



THE

NEW DEMOCRATIC FRONTIER

A COUNTRY BY COUNTRY
REPORT ON ELECTIONS IN
CENTRAL AND
EASTERN EUROPE

EDITED BY LARRY GARBER AND ERIC BJORNLUND

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

**The New Democratic Frontier:
A Country by Country Report
on Elections in Central
and Eastern Europe**

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Foreword

J. Brian Atwood

It is rare that any institution has an opportunity to work with people who are changing the course of history. We at NDI were well aware that our colleagues from Eastern and Central Europe, many of whom had been prisoners of conscience or underground dissidents, were making history in 1989-90. This book tells their story, not a story of the victory of West over East, or of capitalism over communism, but the triumph of the human spirit. To have participated even in a small way in that epoch was an extraordinary privilege. To share our experience, we believe, is nothing less than NDI's obligation to future generations of democrats.

The editors of this book and the authors of its chapters have worked very hard to interpret the cataclysmic events of this region. They have viewed the elections and the environments within which they took place in the context of contemporary political situations, the history of the region's nations and, importantly, through the prism of their own experiences, both in their own countries and on the ground in Eastern and Central Europe as part of NDI's international network. Their insights and analyses do justice to the courageous and committed citizens of this region.

The editors of this book are two talented lawyers who have chosen to apply their considerable legal skills to the democratic

development work of NDI. Larry Garber is NDI's Special Counsel for Electoral Processes and Eric Bjornlund, Senior Program Officer. While this was a labor of love for them, it was at the same time arduous work. They conceived the format, guided the authors, edited texts and constantly prodded those drafting chapters, including me, to meet deadlines. Both continued to carry a full NDI workload, managing projects on even newer democratic frontiers in Africa and South Asia. They deserve great credit for seeing this project through and for enabling our Institute to contribute to a better understanding of the history of this time.

Finally, it is gratifying to be associated with an effort that analyzes and explains important aspects of the democratization mission. Western political leaders trumpet democracy-building as a major tenet of foreign policy. Yet, the operational work is only vaguely understood, its definition often distorted. A frequently heard criticism is that elections are highly superficial indicators of democratization. This is, of course, correct, but many who repeat this increasingly trite insight fail to acknowledge that elections are an essential starting point. And they routinely underestimate the difficulty of holding meaningful elections in fragile new democracies. If this book contributes to a more sophisticated discussion of these issues, it will have served an important secondary purpose.

Acknowledgements

This book is the product of hard work by a large number of people. The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) thanks in particular the authors of the different chapters for their contributions. (Author biographies are listed at the back of the book.) The Institute also thanks all the participants in its training and observer missions in the region. Their insights and dedication contributed enormously to the quality of this work.

NDI President J. Brian Atwood conceived and initiated the idea of a country by country study of the 1990 elections in Eastern and Central Europe and ensured that the project remained an NDI priority. NDI Executive Vice President Kenneth Wollack carefully reviewed the entire manuscript.

In addition to editing each of the chapters, NDI Public Information Director Sue Grabowski was responsible for the volume's format and design. She also endured the seemingly never-ending process of rewriting, editing and production.

The editors also acknowledge the significant contribution of NDI Program Assistant Joseph Hennessey. In addition to his thorough editing, Mr. Hennessey was responsible for developing outlines for several thematic chapters and for regularly communicating with authors located on four continents.

iv Acknowledgements

Amy Tate checked facts for several of the chapters and prepared the tables of election results included as an appendix to this volume. Britta Bjornlund also assisted with the fact-checking. Jacqueline Dorsey capably handled the time-consuming job of typing and retyping the many drafts, often with barely legible edits. Karen Clark, Patricia Keefer, Lisa McLean, Thomas Melia and Gerald Mitchell also edited one or more chapters.

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Larry Garber

Eric C. Bjornlund

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NDI Description, Board and Publications

Chapter 1

Introduction

Larry Garber and Eric C. Bjornlund

The dramatic events in Eastern and Central Europe from autumn 1989 to spring 1990 mark a watershed in European and world history. As the Cold War waned, the authority of totalitarian governments crumbled virtually overnight. Re-energized populations found their voices and regained control of their governments. Elections opened a new phase of politics throughout the region.

Between March 18, 1990, when East Germans freely elected a Christian Democratic government with a mandate for German unification, and June 10, 1990, when Bulgarians narrowly returned the renamed Communist Party to office, the people of Eastern and Central Europe went to the polls to choose their leaders in more or less free elections. During this short, four-month span, six of the former Warsaw Pact countries, counting Yugoslavia, held their first genuinely competitive elections since the end of World War II. A seventh, Poland, which launched the trend a year earlier with partially free national elections, became the first country in the region to hold competitive local elections during this timeframe. The combination of these extraordinary elections in one concentrated period and in one

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part of the world made this one of the most unique and dramatic times of the 20th century.

The Eastern and Central European elections of 1990 were largely successful in allowing sufficient political space for opposition forces to contend for political power. With the significant exception of Romania, the 1990 elections also succeeded in creating governments that derived their legitimacy from the free choices of the people. The elections occurred with little violence. They allowed populations subjected to decades of political repression their first meaningful opportunity to express political views. They encouraged and enabled significant political participation for the first time in years. The elections provided, in effect, an opportunity for these publics to participate in a country by country series of referendums on the communist system.

I

As the sequence of events in Eastern and Central Europe from late 1989 through mid-1990 illustrates, elections seldom distinguish the beginning of a democratic transition or a revolutionary transformation. Rather, a schism in the government or the military, a severe economic crisis, a catastrophic war or even the unification of opposition forces generally initiates a transition process. The combination of such circumstances leads to calls for meaningful elections, which, when they occur, signal a second phase of a democratic transition.

Throughout 1989, the communist governments in the region, sometimes of their own accord and sometimes in response to mass protests, relinquished their monopolies on political power and allowed opposition groups to form and mobilize, thus marking the first stage of the transition process. These events were relatively peaceful, although insurrection against Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu at the end of 1989 brought this chapter to a bloody denouement.

A second phase commenced when the communist regimes, or their remnants, and opposition forces established rules for competitive elections and then permitted their occurrence. This was no small

achievement because none of the countries in the region had held truly multiparty elections in more than 40 years.

II

This book is intended to be a resource for scholars, activists and policy-makers alike. It reports on the elections of 1990, and it analyzes the ongoing political transitions in which these elections played such a key role. Focusing in particular on elections, the book describes how opposition political leaders and democratic activists affected dramatic political change in seven countries of Eastern and Central Europe in an extremely short period of time.

This book was conceived in the spring of 1990 as part of the response of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) to the second phase of the dramatic democratic developments in the region. NDI, a nonprofit, U.S.-based institute, conducts nonpartisan political development programs overseas. By working with political parties and other institutions, NDI seeks to promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions and pluralistic values in new and emerging democracies. In its democratic development projects around the world, NDI draws upon the expertise of prominent political leaders, government officials, journalists, academics and civic leaders from across the democratic spectrum and from established and emerging democracies around the world.

Through its activities, NDI has developed a reputation as a leading nongovernmental organization in the field of election observing and election processes. Since 1986, NDI has sponsored large, high-profile international delegations that have observed and monitored more than 20 of the most important and controversial elections that have occurred around the world; smaller NDI teams have been present for elections in many other countries. NDI has also provided technical assistance to political parties and nonpartisan civic organizations that have conducted voter and civic education campaigns and have organized election monitoring programs, such as poll-watching and independent counting systems.

NDI observer missions and other programs have enhanced confidence and encouraged participation in the electoral process,

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promoted understanding of international standards for free and fair elections, deterred fraud and manipulation, and reported to the international community about the conduct of the elections and the extent of election-related abuses. International observers have focused attention on the process before, during and after election day. By recruiting high-profile leaders and expert delegates, developing specific techniques for identifying fraudulent practices and issuing comprehensive election reports, NDI has significantly influenced the development and application of international standards for free and fair elections and for election observing.

NDI began its activities in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989 with programs in Poland, where NDI co-sponsored a conference on the organizational and decision-making process of the parliament, and Hungary, where NDI organized a party training program in the fall. In January 1990, at the request of President Vaclav Havel, the Institute sent to Czechoslovakia a multinational team of technical experts to advise the new government on the relative merits of different election systems. Subsequently, in anticipation of the spring 1990 elections, NDI sponsored training programs for emerging democratic political parties in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and helped establish nonpartisan civic organizations in Bulgaria and Romania.

Between March and June 1990, NDI organized major observer delegations for elections in Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. These delegations were co-sponsored by NDI's Republican counterpart, the International Republican Institute, formerly the National Republican Institute for International Affairs (NRIIA). The delegations included parliamentarians, political party leaders, election officials, journalists and democratic activists from more than 35 countries. A number of prominent world political leaders led these delegations, including: NDI Chairman and former U.S. Vice President Walter Mondale; U.S. Senators Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and John McCain (R-AZ); former U.S. Senators Charles Mathias (R-MD) and Harrison Schmitt (R-NM); Representative Robert Lagomarsino (R-CA); Governor Madeleine Kunin of Vermont; Prime Ministers James Mitchell of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Garrett FitzGerald of Ireland and Steingrímur Hermannsson of Iceland; political party leaders Jan Carnogursky of Czechoslovakia, Roy Hattersley of Great Britain, and Senator Robert Hill of Australia; and Honduran first lady, Norma Gaborit de

Callejas. Each delegation issued a post-election statement that assessed the entire electoral process, from the pre-campaign period until after the announcement of the official results. NDI and NRIIA jointly published comprehensive, book-length post-election reports that analyzed the elections in Romania and Bulgaria in detail.

Drawing on the observations of these delegations, as well as those of smaller NDI delegations sent to the March 1990 national elections in East Germany, the April 1990 elections in Slovenia, Yugoslavia, and the May 1990 local elections in Poland, this book reviews and assesses the political context and the electoral process in the seven countries. In the following chapters, international experts and democratic activists who have participated in NDI's programs in the region analyze aspects of the elections and their social, political and historical context. The appendix at the end of the book provides results for each of the elections covered in this volume.

This book provides insights into the ongoing transitions to more democratic governments in Europe. The chapters describe how the transition processes were effectuated: the workings of the roundtable negotiations, the choice of election systems and mechanisms for administering elections, the formation and functioning of political parties and electoral coalitions, the role of civic organizations, and the contributions of the international community. Here are lessons for democrats in other countries still struggling for freedom against repressive regimes.

The transitions have not solved many problems confronting the countries in the region. The consolidation of democratic government and the transformation to free market economies remain daunting tasks.

The chapters of this book were written between late 1990 and early 1991. While political developments in the region have continued to move forward rapidly, other regions are only now entering the critical electoral stage of democratic transitions. By focusing on the election phase the book will inform the debate and discussion of historians, political scientists and policy-makers around the world.

III

In hindsight, there exists an easy wisdom that the dissolution of the communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe was inevitable. This was not, however, the expectation of most scholars and experts writing even five years ago. Still, as Professor Madeleine Albright writes in the first chapter of the book, a series of developments, beginning with the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975 and including Gorbachev's ascension to power, made peaceful transitions in most of the region possible. In her contribution, Albright, who formerly served as NDI's vice-chair, provides the framework for understanding the circumstances surrounding the momentous 1990 elections.

Chapters 3 through 9 describe the historical contexts and electoral processes of the seven Eastern and Central European countries that held elections in the spring of 1990. While these countries share the experience of communist domination, differing political, social and cultural conditions shaped their transitions.

In the German Democratic Republic, the question of German unification dominated the political debate during the electoral campaign. This factor significantly distinguished the East German elections from the others in the region. In their chapter, Daniel Gordon and Fred Reinke describe the unique political situation in Germany and the dominance of West German political parties and resources over the East German electoral process. They report on what were the only truly competitive elections in East German history. In the end, the March 1990 elections in East Germany became a referendum on unification and marked only one step, albeit an extremely important one, in the process of incorporation into the Federal Republic.

Hungary benefitted from a phased transition process, emerging as the only country in the region with ideologically oriented, indigenous political parties. In Chapter 4, Thomas Melia analyzes Hungary's recent political history, leading up to and following the historic March 1990 parliamentary elections. He notes that, until the sudden transitions elsewhere in the region in late 1989, events in Hungary preceded parallel events elsewhere. The chapter considers

some reasons for the relative success and strength of Hungary's democratic transition.

Edward McMahon's account of the April 1990 elections in Slovenia highlights the complex mix of democratic and nationalist politics that characterized all of the Yugoslav republics on the eve of Yugoslavia's disintegration and the outbreak of civil war. He describes the complicated governmental institutions, both within the republic and in Yugoslavia as a whole, that were designed to hold together and govern this multi-ethnic, multinational state. Within Slovenia itself, the chapter reports that the elections resulted in a careful balance between new democrats and reformed communists and between democratic and nationalist ideologies.

After the bloody overthrow of Ceausescu, Romania held elections in May 1990, but Thomas Carothers, relying on the findings of the NDI/NRIIA international observer delegation, concludes that the electoral process was severely flawed. Carothers assesses the significance of the December 1989 revolution and considers whether the National Salvation Front, which assumed power during the revolution, was ever truly committed to democratic reform. He describes a myriad of problems that made the electoral process systematically unfair, even while balloting on election day proceeded in a relatively smooth and peaceful manner. The chapter suggests that the flawed electoral process portends serious impediments to a genuine democratic transition in Romania.

The partially free 1989 national elections in Poland were a precursor of further, and more dramatic, liberalization in the other countries. Indeed, the drama of Poland's democratic opening seems almost anachronistic from the perspective of subsequent developments in the region. Nonetheless, as Maya Latynski recounts in Chapter 7, the 1990 local elections, the first completely open elections in Poland, were a critical step in the country's consolidation of democracy and provided the stimulus for efforts at decentralization and democratization at the local level, a pattern followed by other countries in the region. Latynski expresses concern about voter apathy and about certain demagogic tendencies in Polish politics, but she describes an important phase of what looks to be a genuine democratic transition.

The June 1990 elections in Czechoslovakia marked a continuation of the almost surreal quality of the "Velvet Revolution." In Chapter 8, Robin Carnahan and Judith Corley recall the events that suddenly

swept intellectual Vaclav Havel from leading dissident to government leader. Unlike the other countries in the region during the election period, in Czechoslovakia the communists or their successors did not control the media or the election machinery. As the chapter reports, the elections themselves were not controversial and served only to confirm Civic Forum, and its Slovak counterpart Public Against Violence, in government.

The June elections in Bulgaria, which concluded the 1990 election season, demonstrated that a reformed and renamed Communist Party could compete successfully in multiparty elections. This pattern of victory by a reformed communist party was later repeated in Serbia and Albania.¹ Nonetheless, as Larry Garber relates in Chapter 9, subsequent developments revealed the ruling party's inability to govern effectively, even with a legislative majority. The chapter also describes the complicated electoral system and the important role of a nonpartisan, election monitoring organization, the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections.

IV

Certain common themes emerge from the country chapters, including the key role played by dissidents and other mediating institutions in shaping the transition, the complicated process of negotiating the modalities of a new election system, the emergence of political parties in anticipation of elections and the important role played by the international community. These themes form the basis for the analysis in Chapters 10 through 15.

In Chapter 10, Professor Shlomo Avineri, a renowned scholar of Marxism, describes the critical role that broadly based, social mediating institutions played in developing a democratic culture and making possible a meaningful electoral process and democratic transition. Professor Avineri asserts that the presence of social and

¹ See, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, *The March 31, 1991 Elections in Albania* (1991). See also, National Republican Institute for International Affairs, *The 1990 Elections in the Republics of Yugoslavia* (1991).

cultural institutions, such as Solidarity in Poland and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, facilitated meaningful elections in those countries and made successful the first stages of their transitions. In contrast, the absence of such institutions and of a democratic culture in Romania and to a lesser extent in Bulgaria has made the transitions in those countries more questionable, or at least more troubled.

Judge Antonio Vitorino, who serves on the Constitutional Court of Portugal, describes and assesses in Chapter 11 the critical contribution of the roundtables. In most of the countries, ruling and opposition political forces and other representatives of many sectors of society sat down together to discuss political reform. The roundtables took on a legitimacy completely unavailable to the existing governmental institutions. They urged sweeping constitutional and legislative changes. And they proposed the holding of free and fair elections to resolve political conflicts and confer legitimacy on the resulting governments.

Vitorino also compares the process of transition in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989-90 to the transition process in Southern Europe in the 1970s. Similarly, Genaro Arriagada, a Chilean political scientist and democratic activist who coordinated the opposition forces in the 1988 plebiscite campaign in Chile, suggests parallels between the political situation in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989-90 and in Latin America in the 1980s. Arriagada addresses the complex challenges and opportunities that a flawed, imperfect electoral process presents for democratic forces in an authoritarian political environment. He considers the danger that leading democratic activists may lose touch with the larger public and the need for democratic activists to marry moral principles with practical politics.

One of the most important decisions for the roundtable participants involved selecting an election system and formulating the mechanics of administering elections in countries where distrust in authority, naturally, was widespread. In Chapter 13, Antonio Nadas, a Portuguese lawyer, reflects on the significance of various choices about election systems made by each country. He further describes the administrative safeguards that were introduced to inspire confidence in the process.

A healthy democracy requires not only a fair election system, but also competitive political parties. In Chapter 14, Andrew Ellis, a leader of Britain's Liberal Party, analyzes the development and