors, at the change of the system, were hostile to the new government. The parties that gained less votes among them than in the general elections were the urban, liberal parties, the Free and the Young Democrats, which is not surprising in a sample where the large cities were underrepresented. All in

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all, the governing coalition had a safe majority among the mayors, with 45% of the total votes; the socialist had still only 17%, while the liberals 25%.

The present government therefore had originally the support of the would-be mayors as well. But, after two and a half years in office, things changed considerably. Had there been a vote in the late Summer of 1992, the two main coalition parties would have suffered a serious defeat among the mayors, just like among the general electorate. The 31% share of the Forum would have been drastically reduced to 12%, and the Smallholders would not have even gained seats with a mere 3.5% of the votes, even in this non-urban sample. But this does not imply a shift to the socialist party, in spite of the strong former allegiance. Its share even decreased slightly, from 17% to 14%. Neither does it indicate a universally strong support for the opposition liberal parties. The main winner would have been, just like among the electorate at large, the Young Democrats: a good 25% of all those who would have gone to vote would have preferred them. The other liberal party, however, would have suffered the fate of the Forum: their shares would have been reduced by more than half, to a mere 6.5%. Finally, about the 1/4 of the mayors indicated that they did not have yet made up their mind.

In the Czech republic, the Civic Forum was even more strongly preferred by the mayors than by the general electorate, and would have been a safe winner. The Christian Democrats also gained considerably more votes among the mayors, while the communist party much less: in the general elections, it had a surprisingly strong showing, with about 13.5% of the votes, but among Czech mayors, only a mere 4% preferred them. In Slovakia, the Public Against Violence movement, and the different Christian Democratic groups also collected the majority of the votes among the mayors. However, as opposed to the Czech sample, here the Communist party had a very strong showing, obtaining about a quarter of the votes. In this way, while at the general elections, the communist party got exactly the same percentage of the total votes in the two parts of Czechoslovakia, among mayors, it was

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selected six times more in Slovakia. (32) In the Czech parts, those with Communist sympathies were disorganised and as it were "hidden", while in Slovakia, they had much more presence and organisation at the local level, even if it was by no means dominant, as of 1992.

Not surprisingly among elected public officials, political participation was high, there being only a very small segment of the mayors who did not or would not go to vote. (33) Concerning current party membership, however, the differences were considerable. It is known that in Hungary, such numbers are extremely low, even the largest parties having only a few ten thousand members. This holds true for the mayors as well. In Hungary, only about one mayor in six was currently member of a political party, while in Slovakia, this number was 41%, and somewhat more than half of the Czech mayors (54.5%) belonged to a political party.

The distribution along party lines was practically the same in the Czech republic as in the case of voting, while it was quite different from the voting patterns in Hungary and Slovakia. In Hungary, not surprisingly, none of the mayors sampled were members of the Young Democrats. But, more surprisingly, the few party members were practically evenly distributed along the remaining five parties, even if the votes they received was radically different both in the general elections and among the mayors. No party had more than nine members of our sample, and any of the remaining five had at least six.

The Slovakian pattern was again different, but consistent with the difference between the voting pattern of the Slovak electorate and the sample of mayors. The share of the Communist Party among actual party members was increasing even more, to over 30%. This party had the single largest membership of mayors of all parties in Slovakia.

These data reveal marked differences in political participation among mayors. This was relatively the highest in the Czech

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republic, while in Hungary, at the level of activity requiring something more than a mere casting of a vote, participation was very low by all accounts. In fact, there was no single political party in Hungary that would list as much as 4% of all mayors among its members, while in the Czech republic, 30% of the mayors were members of the Civic Forum, and even in Slovakia, apart from the 13% Communist party members, 11% belonged to the Public Against Violence movement, and 9% to the Christian Democrats.

This poses the question whether this fact is due to a general lack of political interest on the part of the Hungarian population. Do Hungarians speak less frequently and with less intensity in company about politics? The data, in fact, show the opposite (see Table 5.). In Hungary, 35% of our mayors stated that they regularly discussed politics in company, while this number was 27% in the Czech sample, and a mere 13% in the Slovakian; and while only less then a quarter of the Hungarian sample stated that they rarely or never talk about politics, such numbers are higher in both parts of the former Czecho-Slovakia: 30% and 40%, respectively.

Table 5. Interest in discussions about politics

Country	regularl	often	seldom	never
Hungary	35%	41%	20%	4%
Czechy	27	42	30	1
Slovakia	13	47	36	5

Table 6. Frequency of trying to convince others

Country	regularl	often	seldom	never
Hungary	35%	48%	13%	4%
Czechy	14	46	34	5
Slovakia	11	42	37	9

The differences are even greater concerning the intensity of political discussions (see Table 6.). 35% of the Hungarian respondents regularly try to convince their partners about their

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own convictions, while the respective number is only 14% and 11% in the Czech and Slovak republics. The same pattern is repeated by the opposite answers: in Hungary, there is only a small minority of respondents (17%) rarely or never trying to convince others, while close to half of them do so in the other countries (39% and 45%).

Next, we used two questions to tap the level and the dynamics of the role of national political parties in local public affairs. Both results fully confirm what we already found in the study of individual participation: the role of political activity is very low in Hungary, and somewhat higher in the Czech than in the Slovak parts. The actual level of activity nowhere was judged very high. Only 11-12% of the respondents stated even in the Czech and the Slovak sample that the role of national political parties in the local affairs is either very high or rather high. The marked differences between the countries are at the other pole. Only 23% of the Czech respondents stated that national political parties play very little role, while this number is 31% in Slovakia, and 53% in Hungary.

With respect to dynamics, it is no surprise that since the elections, political activity declined everywhere. But while in the Czech lands, this decline was only minor - the role of political parties decreased in 39% of the localities, and increased in 32% of them, in Slovakia, the difference is larger (44% vs. 28%), and in Hungary, there was a true shake-up: activity decreased in more than half the cases (55%), while increased only in a small minority (8%).

We asked no questions about the role political parties played at the time of the elections, partly because it would have been difficult to get reliable information, and partly to avoid inquisitive, circular questions. Still, by cross-tabulating the two available variables, it is possible to sharpen the analysis, especially about the possible increase or decrease of inequalities at the level of political participation (see Table 7.).

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Table 7. Strength and changes in local presence of political parties

A. Hungary:

Change since election	The local presence of political parties is: very strong	rather strong	medium	rather small	very small	(altogether)
increased	5%	20%	55%	15%	5%	8%
no change	1	2	19	14	64	36
decreased	0	1	16	30	53	55
altogether	1	3	20	23	53	100

B. Czechy:

Change since election	The local presence of political parties is: very strong	rather strong	medium	rather small	very small	(altogether)
increased	4%	20%	43%	22%	11%	32%
no change	3	7	38	28	25	27
decreased	0	0	22	47	31	39
altogether	2	9	33	33	23	100

C. Slovakia:

Change since election	The local presence of political parties is: very strong	rather strong	medium	rather small	very small	(altogether)
increased	5%	23%	36%	23%	7%	23%
no change	2	11	32	20	35	28
decreased	1	4	27	30	38	48
altogether	2	10	31	26	31	100

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The role of political parties was of course higher in the localities where their role increased in the last years than where it decreased. But countries differed markedly in the pattern of the relative differences. In Hungary, there were very few localities where the role of political parties increased lately, but these were disproportionally more among the few localities where the role of political activity was relatively high than in the former Czecho-Slovakia. In the latter countries, in about a third of those localities where the role of political parties increased lately, their role was still quite minor; where in Hungary, this number was only 20%. The same type of relative polarisation was even more characteristic of the opposite end. In Hungary, this decrease meant a practical elimination - in 53% of these localities, parties play minimal role today; while in the Czech and Slovak samples, the respective numbers are only 31 and 38%, indicating that even where political activity declined, it did not disappear altogether. Polarisation was much stronger in Hungary than in the other cases: where political activity declined, it all but vanished, while in the few cases where it increased, it became predominant.

But the most surprising results were given by the comparative analysis of localities where the role of political parties remained constant. In the Czech and Slovakian cases, the distribution of the localities in this category almost perfectly reproduced the original frequencies. But in the Hungarian case, another even stranger peculiarity appears: there was a higher percentage of cases with minimal political activity among those localities where there was no change at all than where political activity actually declined. In other words, political activity was higher in those localities where it decreased than in those where it stayed the same. This can only be made sense if we assume a complete absence of political life in as much as a quarter of all Hungarian localities sampled: where political activity could not decrease or increase, as it did not even start.

This suggests that the model characterising the links between central and local politics in Hungary is the opposite of the Czech and Slovak cases of a more or less normal distribution, with

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random variations in time. (34) First, there is a "dual polity" at the level of the localities in Hungary, with about quarter of them simply not taking part in the game since the beginning. Second, the process of change was not random, but polarising, with a very small minority engaged in ever more intensive political activities, and another large section dropping off altogether.

6. The assessment of national politics

If this picture of the representation of national politics at the local level is correct, if this is the way links have been established and consolidated between the two levels of the polity, then this should find its reflection in the way mayors assessed national issues. There are three types of questions, often repeated in different surveys, therefore providing ample rooms for comparative analysis included in our questionnaire: left-right orientation, a short set of four questions on political attitudes, and overall satisfaction with the government.

Along the left-right ideological dimension, the huge differences between the three countries almost defy comprehension (see Table 8.). In the Czech sample, there was an extreme polarisation toward the right. 72% of all respondents placed themselves on the top four rungs toward the right, with a mere 7% leaning in the same manner to the left. This must be a world record of right-wing orientation in a national sample - such a high degree of polarisation perhaps could not even be found among a sample of voters for parliamentary conservative parties.

Table 8. Left-right scale

	left			right
Country	1 through 4	5	6	7 thru 10
Hungary	36%	37%	17%	9%
Czechy	7	9	12	72
Slovakia	30	20	14	36

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The explanation that this is just a standard post-communist phenomenon does not hold water as in Hungary, the situation was the exact opposite. In spite of the similar type of communist experience and its wholesale rejection in 1990, only a very small minority (9%) of Hungarian mayors chose the four ladders leaning strongly toward the right, while 36% leaned definitely to the left. This pattern was repeated in the two middle ladders: an additional 37% of respondents leaned rather toward the left, while only 17% toward the right.

The Slovakian results, in one sense, were mid-way between the other two. Altogether, exactly half the respondents expressed preference for both the right and the left. But, peculiarly, the responses were strongly polarised. Without any skew in the distribution, one would expect a rather strong tendency to pull toward the middle responses, and more caution of situating oneself toward the extremes. In Slovakia, the case was the opposite. Of the 50% opting for the right, only 14% chose the middle category, the remaining 36% situated himself or herself quite strongly toward the right pole; and almost the same internal polarisation characterised the sympathisers of the left (the actual numbers being 20% and 30%). Taken together, only a third of the respondents chose the two middle alternatives of the 10-ladder scale, which, in the case of a sample perfectly evenly divided between left and right, is almost as surprising as the one-sidedness of the other two samples.

This points out a most peculiar situation at the level of political ideologies in these countries. In the Czech republic, as a response to the former communist system, there has emerged an extreme, ideologistic-doctrinaire affiliation with the right, the very word of the "left" being completely discredited. In Hungary, however, almost the opposite thing has happened. By reasons of political developments after the elections, mostly due to the emergence of a small, but very vocal extreme right, the "right" has become discredited. Finally, in Slovakia, the data indicate strong ideological struggles and polarisation.

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The previous discussion moved only at the level of abstract political affiliation. Are these differences reproduced in concrete attitudinal questions, related to unemployment, welfare, and the environment? A review of the results of the four related items first shows that here, there are only two different response patterns, the Hungarian and Slovakian cases being practically identical in all counts. The Czech responses follow a neo-liberal orientation in all items, interpreting the meaning of "right" in the country accordingly. Thus, more than 70% of the respondents preferred fight against the inflation over the decrease of unemployment, while the opposite was only chosen by 17%. In both Hungary and Slovakia, by a margin of about 50% vs. 40%, preference went to the fight against unemployment. This can still be explained by referring to the actual situation, the much lower rate of unemployment in the Czech lands. However, the same differences were maintained in the other responses. Practically all Czech respondents (92%) agreed that there should be no upper limit to the money one can earn, while Hungarians and Slovaks were more cautious in agreeing (around 70%). The results of the question about governmental role in medical care were even more revealing. For mayors in Hungary and Slovakia, the choice was clear: preference for free medical care was chosen by a 7 to 2 margin. For Czechs, this choice evidently created a lot of troubles. Given their ideological orientation, many of them did not even want to hear about governmental help - only slightly more than a third of the respondents opted for this alternative. But most of them could not really swallow the idea that everyone should pay for their own medical bills either - this alternative was only chosen by another 1/3-plus. This left us with a very huge proportion of Czech respondents (23%) failing to answer this question. Finally, the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed in all countries that the protection of the environment is to be given preference, even at the price of a loss of work-places, the differences only being in the relative ratios (the odds being 7 to 2 in Hungary and Slovakia, and 8 to 1 in the Czech republic).

Finally, connecting back to the questions posed before about the links between the centre and the locality, the questionnaire also

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included the standard item on the evaluation of the government. Here, again, the differences were very strong between all three countries. Like always, Czech and Hungarian responses were the furthest from each other, with the Slovakian in between, but closer now to the Czech case (see Table 9.).

Table 9. Satisfaction with the government

	dissatisfied									satisfied
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
HU	7%	10%	21%	13%	26%	10%	7%	6%	1%	1%
CZ	2	4	9	13	13	11	21	17	8	2
SL	6	8	11	10	20	15	8	15	5	2

Considering that we are talking about the first democratically elected government for well over 40 years in these countries, it is surprising that satisfaction with the government was nowhere very high, although this can me rendered somewhat intelligible both by the difficulties these governments had to face, and a peculiar legacy of communism: the indiscriminate blaming of "those above". Among Czech mayors, there was a clear majority expressing satisfaction (59%). Within this category, there was a peculiar inversion, a disproportional number being quite strongly happy with the government: there were much more respondents choosing the 7th and the 8th ladder than the 6th, creating an unusual bi-modal distribution. The respondents in Slovakia were much less satisfied, but still gave a decent rating of their government (46% satisfied, 54% not satisfied), with a response distribution similar to the Czech, showing polarisation both on the satisfied and the non-satisfied pole. One can sum up these results by stating that our respondents had rather strong sentiments about the performance of their government, whether good or bad, and that in the Czech sample, there was a definite preponderance of those who were satisfied, while in the Slovakian, the balance was rather shifted towards the dissatisfied.

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No such nuances were present in the Hungarian sample: a mere 24% expressed some degree of satisfaction, while 76% were dissatisfied. The internal distribution was also significant, showing that the picture drawn by the mayors was not altogether dismissive. First, comparing the extreme poles to the Czech and Slovak results, we can see that the top two categories are practically missing from Hungary: only 1.6% of all respondents gave 9 or 10 "points" to the government, while in the other countries, such high marks were given by considerably more respondents (9.6% and 7.0%). But in the bottom two ladders, the differences were much smaller. In Hungary, 16.3% of the respondents had such a low opinion of the performance of the government, while in the two parts of the former Czecho-Slovakia, it was 6.0 and 13.6% respectively. Thus, while in terms of overall evaluation, the Czech and Slovak results were quite close to each other and different from the Hungarian, in this particular case, there is much more similarity between the Slovakian and the Hungarian data.

This difference can be explained in a manner consistent with the findings analysed so far. Giving such a low mark reveals a deep-seated hostility, as it is hardly conceivable that an unprejudiced person would give a similar rating to the first democratically elected government of his country. Two reasons could explain this choice. This number may give an indication of the presence of former, truly communist leaders among mayors, who never for a minute supported the changes, and use all occasion to blame the new system. But these could also be persons who became most disappointed with the new system; who entertained very high, illusory hopes, and were the most irritated by the failure of their realisation. As the results show, while both these categories were all but absent from the Czech sample, they were present in almost the same manner in Hungary and Slovakia. The point is that this does not explain the wide difference at the level of the overall assessment of the government not only between Hungary and the Czech Republic, but also, between Hungary and Slovakia.

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The heart of this difference between Hungary and the other two countries is not at the two bottom ladder, but in ladders 3, 4, and 5. Taken altogether, 60% of the mayors in the Hungarian sample evaluated the performance of their government in this, moderately dissatisfied way, while the respective numbers are 35% and 41% in the other two countries. Like voting behaviour, this indicates that a chance was given to the government, but it could not capitalise on it, failing so blatantly that it was unable to build up even a faint basis of support among mayors. Though obtained about half the votes of the mayors during the elections, only 24% of them were relatively satisfied with its performance after two and a half years in office. Also, while in both the Czech and Slovak republics, not only the average rate of satisfaction was higher, but there was a marked increase toward the top rungs on the ladder, indicating the presence of a very supportive contingent (in rungs 7 and 8, in both samples, there was a strong second mode), in Hungary, 10 % of the 24% satisfied with the government opted for the lowest possibility, and the remaining were divided between rungs 7 and 8, with practically none remaining at the upper rungs.

On the basis of a detailed analysis of the data distribution, we can therefore say much more about the Hungarian case than simply stating a high level of dissatisfaction. In spite of their past record (many former communist party members and heads of local councils) that many hold against them, mayors were not at all hostile to the new government from the start, and most were not enemies even at the time of this survey. But hardly anyone today can be listed among its supporters. The government failed to capitalise on the proper moment to build up a basis for its policies at this crucial level of polity. This proved to be a fatal error. Due to this lack of a stable basis, the government could not mobilise support for its policies that would have helped him to get through the difficulties. This increased its sense of paranoia, the feeling of being surrounded with hostility. Again and again, the wrong answer was given to this problem: instead of targeting those individuals that have a decisive voice in the local communities, it tried to gain control, through highly questionable means, over the

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central media. Due to reasons that are difficult to understand, it mistook the reality of Hungary to a fantasy-image of a "wired world", where the impact of electronic media is all-powerful, and there are no local voices of influence. The lesson suggested by our study is that instead of worrying about the TV, the government should have bothered itself with mayors, and the needs and opinions of localities.

7. Overall assessments of the job

Two topics will serve to finish the overview: self-evaluation of the overall level of satisfaction, and a few questions about the point of exit.

7.1. Overall level of satisfaction

Just considering the present as a single point in time, the differences between the three countries are not very great (see Table 10.). The Czech and the Slovak distributions are practically identical, with over 70% of the respondents being rather satisfied with their life, while this number is a little over 60% in Hungary. In international comparison, the first reaches the overall level of satisfaction of the Catholic, Latin countries (France, Italy, Spain), while the latter falls below.

Concerning the level of satisfaction as of five years ago, the differences become greater, and the relationship between the three countries is changed. It is now Hungary and Slovakia that are very close, with about 60% of the respondents leaning toward satisfaction with their life as of five years ago. (35) Czech mayors presented a very bleak picture of their former life. Those dissatisfied outweighed the satisfied with a margin of almost 3 to 2, and 32% of all respondents placed themselves at the three bottom rungs. The structure of the responses on expected satisfaction five years from now is quite close to the distribution related to the past, only the sign of the differences are changed. The Slovak and the Hungarian distributions are close to each other

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again, with 70 and 75% projecting a satisfactory life for that time horizon, while the Czechs are radiating with optimism, with 88% thinking that they will be satisfied with their life by that period, 64.5% even placing themselves at the top three rungs.

Table 10. Overall satisfaction with life

A. Hungary:

	dissatisfied 1 through 4	5	6	satisfied 7 thru 10
5 yrs ago	20%	18%	15%	48%
Now	19	18	15	48
In 5 yrs	15	15	14	56

B. Czechy:

	dissatisfied 1 through 4	5	6	satisfied 7 thru 10
5 yrs ago	43%	16%	10%	32%
Now	17	11	14	57
In 5 yrs	6	7	8	80

C. Slovakia:

	dissatisfied 1 through 4	5	6	satisfied 7 thru10
5 yrs ago	4%	12%	12%	51%
Now	11	8	16	58
In 5 yrs	16	9	13	62

The study of the internal dynamics of the three countries complements the previous assessment, adding some clarification and colour. Czechs live in a fairy tale, projecting a wholesale transformation from the realm of gloom to Paradise. As an illustration, only 31.8% of the sample said that they were quite satisfied with their life 5 years ago (the sum of the four top rungs); as of today, this number jumped to 57.6%; while 80.1% of them hope that they will be so satisfied five years from now. (36) The dynamics of the Hungarian and the Slovak cases differs from the Czech, but also somewhat from each other. The Hungarian sample reflects the general feeling of the population at large

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concerning the changes: the distribution of the present level of satisfaction and that retrojected to five years ago are practically identical. However, there is a hope that perhaps, in five years, the situation will change. In Slovakia, compared to five years ago, there is a definite increase in the level of satisfaction, but very little improvement is expected in the next five years.

7.2. The point of exit

One would expect that the overall level of satisfaction with one's present life should have a lot to do with answering the question whether one would accept again the offer of becoming a mayor. It may well be the case at the individual level, but does not hold true for country averages. We have seen that Hungarian mayors were relatively the least satisfied with their present life; yet, they are the ones who would accept again the offer by the highest proportion (69% vs. 28%). In the Czech sample, a much smaller number answered this question with a clear yes (54% vs. 31%); while among Slovakian mayors, the number of refusalS also increased considerably, to 37% (with 48% still accepting). (37)

While the previous question asked about the demand side, the second thoughts mayors may have about accepting the job, the next tried to tap the supply side, the possible pool of candidates, asking whether it would be easy to replace them. There was a marked difference here in no answers: while 10% of Hungarian respondents could not answer this question, in the Czech sample, it went up to 20%, and in Slovakia, to 28%. The pattern of valid answers was also dissimilar. In Slovakia, the 'yes' answers outweighed the 'no' by a ratio of five to one; in the Czech republic, this was only three to one, while in Hungary, a mere three to two. Even keeping in mind the high ratio of missing responses, this still suggests that in Slovakia, such a replacement would be easy in the majority of cases; in the Czech republic, more difficulties would emerge; while in Hungary, such a replacement would be often quite difficult. Many of the mayors in Hungary should be classified, according to this data, as almost indispensable, probably

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not simply due to their outstanding qualities, but as nobody else could be found to take up the job.

Finally, about 30-35% of the respondents claimed that at the end of their term, they would start their own business. Here, missing responses were again quite high in the former Czecho-Slovakia (22-24%).

8. Concluding remarks

Throughout the paper, whenever matters connected to professional expertise, the level of familiarity with the market economy, or the acuteness of concrete, actual, pragmatic difficulties arose, the advantage of Hungary with respect to the other countries were clear-cut. Whether the question was about the reference to new, economic expertise vs. traditional, legal knowledge (p.16), the surprises encountered first at the job (ZZZ p.20), the solution of conflicts (p.27), the average number of obstacles encountered (p.28), the troubles caused by the legacy of the former nomenclatura or the apparatus (p.34), or second thoughts about accepting again the invitation to run (p.48), the answers indicate that the process of change was much smoother, the difficulties encountered less numerous and serious in Hungary than in the other countries. If we only take a snapshot, without considering the dynamics or looking beyond the surface, Hungary seems to offer definite advantages over the two other countries. This is reflected in the fact that in the first few years after 1989, foreign capital investment in Hungary was much higher than in any other of the countries.

If, however, we take a careful look, the picture becomes less convincing. First of all, the idea according to which in Hungary, all problems can now be reduced to mere matters of professional expertise looks doubtful. Certainly, the economic liberalisation that happened in the Kádár régime makes the transition to a market economy easier in certain respects. But it is difficult to believe that due to this, the communist system has been

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completely emptied out from the inside, and with the collapse of the political system, its effects will vanish into thin air. A number of findings of the study support this doubt.

First, a situation where the solution of economic and political problems requires only expertise assumes a polity united on some basic principles, and showing strong and clear dividing lines on issues of alternative policies. The East European picture drawn from this study, and especially in Hungary, looks the opposite. Mayors wish to present a picture of the whole community as united, and yet, when facing the concrete problems to solve, the elected bodies seem paralysed in front of the spectre of the "economic problem". There is not even a discussion of alternative policies, the very idea of policy-making at the local level seems lacking. (38) On the other hand, there is no political life either, apart from personal conflicts, or pale reflections of some national political debates.

This suggests that even in Hungary, the question at stake is more than a simple continuation of the road started in 1968; it is the creation of the foundations and frameworks of a new order, a new polity. This is certainly not going to be accomplished in a few years. The problem is that our data indicate that in the countries sampled, and again especially in Hungary, it is highly doubtful whether the first steps were taken in the right direction.

Perhaps the most crucial element in the re-building of the polity is the presence of a certain kind of political will. This is not at all meant in Rousseaus sense of the formulation of common goals, of preaching about consensus and solidarity, of the positing of a new, small elite into the role of the law-giver and the prophet, but a widespread and shared will to take part in the solution of the common problems and conflicts at all levels of the polity; a desire to be active, pragmatic, energetic, rational, clear-headed; a refusal of the search for overall notions of unity, and of the emotional, intolerant, and exclusive style of politisation so characteristic of the former systems. It is this political will that, as our findings show, is still rather weak in the region.

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If we look at the characteristics mayors think particularly important for their job, we find a predominance of the old style of "pastoral" characteristics, and a marginalisation of activity and pragmatism. A mayor needs qualities to hear and bear the complaints of his herd, and not energy and imagination to stand up to the tasks. But the clearest example concerns the peculiar link (or rather, its absence) between activity and thought in politics.

Whenever people get together in East Europe, whether in the family, in the work-place, or among friends, they discuss politics. But actual participation in the political life is extremely low. Politics is "their" business, about which "we" can only talk. The proof that the discussion about politics is not translated into activity is the wide gap between thinking about taking up a public office, and actual participation in local public affairs. Still today, people are rather pulled into public participation with a considerable force, and would not even think of this as a possibility on their own. On the part of most people, taking up a public or political office is not the result of careful premeditation, but an act of fate that one could not avoid; as if the very idea of participating in politics would be evil.

All this points towards two connected themes that should be the objects of careful theoretical analysis in future studies. The first is the gap between the self and the other that predominates East European polities. It is the harmonisation of this link that, with the help of techniques like the market, policy-making, or normalising education, lies at the heart of the construction of the modern Western polities; successful to such a large extent that its very success creates problems on its own, by the threat posed to the autonomy of both the individual selves and of different cultures. The problem in East Europe is the exact opposite, the appealing lack of connection. This is the driving force behind the current processes of fragmentation, nationalism, isolation, apathy, lack of activity, and an ultimate closing into oneself. (39)

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The second point concerns something that, following Weber, could be called the "spirit of democracy". This paper will not offer a definition of this spirit, and would only point out that the gap that was discovered between the self and the other may exactly be due to the lack of this "spirit" in East Europe. An analysis of this "spirit" should follow the proper methods of Weber, by separating it from the similar attitudes of equalitarianism, levelling, and resentment, and by focusing on the micro level, on what made the establishment of democracy possible at the level of daily life and subjectivity in the Western countries, searching for the substantive techniques of democracy that are assumed by studies focusing either on political institutions, or the market. It is here that, as the other part of the project argues in detail, the last, unpublished lectures of Michel Foucault given between 1982 and 1984 about techniques of the self and *parrhesia* (the courage of truth-telling), and the promised theme of the "true life", especially when read and used together with other authors like Weber, Elias, Luhmann, or Patocka, offer new paths for research on modern democracy.

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Notes

(1) Though, for various reasons, much less interest was raised in sociology, especially social theory. This is all the more surprising as it was the need to explain such changes beyond referring to political events that led to the emergence of sociology. For a difference, see Adam Przeworski: *Democracy and the Market* (Cambridge Univ Press, 1991), though it only underlines one's doubts about the usefulness of a rational choice approach to the current dilemmas of East Europe.
(2) From the vast body of literature, let us only single out the works of Juan Linz, José Maravall, Geoffrey Pridham, and Philippe Schmitter.
(3) See Jadviga Staniszkis, *The Dynamics of Breakthrough in Eastern Europe*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991).
(4) The few optimistic scenarios have some peculiar commonalties: they are mostly written by economists, and in the United Kingdom. A careful reading of these pieces, however, shows that they have as much to do with East Europe as Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* with Persia. See the famous article in the *Financial Times* on the reorganisation of centre and periphery in Europe, and the *Economist*, 13 March 1993, special survey following p. 64.
(5) Thus, his collected essays appeared in two separate volumes bearing the title *Diagnoses* (Budapest, Magvetö, 1982 and 1986), and as a background, he put a large emphasis on the literature on social pathology.
(6) Such a linguistic exercise may seem far-fetched, but here, as often, the use of words, whether consciously intended or not, can tell more about at once essential and fine aspects of the problem than a lengthy essay or an expensive and time-consuming empirical study.
(7) The *Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 13, p. 508.
(8) The word "regime" is often used explicitly in East Europe, but even the term "system" is closer to this meaning there than its Western use. For a recent example, see the demonstrators against the "regime of Eltsin" on the title page of the International Herald Tribune. (IHT, 24-25 April, 1993, p.1).
(9) See Seneca's Letter 52, 'On Choosing our teachers'. This discussion has been very strongly influenced by the 1982 lectures given by Michel Foucault at the *Collège de France*. See especially the lecture of 27 January 1982.
(10) This was the title of a famous book written by a former Hungarian communist living through the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union; see Ervin Sinkó: *Mint vihar a levelet* (As a tempest

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[blows] a leaf). This metaphor was also widespread in the early Christian literature.

(11) As a particularly revealing example, see the case of the VGMK-s (self-accounting teams at state-owned enterprises), one of the sacred cows of the reform economists, introduced in the early 1980s. The intention was dual: to legalise some of the activity done in the second economy, and to introduce some elements of enterpreneurship into the state sector. The result was quite different: the provision of a legal value to simple theft and bribery; to stabilise the growing conviction of a large segment of the population that "reform" and "markets" are only synonyms for personal enrichment through corruption; an indication that times may change (the role of the party is diminishing), but the rules of the game stay the same. VGMK-s had a crucial role in the thorough de-moralisation of Hungary.

(12) For related publications, see Agnes Horváth and Arpád Szakolczai: *The Dissolution of Communist Power: The Case of in Hungary* (London, Routledge, 1992); Arpád Szakolczai, 'Weber et la méthode généalogique', *Magazine Littéraire* , 1992, no. 298; 'On the Exercise of Power in Modern Societies, East and West', EUI Working Papers, 1992; Nietzsche's Genealogical Method: Presentation and Application', EUI Working Papers, 1993; and 'From Governmentality to the Genealogy of Subjectivity: On Foucault's path in the 1980's', EUI Working Papers, 1993.

(13) On the basis of 31 interviews conducted in the Summer of 1991 in Hungary and Slovakia by members of the local elite, mostly newly elected mayors, a questionnaire was constructed to tap various areas of local political, and the social and political background and the value orientations of the mayors. This questionnaire was asked in July-September 1992 by professionally trained interviewers on 250 mayors in Hungary, the Czech republic, and Slovakia. The actual number of cases were 246, 257, and 243, respectively. See also 'Types of Mayors, Types of Subjectivity: Continuity and Discontinuity in the East-Central European Transitions 1', EUI Working Papers, 1993.

(14) Thus, for e.g., studies on voting behaviour in Hungary have shown very little impact by the social background variables. See for e.g., the works of Kolosi and Szelényi.

(15) See the related works of Hankiss and Bruszt.

(16) See Gábor Péteri (ed), Local Democracy and Innovation: The first steps of local transition in East-Central Europe (Budapest, Ld & I Foundation, 1991).

(17) This is especially surprising as in countries with a strong mayoral system (for e.g., France), such a position is considered often as a step toward political office.

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(18) See Agnes Horváth and Arpád Szakolczai: *The Dissolution of Communist Power* , 1992.

(19) Probably everybody in Hungary could tell stories about the selection of pioneer or KISZ leaders from the 1970s on, to show that while officially, the taking up of such positions was considered to be a great privilege, the actual choice was in fact quite different. To give a concrete example from 1970-71, when such a choice had to be made in my school by 12-13 year old students, we selected as our "leader" a boy who came to our school just a few months ago, had the reputation of being a bit "difficult", and was actually absent when the nomination was made. All this happened in what was considered as one of the best schools in the country. In Italy, a similar choice even today, when the Italian political life is considered to be on the brink of collapse, is a matter of utmost prestige in a school-class. And let us just add a recent example from Hungary, as it was told in an interview with the newly appointed political secretary of state of the Ministry of Finances. The point is worth a full quotation:

> Q. "You have explained your catholic activity, but not yet the political ... "
>
> A. "This has its own story. At one time, the leadership of KIM (the catholic youth movement) decided that one member of the organisation should participate at the elections. I was just undergoing an operation. What happens in such cases? They always think of those who are not present." See HVG, 13 March 1993, p.98.

Thus, in a full account of the personal motivation of entry into politics given in Spring 1993, just by a change of letter (KIM to KISZ), the statement loses its specificity, and becomes possible to utter at any time since 1957.

(20) In a talk given in Florence in 2 March 1993, András Kovács, political advisor to FIDESZ indicated that in case of winning the election, one of their top priorities would be the drafting of a new constitution.

(21) On democracy and ascendancy, see Foucault's course of 1983 at the Collège de France, especially 2 and 9 February. See also Moses Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World* (Cambridge U. P., 1983).

(22) It is worthwhile to remember that the country that was the closest to the West for several decades, and was the secret hope of the other East European countries, was Yugoslavia. As a last reference to the advanced status of Yugoslavia, see the article by Jeffrey Sachs and David Lipton, '"Shock therapy" and real incomes', *Financial Times* , 29 January 1991.

(23) The debate between Eltsin and the Russian Parliament resembles the first case, why the position of several "former

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communist" mayors in Hungary and especially Slovakia the second. See Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society* (to be published by Routledge in 1993)

(24) In order to get valid results, the item was stated using very strong terms. The exact wording was the following: "the council meetings are very long, as there are very many superfluous, meaningless interventions."

(25) See Susan Welch and Timothy Bledsoe, *Survey of Council Members in Large American Cities, 1982* , ICPSR 8655 (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1987).

(26) This is the sense in which politics, since its emergence in Athens in the 7-5th centuries BC., was always a matter of invention.

(27) A capitalist market economy encounters periodical crises; a backward country lacks any economic dynamics; but a socialist economy was in a permanent state of crisis, this being the very concrete and real meaning of the "permanent revolution" thesis.

(28) This circle has been analysed in several classical works in the literature on economic development. See especially the works of Hirschman, Myrdal, and Nurkse.

(29) See HVG, 17 April, 1993, p. 98.

(30) The per capita GNP in 1990 in Spain was 10.925 USD, in Portugal 8136 USD. See Eurostat 1992: Basic Statistics of the Community (Luxemburg, 1992).

(31) This is one of the many reasons why FIDESZ is so weary of teaming up with the Free Democrats.

(32) In the Czech parts, 13.5% in the House of People, and 13.8% in the House of Nations; while in the Slovak parts, as if only the numbers were changed, 13.8% in the House of People, and 13.4% in the House of Nations. See Gordon Wightman, 'Czechoslovakia', in *Electoral Studies* 9 (1990), 4: 319-26.

(33) The exact numbers are 89% in Hungary, 95% in the Czech lands, and 89% in Slovakia.

(34) Though the meaning is merely descriptive, I am willing to put values to it.

(35) Incidentally, this distribution is identical to the response members of the party apparatus gave in 1988 about the situation of their life as of five years ago.

(36) It may again be instructive to compare these results with the dynamics of the responses of the party instructors in 1988. According to them, five years ago, they lived an "average" level of happiness by cadres in the system of existing socialism. In September 1988, when they knew only too well how close they are to the end, their level of satisfaction was extremely low, only slightly better than the dismal picture out Czech respondents painted of themselves in the *Ancien Régime* , with only 45% of the

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respondents being more satisfied than dissatisfied. But, as opposed to our present respondents, they did not see at that time much hope of improvement for the future either: the level of expected satisfaction only went up to 53% in the horizon of five years.

(37) Some of the differences may also be dueto the fact that the number of missing responses was not the same throughout - 4% in Hungary, 15% in the two parts of the former Czecho-Slovakia.

(38) This assessment is based not only on the survey, but also the interviews.

(39) About this, see also the working paper entitled 'Types of mayors, types of subjectivity'.

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