

From Communism to Authoritarianism via Democracy: The Puzzle of Political Transformations in East Central Europe

Abstract

During the first two decades after 1989, countries of East Central Europe experienced a swift and successful democratization process and a relatively painless transition to a market economy. Consolidation of liberal democracy and working market economy opened the door to their accession to the NATO and the European Union. By 2004, it seemed that these countries became “normal” European democracies with respectable economic growth and that any concerns about the stability of their newly established democratic rule could be safely put to rest.

Yet, the third decade of post-communism has brought to power nationalist governments that have presided over the striking erosion of democratic commitments and liberal principles. FIDESZ in Hungary and PiS in Poland have begun deliberate assault on the rule of law and fundamental values of European integration, ignoring concerns of their European partners. The increasing shift to authoritarian rule and away from Europe is especially puzzling since these two countries were leading reformers under the communist rule, led the region in transition away from communism and were considered the success stories of post-communist transformations. This Lecture will focus on the current political developments in the region and on possible ways to understand the unfolding authoritarian turn.