Democratization: The Development of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

This paper examines the impacts of public policy on organizational behavior in relationship to the process of democratization and the development of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in post-communist Central and Eastern European countries. The public policies and public management style in these countries under communist rule differed greatly from those associated with democratic societies. Under communism, public policies were geared toward making the individual totally dependent on the state. These policies must now be replaced with policies that support democratic values. This study finds, that the democratization of post-communist Central and Eastern European countries can best be achieved through the development of a political climate conducive to private initiative and to the growth and development of NGOs.

Central and Eastern Europe Under Soviet Domination:

The implementation of soviet communism in Central and Eastern Europe[1] resulted in the transformation of the existing political, economic and social structures of the region, including the virtual elimination of all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Under the new soviet regimes, all political, economic and social activities were controlled by a totalitarian state dominated by a single party. The communists sought to establish a new social order in which private property and competition were abolished, money and credit were centralized in the hands of the state, and all children were educated by the state (Marx and Engels 1964). In establishing this new social order, the soviets radically changed the existing

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[1] The terms *Central and Eastern Europe* and *Central and Eastern European countries* are used here to refer to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

social capital of the Central and Eastern European countries. The soviet system changed the informal norms within Central and Eastern European societies by replacing them with formal norms – new rules and laws decreed by the state without popular participation and consent. Sovietization[2] was forced on largely unwilling populations through the restriction of political debate and the expansion of the soviet security apparatus. The soviet system, which bound the soviet-dominated nations of Central and Eastern Europe and guided their political, economic and social development during the course of more than seventy years, was instituted by the soviets using an extraordinarily brutal paradigm of an onslaught of mass terror, succeeded by generalized terror and subsequently held in place through selective repression (Palubinskas 2002).
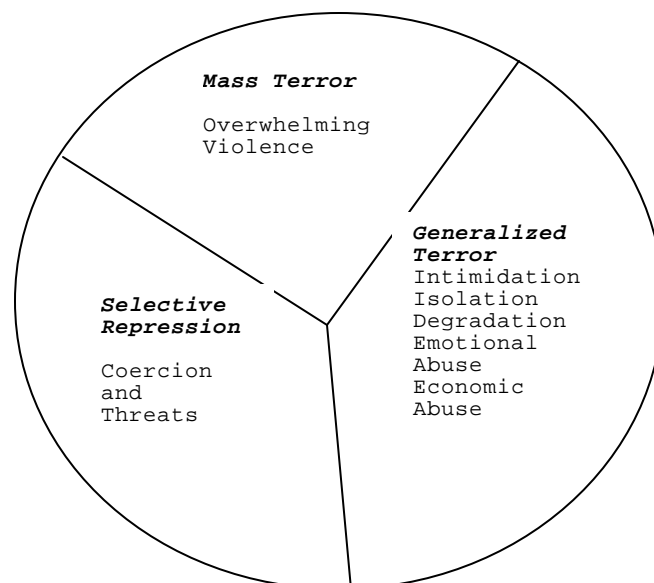

Figure 1: Sovietization Paradigm (Palubinskas 2002)

Excessive force and mass terror were used to eliminate anyone who

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[2] The reorganization of soviet-occupied and soviet satellite countries' economic, political and social structures according to the dictates of the soviet government and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

"displayed an independent mind about public affairs" (Service 1997, p. 225) and it was used to establish soviet control in all of the countries that came under soviet domination. Generalized terror was used to further eliminate anyone capable of challenging the soviet regime, to dissolve existing social relationships and to completely subordinate the individual to the state.

The soviet state aim was to break society down into a collection of individuals (Moore 1954), which acted "collectively only when mobilized by party and government" (Service 1997, p. 245). It sought to control every unit of social life, consciously seeking even the disintegration of family loyalty (Conquest 1990); the soviet state was to supersede all else, and the individual was to become an accessory of the state.

The soviet state targeted all of those viewed as potential opponents of the soviet system – former government officials, former army officers, soldiers, former members of the judiciary, former police officers, former political party members, active members of student organizations, landlords, merchants, bankers, businessmen, wealthier farmers, anyone who had fought against the soviets, and anyone resisting collectivization, industrial-ization, and secularization of society – as well as their families, colleagues, friends and neighbors.

Constant fear of repression, the soviet demand for "not only submission, but also complicity" (Conquest 1990, p. 252), and progressive soviet subversion of previously existing social ties, spurred an increasing sense of isolation among the soviet dominated peoples and succeeded in obliterating a general sense of trust within the soviet-conquered societies.

Once the general population of a country had been terrified into submission and was too fearful to oppose the soviet regime, selective repression was used to maintain that fear. Anyone willing to overtly challenge the soviet regime was condemned. Dissent was punished. Privacy disappeared as the state encouraged people to monitor and report on their neighbors, friends, and even family members. Consequently, trust eroded; conversations became guarded; and, associations faded. As the soviet state strove to increasingly control both the public and private spheres of life, the soviet dominated peoples learned to avoid even the appearance of having independent opinions (Service 1997), to fear showing initiative (Smith 1976), and to live with a "deeply ingrained sense of impotence, because of the official power of retaliation, and the assertive intrusion of officialdom with personal lives" (Smith 1976, p. 259).

The sovietization process was, in many ways, analogous to battering (Palubinskas 2002). Batterers seek control of their victims through the exertion of excessive force, or an unusual amount of control over their victim's activities, finances, contacts with others (Kosof 1995; Statman 1995). Usually, there is a determining event that convinces the victim that the batterer can cause them tremendous harm, and the fear that it generates forms the foundation of the batterer's control over his victim (Kosof 1995). Once a victim believes that they are in imminent danger from the batterer, the victim lives in constant fear of incurring the batterer's wrath, of enduring another violent episode, and strives to protect themselves and their family by learning to censure their speech and actions in accordance to the batterer's demands (Johann 1994; Kosof 1995; Statman 1995). The batterer's control over the victim is maintained through explicit or implicit threats of harm (Johann 1994; Kosof 1995). This battering paradigm is shown by the Power and Control Wheel presented below.
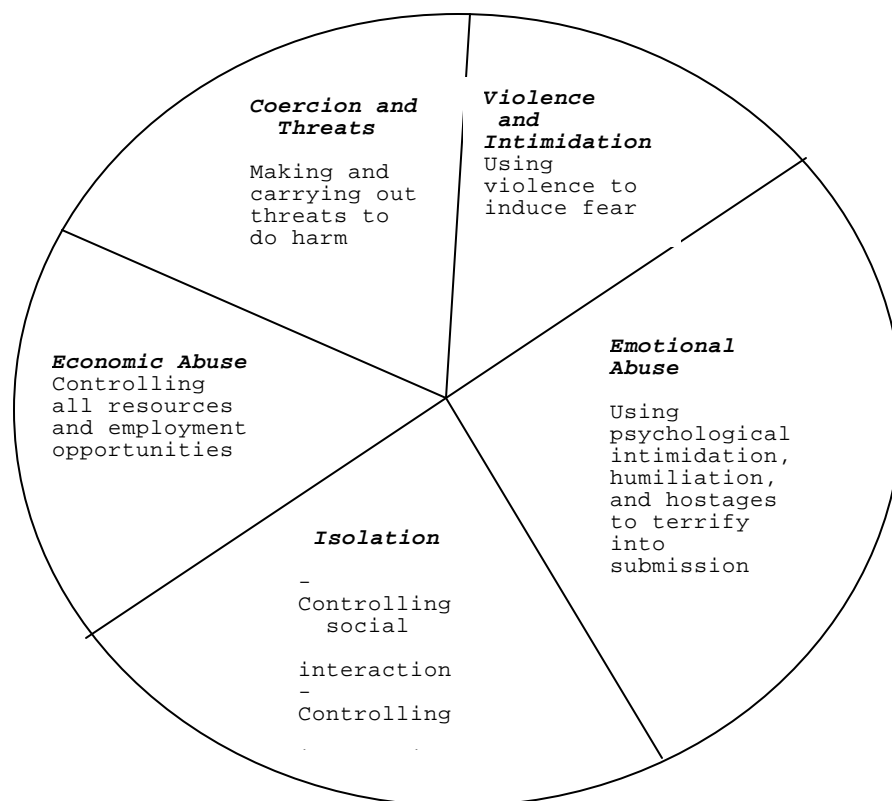

Coercion and Threats

Making and carrying out threats to do harm

Violence and Intimidation
Using violence to induce fear

Economic Abuse
Controlling all resources and employment opportunities

Emotional Abuse

Using psychological intimidation, humiliation, and hostages to terrify into submission

Isolation

- Controlling social

interaction
- Controlling

Figure 2: Power and Control Wheel
(Based on the Power and Control Wheel in Kosof 1995, p. 55)

A comparison of figures 1 and 2 shows that the sovietization paradigm is consistent with the Power and Control Wheel of battering: mass terror employs violence and intimidation; generalized terror applies emotional abuse, economic abuse and isolation; selective repression relies on coercion and threats.

Sovietization Paradigm

Mass Terror

Overwhelming
Violence

*Selective
Repression*

Coercion
and
Threats

*Generalized
Terror*
Intimidation
Isolation
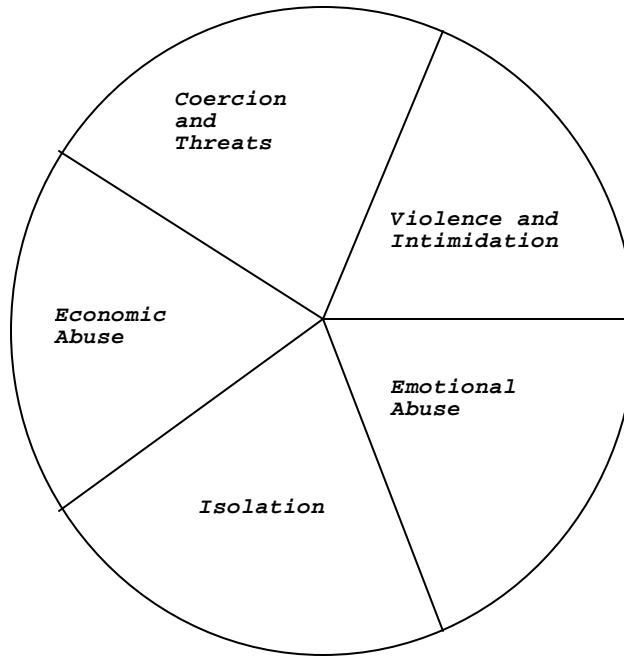Degradation
Emotional
Abuse
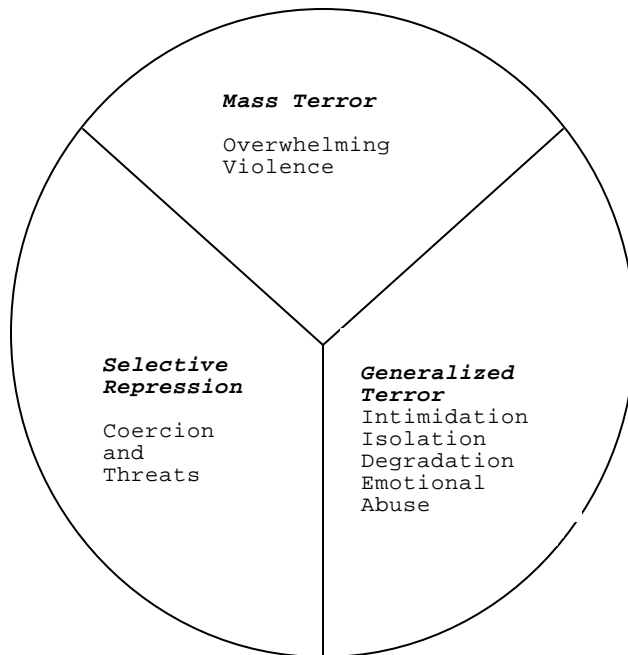
Battering Paradigm

Figure 3: Comparison of Sovietization and Battering Paradigms

The effect of sovietization is also analogous to battering; in both cases, targets are subjected to prolonged victimage,[3] and exhibit signs of post traumatic stress – fear, helplessness, horror. Both paradigms create an imbalance of power in which the target is made dependent on the dominant entity for survival. In both cases, the target is made to feel powerless. Fear, despair, distrust, a sense of isolation and depression characterized early soviet society to the point that even the closest of personal relationships were subordinated to obedience to the state; battered victims live in fear, isolation and depression. Soviet terror pushed Central and Eastern European populations into a state of depression and apathy; battered victims live with a sense of helplessness and defeat. Just as the batterer seeks to control his victim through complete dominance, so did sovietization

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[3] *Prolonged victimage* is defined as experiencing the effect of being aggressed against over an extended period of time, as in the case of a battered wife or child, a concentration camp prisoner, or prisoner of war.

implement totalitarianism in which "the state breaks down the barrier between public and private spheres to control not only the outward flow of social life, but the inner lives of individuals" (Feffer 1992, p. 221).

The imbalance of power established through the soviet policy of terror was institutionalized politically, economically and socially, giving way to the development of a "suspicion-ridden, corrupt, and exploited new society . . . living in a state of fear and frustration" (Borsody 1993, p. 203). It had an important impact on how societies under soviet rule were structured politically, economically and socially; on how their social capital developed, and on the type of human capital (skills, etc.) that was fostered.

The soviet state created and controlled all social organizations, using them to indoctrinate, monitor and control the soviet-dominated populations. Unlike any natural community, soviet society was an "artificial social unit" (Etzioni 1964, p. 58) – planned, deliberately structured and constantly monitored. Due to its artificial nature, the structure of soviet society was quite complex. Each of its subsystems was developed as a virtual replica of the central system (Carrere D'Encausse 1982) and each of its members subject to a distinct hierarchy of authority. The soviet social structure was constructed so that each social unit, down to the individual, was effectively an auxiliary of the state, controlled by the center through edicts enforced by the secret police. Thus, soviet society was structured as a formal organization and its culture was formed, transmitted and enforced through formal mechanisms.

The soviet system was a self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating system in which political, economic and social policies were closely intertwined and used to promote subservience, compliance, conformity, uniformity, and passiveness in soviet-dominated populations. The soviet political system shaped and controlled the economy and society. All soviet-based societies were state-funded and state-organized. The government assigned jobs, paid salaries, determined production quotas, issued payments for production resources, allotted apartments, cars, systemized education, social clubs and health care. The individual was made completely dependent on the soviet state for survival.

Over time, people born into the soviet system had little or no knowledge of alternative political, economic or social structures. Their perception of how government, the economy and society function was formed by the soviet system

itself. Daily existence taught them how to function within a system that fostered uniformity, conformity, subservience, passiveness, and discouraged individual initiative. Isolated from the rest of the world, people living under soviet domination were

> "expected to join what Havel's friend Ivan Klima called the 'community of the defeated,' and to abide by its basic rules: that there would only ever be one governing party, to which everything, including truth itself, belonged; that the world was divided into enemies and friends of the Party, and accordingly, that compliance with the Party policies was rewarded, dissent penalized; and, finally, that the Party no longer required the complete devotion of its subjects, only the quiet acceptance of its dictates" (Keane 2000, pgs. 232-233).

For nearly five decades, the people of Central and Eastern Europe lived in command societies in which most social, political and economic decisions were made for them, and individual initiative was discouraged. Their societies were dominated by a single party which controlled all resources and employment opportunities, controlled social interaction, controlled the availability of information, controlled freedom of movement, and used its economic power to promote "correct attitudes among the masses, by inducing conformity of thought and action" (Conquest 1968, p. 140). They managed their affairs within a narrow scope of approved activity, with no freedom of association, and no real possibility of forming nongovernmental organizations.

Democratization and the Development of Nongovernmetal Organizations (NGOs) in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe

The collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe released the fifty-year soviet grip on the region and the process of transforming the countries into democracies with market-dominated economic systems began. New constitutions replaced those implemented during soviet rule in the region, creating legal frameworks for the development of democratic societies. Laws and institutional structures were changed, and soon the basic hallmarks of democratic societies – the right of association, freedom of assembly, numerous political parties, free elections, the rule of law, and peaceful transfers of power – were acknowledged and evident in the post-communist Central and Eastern European countries.

Changes in laws and institutions eliminated some of the former structures and relationships that existed in the soviet system - multi-party systems replaced the single-party soviet political system and people regained the right of association, freedom of assembly, and freedom of movement - but in and of themselves, these changes did not transform the post-soviet Central and Eastern European countries into democracies. Many of the countries experienced partial democratization; formal democratic procedures and institutions have been introduced, but everyday practice lacks the democratic spirit.

By 1997, it was clear that "economic and democratic reform were complementary and heavily correlated," when the Freedom House Nations in Transit 1997 rankings showed that the Central and Eastern European countries that were guided by the rule of law and were successfully consolidating their market economies, were also making progress in their transitions to democracy (Shor 1997, p. 2). Less clear was that the transition from an authoritarian system of rule to a democratic system also depends on the emergence of a strong nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector. NGOs serve three vital roles in democracies: they convey public opinion to lawmakers formulating public policy; they advise the public of public policies and serve as an instrument of policy implementation; and finally, they independently fund and deliver services (Reeder 1999). In post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, the emergence of NGOs marked a shift from the previously existing balance of power in which the State was the dominating entity upon which citizens depended for survival, to one more conducive to a partnership between citizens and State; a shift away from totalitarianism toward a democratic form of governance.

Interestingly, despite the abundance of NGOs in the post-communist Central and Eastern European countries (Reeder 1999), the effectiveness of the NGO sectors in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe remained underdeveloped. This was due in part to the legislation passed with regard to the third sector, and in part due to the expectations of the NGOs themselves; in pushing for government funding, the NGOs remained closely tied to the government, rather than forming a truly independent sector. Many Central and East European governments tried to develop an adequate legal and institutional framework for the NGO sector (Romania, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania), but initially there seemed to be an undue emphasis in forming NGO/Government partnerships, in which NGOs were funded from the state budget (International Center for Not-For Profit Law, undated) and operated with a high degree of government oversight.

In light of the previous soviet-imposed system, this is not surprising. In the soviet system, state funds had been used to underwrite every official aspect of society, and to eradicate all that which was not state-sanctioned. The soviet system had discouraged innovation, experimentation, as well as independence of action and thought, and had fostered subservience, compliance, passiveness, uniformity and conformity. While the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe disturbed the existing status quo, the soviet culture of dominance and dependence did not disappear with the soviet system. As would be expected, those in power continued to hold on to it, protecting the rights and privileges that the soviet system had provided them. Those used to being dependent on the government continued to cling to it for support. And finally, by attaching NGOs to the government, each side took out a form of insurance – the government effectively maintained control, while the new NGOs gained a sense of security, because they were clearly government-sanctioned. This interdependence slowed the development of civil society and democracy in post-soviet societies.

As the NGO sectors continued to evolve in the post-communist countries, their very existence contributed to the process of democratization. Those post-communist countries that have encouraged the growth of the NGO sector (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary) over the past decade have made tremendous progress toward becoming democratic societies in a relatively short span of time. Those countries in the post-communist region that have actively quashed their NGO sector through legislation (e.g., Belarus), have progressed little along the path to becoming democratic societies.

The World Democracy Audit shows that Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia rank among the 34 countries that are listed as "unquestionably free," while Bulgaria and Romania are classed as "free but with a distance to go" (based on Lindley 2002 and World Audit 2002). Democratization has not progressed as far in the countries of the Confederation of Independent States (CIS). Russia ranks far below the post-communist Central and Eastern European countries, at 101 on the list of countries audited, but ranks ahead of seven other former soviet republics (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan). Moldova is the only one of the CIS countries that ranks among the "free, but with a distance to go" countries.

Strengthening the NGO Sector in Central and Eastern Europe

Developing adequate legal and institutional frameworks for their NGO sectors is an important step in developing a climate conducive to private initiative and the growth and development of the third sector in post-communist Central and Eastern European countries. Equally important is the development of public policies specifically geared toward undoing the soviet legacy of subservience, compliance, passiveness, uniformity and conformity, and the development of policies that return power to the people, creating a solid partnership between citizens and State. Koestenbaum (1991) provides a simple formula for empowerment:

Empowerment (E) is the product of autonomy (A), direction (D), and support (S), or

$$E = A \times D \times S$$

To promote *autonomy*, the Central and Eastern European governments should focus on projects that come from the initiatives of their citizens, rather than trying to create NGOs that fulfill government initiatives. In terms of *direction*, more than anything else, governments should pave the way for philanthropy by creating tax incentives (i.e. income tax deductions) for individuals and enterprises to support NGOs financially. Income tax deductions for charitable giving would make plain that the government respects individual choice, and encourages philanthropy. They would also serve to decentralize the current system in place in several countries (e.g., Hungary) where the government allows individuals to designate one percent of their personal income tax to the civil sector (only to NGOs that meet the government's beneficiary criteria) and an additional one percent to churches, which the government then distributes. Note the difference between this practice, and those of old democracies, such as the United States, where funds are given directly by the donor to his or her NGO of choice and a tax deduction subsequently taken. Finally, government should *support* the third sector by providing tax relief to NGOs, particularly public benefit organizations.

Conclusion

Public policy continues to impact organizational behavior in Central and Eastern Europe, because as the state sector shrinks in Central and Eastern

Europe, room for NGOs expands. By taking themselves out of the third sector, Central and Eastern European governments will create a political climate more conducive to private initiative and to the growth and development of NGOs. NGOs will form a true third sector – a sector active between the state sphere and the market sphere – and increasingly involve citizens in democracy through active participation. NGOs will also be free to convey public opinion to lawmakers formulating public policy; advise the public of public policies and serve as instruments of policy implementation; and, independently fund and deliver services. This, in turn, will increase democracy in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe.

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