

Pre-edit copy of book reviewed published in

**Democracy after Communism** edited by Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner.  
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. PP xxiv + 278; index. £14.00  
(paperback). ISBN 0-8018 – 7076 – 3.

*Democracy after Communism* is the latest collection of articles first published in the *Journal of Democracy*. Like these, it is intended primarily as a resource for teaching reader. The collection is divided into three parts, the first examining the distinctness of post-communist democratisation, the second and third covering the contrasting experiences of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (FSU). Valerie Bunce, suggests that the impact and duration of communist rule created novel social structures, simultaneous economic, political and (sometimes) state transformations; and patterns of regime exit that do not fit the modes of transition identified by Latin Americanists. She does, however, accept that, comparison of East and South may be valid for study common problems such as institutional design or as way of challenging to existing theory. Nodia, by contrast, argues that liberal democracy's status as a universal reference point does enable broad comparison. The most revealing, he suggests, is that between 'organic' classic democratisation in Western Europe and North America - where social and value change preceded regime change - and the 'ideological' transitions of post-communist states, where socio-economic change is less a cause than a *consequence* of democratisation. Successfully combining simultaneous democratisation and economic transformation in such circumstances, Leszek Balcerowicz argues, require politicians to take advantage of the early period of 'extraordinary politics', when the government's political capital is high and public resistance to reform low. For, as Aleksander Smolar notes, despite the use of 'civil society' as a rallying cry by dissident oppositions during

communist rule, post-communist democracies are usually characterised by the relative weakness of civil societies. The survival of former regime elite is another prominent feature of the region's politics. However, John Higley, Judith Kullberg and Jan Pakulski argue, *moderate* elite continuity is generally an indicator of consensus and inclusion conducive to democratic consolidation. Only *strong* elite continuity is linked with authoritarian backsliding. Charles H. Fairbanks examines the relative absence of the military as an actor in post-communist politics, which he sees as one of communism's few benevolent legacies. In the weak states and ethnic mini-states at the periphery of the FSU, however, ethnic or political militias *are* important political actors and as such merit greater scholarly attention..

Despite the public alienation from politics in Eastern Europe and the palpable loss of interest in the region and its 'revolutions of '89' among Western writers noted respectively by Richard Rose and Aleksander Smolar, Eastern Europe is on the whole a success story. Its democratic systems, although marked by corruption and a weak rule of law, are stable and, because of EU enlargement, are locked into a steady convergence course with Western Europe. As Jacques Rupnik observes, such success is attributable to a mixture of radical early reform, favourable geo-political context (weak Russia, democratic Germany, expanding EU with tough democratic conditionalities), the relative ethnic homogeneity of most states in the region; and, perhaps, the cultural legacy of the Habsburg Empire.

As the final section makes clear, Russia offers a more uncertain picture. Its contributors depict Russia as a partial democracy, where genuine pluralism, freedom of speech and electoral competition contend with an overweening, if inefficient, bureaucratic state,

ruthless clientelistic machine politics and the inclination of political élites towards state ‘management’ party politics, civil society and the media. Archie Brown terms Putin’s Russia a ‘flawed and skewed, pluralistic system, not a democracy’, Lila Shevtsova ‘bureaucratic semi-authoritarianism’ and Gregorii Yavlinsky an ‘artificial formal, sham democracy’. Nevertheless, as M. Steven Fish notes, in re-centralising the state, reining in the power of regional bosses and oligarchs and strengthening the legal system, Putin may lay the foundation of deeper, democratisation in the longer term. As Nodia suggests, the identification of democracy with the West makes it easier for new states that perceive themselves as ‘Western’ to reconcile state-building with democratisation. This in part explains the difficulties of democratisation in post-Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus discussed (in an all too brief essay) by Fairbanks, although, as Nadia Diuk’s essay on Ukraine, makes clear, problems of weak states and rapacious vested interests are common across the FSU.

*Democracy after Communism* is an uneven, but generally high quality, collection, which more than fulfills its stated purpose to be an accessible student reader. More seasoned researchers will, understandably, find little new, although the essays of Nodia and Fairbanks do stand out for their scope and sharpness.

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