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*DISSERTATION*

**ASPECTS OF TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY:  
THE CASES OF ROMANIA AND BULGARIA**

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# INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Berlin wall in the autumn of 1989 sent the message that the end of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe was very near after almost 45 years in the region. So was the case for Romania and Bulgaria too.

Romania was governed by the dictator Ceausescu who together with the notorious Securitate (the secret police) had established probably the most repressive regime against its population among all the regimes in Eastern Europe. Along with his failed policies had caused a tremendous deterioration of living standards in the Romanian people especially during the 80's. After bloody demonstrations against the regime in Timisoara and in other cities, a new group of politicians with Ion Iliescu as the leader, did a coup d' etat, executed Ceausescu and took over the leadership.

Bulgaria was ruled by Todor Zhivkov, a Stalinist politician, who remained extremely loyal to the Soviet Union for all of his tenure. Rapid changes began for Bulgaria with the change of the leadership in Soviet Union and the elevation in power of Gorbachev, a reform-minded politician. Soon enough, Zhivkov ran into trouble. Moreover, his discrimination policies against the Turkish minority with the assimilation campaign who reached its peak in 1989 and the ongoing economic hardship of the Bulgarians pushed a group of reformer communists to operate a coup against him.

These events initiated the transition to democracy in Romania and in Bulgaria. At that time, new leaders and the citizens had high expectations and hopes that democracy would take root quickly. However, due to complex situations, in reality it was not that easy. State economies had to be rebuilt. New political systems had to be installed and consolidated. The most crucial factor was that the leaders and the citizens had to break with their communist past,

which was not that simple. The new elites had to form democratic political institutions. The legal system had to be reformed. New constitutions had to be drafted to make them compatible with democracy. New leaders had to form societies where organization of a multiparty system could take place. The economic part of the transition was one of the most challenging aspects in view of privatization.

All these issues became apparent both in the case of Romania and Bulgaria during the first decade of the transition to democracy.

## **HYPOTHESES**

In some cases of transition democracy, it has been observed that political elites which initiated the transition – or at least a part of these political elites – also belonged to the previous communist regime. It will be an attempt in this paper to prove that this hypothesis is true for both the case of the political elite of Romania and Bulgaria too.

After 45 years of communist rule which proved to be a huge failure in all the levels (economically, politically, socially) it is anticipated that in the first free democratic elections after the fall of communism, opposition parties would win the elections.

# **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

## **THE PHASES OF DEMOCRATIZATION**

Democratization is defined by Linz and Stepan as: "democratization requires open contestation over the right to win control of the government, and this in turn requires free competitive elections, the results on which determine who governs" (Linz and Stepan 1996: 3 ).

The phases of democratization include "liberalization", "transition to democracy" and finally "democratic consolidation".

Liberalization is a period in which cracks appear in the ruling dictatorial regime, with the most prominent fault line being that between hard-liners and soft-liners. According to Linz and Stepan, liberalization "may entail a mix of policy and social change, such as less censorship of the media, somewhat greater space for the organization of autonomous working-class activities, the introduction of some legal safeguards for individuals ... and most important, the toleration of the opposition" (Linz and Stepan 1996: 3).

Transition phase is regarded as a period of great political uncertainty. This phase entails the broader and more complex processes associated with a institutionalization of a new democratic set of rules for political life, so this stage is regarded as a hybrid regime. The main feature of this stage is that institutions of the old regime co-exist with those of the new regime and authoritarians and democrats often share power, whether through conflict or by agreement.

The end of the period of democratic transition is complete when a new democracy has promulgated a new constitution and held free elections for political leaders with few barriers to mass

participation. However, it is difficult to distinguish the beginning of the phase of consolidation from the end of the period of democratic transition.

There are different definitions of democratic consolidation which are based on two conceptions of democracy. According to the minimalist (which emphasizes procedural or formal democracy) definition of democratic consolidation, democracy is consolidated when electoral competition is held regularly. The maximalist (focusing on the outcomes of policies such as institutionalization of political institutions, social justice and economic equality) definition includes not only procedural democracy, but also vital democratic elements, as guaranteed of civil rights, democratic checks on executive authority, punishment of human rights abuses etc.

Linz wrote that the main actors regard winning free elections as the only means to achieve power in a consolidated democracy "to put it simply, democracy must be seen as the only game in town".

## **THEORIES OF DEMOCRATIZATION**

Democratization studies examine and explain processes where by governments, states and societies attempt to move away from some form of authoritarianism towards some form of democracy (Grugel 2002: 12). Much of the literature on democratic transition has been referred to as "transition theory". Transition theories as theoretical models have been influenced by theoretical frameworks from the social science disciplines such as modernization theory, decision theory, political culture theory etc. Different theoretical approaches to transition theory have provided various analytical frameworks. In the rich literature on democratic transition, three are the major theoretical approaches on democratization.

## **MODERNIZATION THEORY**

The core aspects of modernization theory regard the direct correlation of democracy with economic growth, the rise of industry and income, the decline of agriculture, urbanization, rising literacy and education. In other words, for the modernization approach, democracy in a country has a strong correlation with the country's socio-economic development or level of modernization. For Seymour Martin Lipset: "the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy".

However, the modernization theory has received heavy criticism because it attempts to explain democratization considering capitalism, so democratization is narrowed only into capitalism. Also, it has been suggested that modernization theory is ahistorical and ethnocentric (Grugel 2002: 48-49) because it proposes that all societies can "copy" a transition that took place in a particular moment, leaving outside the difficulties that a society would face in copying a transition that happened in a different society and in different time.

## **TRANSITION THEORY**

This type of approach concentrated on the interaction of elite strategic choices as possible explanations for the success or failure of democratic transition. Proponents of this approach focused on the critical role of elites and their strategic choices, the splits within the authoritarian regime, and the compromise between the "soft-liners" and the "hard-liners". Those studies emphasized on the autonomy of political processes rather than the economic determinants of political change. Elite calculations, strategic choices and the interaction between choices were viewed as decisive in determining

political outcomes and whether or not democratic transition would occur at all.

As far as transition theory is concerned, there is criticism of being extremely elitist. In this theory, major emphasis is given on elites and the role of civil society and social and political struggles in the “building” of democracy is not analyzed properly. Transition theory focuses on short-term changes where the overall environment is very unstable. It does not explain why some countries do not have successful transitions while others have.

## **STRUCTURALISM**

The structuralism emphasizes on the changing structures of power that are favorable to democratization. Scholars of structuralism draw attention on how the shifting relationship between the state and classes shapes the political system (Grugel 2002: 52). Structuralists explain how democracy appears by giving attention to the transformation of the state through class conflicts over time, and do not reckon that democracy happens simply because some people (individuals, groups or classes) will try to put it into existence and democracy does not emerge immediately (Grugel 2002: 52). The advantage of this theory is that it gives the possibility of comparison across time as well as across countries or regions.

The main critiques on structuralism have been that its view of the world is too simple or simply wrong. According to Przeworski “in this formulation the outcome is uniquely determined by conditions, and history goes on without anyone ever doing nothing” (Grugel 2002: 55). Power is a concept so diffuse that it cannot be understood in any static way. Other weakness is that structuralism, which emphasizes on long-term historical change, cannot explain

the sudden democratization in Eastern and Central Europe and the countries of the ex Soviet Union.

## **MODES OF TRANSITION**

Many scholars have tried to find explanatory variables affecting democratic consolidation and many of them assume that the modes of democratic transition affect the consolidation phase because they believe that the features of the democratic transition process influence the patterns, contents, and degrees of democratic consolidation in distinct ways. They argue that it is necessary to examine why and how transitions take place in order to understand the prospects for democratic consolidation.

## **KARL AND SCHMITTER APPROACH**

Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter in their article "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe" (1991), offered an actor-oriented approach to the transitional setting.

Their starting point was the fact that regimes change from autocracy by a variety of modes. These modes can be categorized into a number of "modes of transition". The goal is to demonstrate that shifting alliances and strategic choices made by political actors, decide the outcome of the transition modes.

For Karl and Schmitter: "transitions are "produced" by actors who choose strategies that lead to change from one kind of regime to another. (...) they may be constrained by the choices available to them by prevailing social, economic and political structures and the interaction of strategies may often result in outcomes that no one

initially preferred, but nevertheless we believe that actors and strategies define the basic property space within which transitions can occur and the specific combination of the two defines which type of transition has occurred" (Karl and Schmitter 1991: 274).

The classification is based on two dimensions. The first dimension differentiates between elites ("from above") and masses ("from below") as the initiators of transitions and the second dimension reflects the transition strategy, separating those based on the unilateral recourse to force versus those based on multilateral willingness to compromise.

Four ideal types of transition modes appeared in the forms of pact, imposition, reform and revolution.

Pacts and impositions take place from above. Reforms and revolutions are led from below. Pacts and reforms in turn involve high degrees of multilateral compromise whereas impositions and revolutions are characterized by unilateral force.

1. Pacts are elite dominated compromises
2. Impositions consist of elites using force unilaterally and effectively to bring about a regime change against the resistance of incumbents forcing the transition
3. Reform is present when masses mobilize from below and impose a compromised outcome without resorting to violence
4. Revolution consists of masses rising up in arms and defeat the previous authoritarian rulers militarily

It is claimed that pacts have a positive impact on the prospects for successfully establishing democracy in a country, mainly because pacts a) include all significant political actors whose interests must be respected in order to gain their consent on the new political regime and the new distribution of power it brings with

it b) make pacting actors mutually dependant on each other c) exclude certain issues from the negotiation table that are of vital interest to some of the participants in the negotiation.

## **ROMANIA**

Romanian people in 80s suffered great economic and social hardship after the rule of dictator Ceausescu. Ceausescu's leadership blamed the country's economic performance not on the bad-organized Stalinist system, but on the work of managers and punished workers by loss of pay when output in a particular enterprise fell short of official targets.

### **THE FIRST SIGN OF PUBLIC ANGER**

In November 1987 Romanian workers went on strike in Brasov an industrial city north of Bucharest protesting for the cuts on their wages because of the "non-fulfillment" of the production plans and the overall deterioration of living conditions. Ceausescu suppressed the Brasov strike, strikers were arrested and punished but this event was the first sign of dissidence against the Ceausescu regime. The riot in Brasov on 15 November 1987, was the main political event that announced the imminent fall of Communism in Romania.

Within the Communist Party, six moderate members on March 1989, wrote an open letter to Ceausescu criticizing his abuses of power and his economic policies, calling for his resignation. The so-called "letter of six" was circulated in Western media (Radio Free Europe) and it was described as the manifesto of an underground organisation called the National Salvation Front (FSN).

However, Ceausescu responded with repression isolating the authors of the letter.

Ceausescu rejected the reforms that were offered to him by Gorbachev (perestroika and glasnost, especially toward Romania's Hungarian-speaking minority in Transylvania) and he resisted on his hard-line policies until the end of his rule, also opposing reform elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the progress of reform in Soviet Union together with his resistance to change, resulted in the "building" of opposition in late 1980s especially after "demonstration effects" in Eastern Europe.

At the beginning, events of dissidence had little impact on the regime (from intellectuals and former high-ranking Party officials), lacking organization and leadership, having no strategy for ousting Ceausescu and replacing communism.

Romania never developed anything like Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 or Poland's Committee for Worker's Defense, due to the force of the regime's political police and the intimidation that this police caused to the Romanians. Furthermore, the Party had convinced the masses that the regime was eternal and had the resources to solve "all" of Romania's socio-economic problems.

However, in early December 1989, in Timisoara, the attempt of Securitate to arrest a dissident cleric of Hungarian background, Lazlo Tokes, and the intention of the local citizens to protect him, became the sparkle of the revolution outbreak. Authorities tried to disperse the crowd by killing hundreds of people. The impressive popular demonstration taking place in Timisoara between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1989 and in the course of which bloody clashes took place between civilians and soldiers, showed that the masses uprising was a spontaneous one, contributing decisively to the outing of the communist dictatorial regime in Romania (Ciuhandu).

## **ELITES AT THE LAST MOMENTS OF COMMUNISM**

In Bucharest, demonstrations started a few days later. It was triggered by Nicolae Ceausescu's speech from December 21<sup>st</sup> 1989. Ceausescu's speech did not take into account either the dead from Timisoara (shot on his order by the army), or the state of spirit of Bucharest. That speech was booed, being followed by a popular demonstration. Ceausescu with his wife tried to flee from the balcony of the Central Committee to rescue themselves from the angry masses moving against them. On 22 December Ceausescu fled the building and when the helicopter was landed, they got arrested and after a hasty trial they were sentenced to death and they were executed on 25 December 1989.

## **REVOLUTION OR A COUP D'ETAT?**

In the midst of this chaos emerged Ion Iliescu, a former high-ranking PCR official who had lost favor with Ceausescu in the 1970s. Together with the youthful Petre Roman, a university professor whose father had been a founder of the PCR, Iliescu consolidated a disparate coalition of dissidents, former communists and military leaders into an interim government called the National Salvation Front (FSN) Initially, both Romanians and westerners believed that the Romanian revolution was a popular uprising supported by the army but a series of events probably led to the change of that belief.

The execution of Ceausescu after a brief trial where the ex-dictator of Romania shouted to the people who went on the trial "traitors" and the creation of FSN raised questions about the nature of the events of previous days and about the future leadership of

the country. Was the overthrow of Ceausescu a popular revolt or a well organized coup d 'etat from authorities inside the CP together with the military?

Many discontents started from the overlapping of actions:

1. The spontaneous movement of the masses with on the spot found leaders.
2. Ceausescu's arrest by top of line military after a previous agreement with the group of the communist reformers. The example of cooperation between the army General Victor Atanasie Stanculescu on the one hand and Ion Iliescu and Silviu Brucan on the other hand, has become notorious.

As Ciuhandu considers "it is certain that the flight of the Ceausescu's from the balcony of the Central Committee organized by army General Victor Atanasie Stanculescu (a top military of the communist regime) with a helicopter, was followed by the arrest, trial and execution of the couple by the group of the communist reformers who drew up the jury as well as the trial. All was possible in the situation in which many of the former communist leaders had switched sides". Population accepted the officials intervention who had renounced the regime almost a week after the revolt in Timisoara.

## **INITIATION OF TRANSITION**

The creation of FSN was announced officially to the public in radio and tv by Ion Iliescu on 22 December 1989, holding the power after the execution of Ceausescu and forming an interim government with himself being the president and Petre Roman, an university professor whose father had been a founder of the PCR, as the interim Prime Minister. The initial membership of FSN came from diverse backgrounds: intellectuals, students, army officers but the leaders were mostly former communist officials.

The origin of FSN and its leaders is surrounded by a certain mystery. Iliescu, a former high-ranking PSR official who had lost favor with Ceausescu in the 1970's, was anti-Stalinist, but he was far from being an anti-communist (he has allegedly stated that he was in favor of a democratic model without pluralism). FSN's takeover from a conspiracy perspective is regarded as a movement by disappointed anti-Ceausescu people from the second echelon of the CP together with the military and even Securitate to get rid of Ceausescu, assume power themselves, and institute a new form of party dictatorship behind a façade of democracy. These conspirators may have been working for sometime toward their goal of ousting Ceausescu and taking power. They waited for the right opportunity to make a coup. The episode in Timisoara seems to have provided them this opportunity. (Goldman 1996: 278).

Even Gorbachev may have helped in the formation of FSN, seeing in Iliescu a more moderate leader than the Stalinist Ceausescu.

FSN quickly assured the mission of restoring civil order and immediately took seemingly democratic measures. The CP was outlawed and social unpopular measures of Ceausescu as ban on abortion was rolled back.

Political parties began to emerge, including the formation of new parties representing ecological and ethnic minority groups and the "resurrection" of the three pre-war parties: the National Liberal Party, the National Peasants' Party and the Social Democratic Party all of whom were led by non-communists and former political prisoners of the communist regime. Those parties enjoyed a great amount of public support in a very short time.

Subsequently, FSN enjoyed great popularity at this moment and emphasized its intention to act as a provisional steward that would organize the following democratic elections and announced that is not a party, so it would not nominate candidates.

In late January 1990, however, FSN reversed course and announced that it would compete in the election and in February 1990 it registered as a party. FSN's sudden change produced doubts about the legitimacy of the Front's exercise of even transitional power. There was growing discontent over the prominent role of former high level communist party officials within the Front who seemed reluctant to confront the legacies of the most odious elements of the old regime, namely the nomenklatura and the Securitate, which led to a tense series of demonstrations and counter demonstrations in late January and early February. Additional pressure came from the international community for the Front to hold the elections as quick as possible. In February 1990, the ruling National Salvation Council was dissolved and the Provisional Council of National Unity (CPUN) was established in its place with over 200 members. The CPUN, in effect, acted as a transitional government through which proposed measures were debated and amended before implementation. Although it included representatives from the opposition parties and other independent groups, the CPUN was dominated by the Front. Its 21 member Executive Board elected Iliescu president and Petre Roman prime minister. The CPUN professed its main purpose to be establishment of the legal framework for the presidential and parliamentary elections held in May 1990, Romania's first multiparty elections since 1946.

## **THE ELECTIONS OF 1990**

It was announced that a 60-day campaign would begin in March 1990. The interest for participating in the elections was great with more than 80 political parties competing for seats in the legislature.

All major parties espoused democracy and market reforms to varying degrees. FSN appeared to some as a heroic organization that had played a crucial role in the December Revolution. It established its base principally among former RCP apparatchiks fearful of losing their positions and among wide sectors of the population dependant on the state, to whom it promised a “third way” economic policy that would evidently avoid the disruptions of fast pace capitalism (Bugajski 2002: 844). FSN proposed slow, cautious reforms in the economy and social safety net. Recognizing the anxiety that many Romanians were feeling at the post communist era, it was constantly repeating the consequences (massive unemployment), that will affect the Romanians from the plans of the opposition parties to implement privatization. FSN also sustained support by increasing food supplies. It is certain that the Front did not identify itself as a party and presented little in the way of ideology. FSN’s support basis was in the countryside attracting the older, poorer and less educated voters who depended upon agriculture for their livelihood.

The Front’s chief ideologist was the Marxist and Neocommunist reformer Silviu Brucan, who was opposed to a multiparty political system.

Moreover, FSN accused the other parties as traitors, that they would sell the country to foreigners and that they had been organized and supported from aboard (Goldman 1996: 281).

## **ADVANTAGES OF THE FSN**

Throughout the election campaign the Front had lot of advantages against the other parties. First of all, FSN had clear structural advantages, meaning the control over information and

means of communication and campaign financing. In spite of the fact that there were electoral law provisions guaranteeing for all parties tv and radio time, the opposition suffered from limited access to the single, state owned tv. What is more, tv news coverage of the campaign was biased in favor of FSN. Printing facilities and distribution networks for newspapers and journals were monopolized by FSN government and there was limited access to the recording studios and other production equipment.

A second advantage was the reports of violence, harassment and intimidation directed at candidates and party members of the opposition initiated by police or Front supporters. Iliescu did not provide the essential assistance for a safe and tolerant campaign. On the contrary, he issued public statements suggesting that opposition party rallies were illegal, declaring that the police would not guarantee the safety of the demonstrators. As it can be clearly understood, acts of violence against the opposition were not reported to police by these parties, believing that this would be dangerous.

## **THE OPPOSITION PARTIES**

As far as opposition is concerned, the National Liberal Party, the National Peasants' Party and the Social Democratic Party were the parties with historical continuity.

To the opposition, FSN was a manipulative band of neo-communists determined to re-impose one party rule in Romania.

The National Liberal Party (PNL) founded in 1948 was a right-of-center party. It had been disbanded in 1948 by the communist regime. It sought for a resumption of the throne by exiled King Michael. It was reconstituted in 1990, had no clearly defined base aside from a loose coalition of professionals, students and intellectuals. The PNL was led by Radu Campeanu, who returned to

Romania after 15 years of exile. Liberals were craving for a fast economic modernization program including privatization and the re-establishment of property rights. The party also was in favor of an establishment of legal institutions that would guarantee civil and political rights and support a multiparty system.

The National Peasants' Party was founded in the pre-war period and then disbanded by the communists. The party refused to cooperate with FSN because FSN had many former communist officials. Before the elections the party agreed to merge with a newly formed group of Christian Democracy and came up Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party ( PNTCD ). The party chose Ion Ratiu, a wealthy entrepreneur who returned in the Romania in March 1990, as its presidential candidate. It too advocated transition to market economy with an emphasis on the de-collectivization of agriculture, the return of property confiscated by the communist regime and the privatization of state farms. Also it called for a parliamentary democracy and the return of Republic of Moldova to full Romanian control.

Most of the other opposition parties were tiny, rendering many opposition leaders to believe that the FSN encouraged the creation of numerous small parties to divide its competition. Exemptions were the Romanian Ecologist Movement (MER) which became Eastern Europe's largest environmentalist group with a membership of 60.000 people and the Party of Hungarian Minority.

The results of the election on 20 May 1990 reinforced the opinion that Romania remained a one-party state. FSN won an amazing proportion of votes in the presidential and parliamentary elections with Iliescu receiving 85 % of the votes and FSN gained 66 % and 67 % of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate.

The Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania received 7.2 % of the votes, meaning that this party successfully dominated the vote of the Hungarian minority. The National Liberal Party received 6.41 %.

## **THE REASONS BEHIND FSN'S VICTORY**

The great election victory of FSN can be explained for a number of reasons. Apart from the previous analysis regarding incidents of violence, intimidation, media control of FSN, another factor is the inability of opposition to form a unified coalition against FSN. On the contrary, opposition leaders fought amongst themselves, leaving no signs of cooperation.

Furthermore, opposition clearly made a wrong calculation about the support that their parties would enjoy from the voters, not giving a necessary attention to the fact that people not only distrusted political parties, but they also had strong conservative instincts desiring a strong leadership and stability. Fearful of change, voters in the countryside contributed heavily to the FSN's victory. Opposition's parties support was strong only in the city areas, where less than half of the population of Romania resided, and appealed to the younger, better educated and more affluent voters, the university students, the professional intelligentsia and other groups eager for real political liberalization and an complete break with a communist past.

As a conclusion, the systematic violence directed against opposition parties, raised serious doubt on the authenticity of the countries democratic transition, because this meant that the massive internal security network continued to operate against political activists on behalf of the state.

The events that followed the first free democratic elections after the fall of communism, without any doubt, made clear to the Romanians that a lot of things should be improved in order to a genuine democracy to be installed in the country and the initial euphoria after the events of December 1989 began to wither away.

In June 1990, Iliescu called for the third time after the revolution miners from Jiu Valley to Bucharest to attack to the protestors who were demonstrating against the government. The international community was shocked by the death of 6 people during the events but Iliescu did not condemn the miners, something that made clear to everyone about the nature of the Iliescu regime and "pushed" opposition leaders to work together more closely.

Two major political events took place after the 1990 elections: the development of a coalition which brought together many of the opposition parties and a major internal split within FSN.

Romanians were caught unprepared when in the end of 1990 the FSN government and the Prime Minister Roman introduced an economic package of shock therapy in spite of the fact that during the campaign before the elections, they had made statement that they were against of these measures and in favor of gradualism, a slow pace of economic reforms.

Especially the liberalization of prices on goods and the devaluation of the Romania's currency, increased the economic hardship of the Romanians. Also Roman passed a land reform law regulating the return of confiscated land to its original owners, a law on privatization and a law on foreign investment. All measures were considered positive by organizations as the International Monetary Fund and the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation.

## **THE FORMATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION OF ROMANIA (CDR)**

Considering all these facts and the growing public dissatisfaction with FSN, opponents outside of the parliament began to explore the formation of a broad-based opposition coalition. During the second half of 1990 and early 1991, movements like the Anti-Totalitarian Forum and the Civic Alliance emerged in an attempt to consolidate opposition to the FSN among student organizations, intellectuals and trade unions. The Civil Alliance movement had appeal as an alternative opposition force that was open to supporters of all parties. In early 1991 the opposition parliamentary parties initiated "Democratic Alliance" seeking support for a unified opposition. Meanwhile, the Civil Alliance movement was turned into a party called the Party of the Civil Alliance. In the summer of 1991, 6 opposition parties formed the National Convention for the Installation of Democracy (the three pre-war parties, the Hungarian Democratic Union, the Civic Alliance Party and the Romanian Ecologist Party) popularly known as the Democratic Convention. The coalition later attracted 12 other small parties and civic organizations (University Solidarity, Association of Former Political Prisoners).

In the autumn of 1991 the streets of Bucharest filled up again with miners of Jiu Valley but at this time they were demonstrating against the government seeing the ongoing deterioration of living standards with the demand of resignation of both president Ilescu and prime-minister Roman. Roman resigned and he was succeeded by Teodor Stolojan who intended to guide the country through elections as quickly as possible due to the political instability that was prevailing at that moment.

A new constitution was adopted by the Romanian parliament in November 1991 declaring that Romania is semi-presidential republic. Members of CDR thought that referendum should be in place, on whether to restore the monarchy or not, but this was rejected. Referendum for the approval of the constitution was scheduled on December 8 1991 and it was announced that it was approved by 77.3 % of those who voted.

## **SPLIT OF FSN**

The movement that won the elections in 1990, had within its ranks members of all the wings of ideological spectrum. This diversity could be apparent in actions as Front's appeal to nationalism although its self definition in March 1991 as "center-leftist party of social-democratic orientation". The foreseeing split of FSN became unavoidable because of the drop of FSN's popularity after the country's bad economic conditions. Internal issues in FSN centered on the reform agenda. Petre Roman who was willing for more rapid and extensive reforms, whereas Iliescu was desiring gradual reforms. At FSN's national conference held on March 1992 Roman's agenda prevailed and Iliescu left FSN and formed a new party called the Democratic Front of National Salvation (FDSN). Certainly, this Roman-Iliescu struggle confirmed the opinion that FSN could not continue with the existing framework. Iliescu's supporters criticized their opponents as political amateurs and saw themselves as the guarantors of social protection. Roman's supporters comprehended the struggle as a battle between a new generation of democratic reformers and old-guard communists. Opposition described it as a fight between opportunists who wanted to divide up the country's riches quickly and take the largest pieces for themselves (FSN), and communist authoritarians wanting to

sustain centralized structures with a high interest in business (FDSN).

Utterly, FDSN was composed of former communists controlling institutions as the presidency, the senate and the Romanian Information Service (SRI). Although it claimed to adopt a gradual reform program, FDSN's parliamentarists were willing to put obstacles to free market measures. Also FDSN members often resorted to highly nationalist appeals when there were pressured from the West. FDSN supported Iliescu for re-election in the presidency along with the reconstituted communist party, the Socialist Party of Labor (PSN) and the extremist Party of Greater Romania (PRM). FDSN campaign had the slogans "we began together, let's continue together" and "the right man for the county".

As far as FSN is concerned, it was clear that it had become as any other Romanian party, losing members of parliament and officials in the countryside. But now it was homogenous group of young, ambitious politicians decided to continue free market economic reforms and they were more sensitive to western concerns.

## **CHANGES IN CDR**

Internal political struggles also emerged within the ranks of CDR. Radu Campeanu and National Liberal Party decided to leave the coalition in late March 1992, claiming that UDMR's presence undermined CDR's probabilities for a victory in the elections. This decision also led to an internal split in PNL. A new party called National Liberal Party-Democratic Convention (PNL-CD) chose to remain in the Convention. Convention also accepted the National Liberal Party-Youth Wing (PNL-AT) which had split from PNL in July 1990.

In June 1992 CDR elected Emil Constantinescu as its presidential candidate. Constantinescu was supposed to promote the change and national reconciliation in the post-communist Romania with a slogan "vote (for) the change". He rapidly gained popularity in urban areas in particular.

In 1992, the elections signified popular acceptance of Iliescu's conservatism, regarding his beliefs on a very gradual reduction of state control over the economic life of the country and the preservation of former communists in crucial positions. Romanians believed in his strong leadership and that he was the right person to protect them in a rapidly changed era. The political cleavage was once more revealed between major urban centers and the countryside. Rural voters, fearful of change and grateful for the restoration of most agricultural land to farmers, strongly favored Iliescu and FDSN, while the urban electorate favored CDR, which advocated for quicker reforms. UDMR although it was aligned with CDR, did not participate in the coalition. There was the belief that it could win more seats for the Convention if it ran its own party list because of the strong identification ethnic Hungarians felt with the UDMR. This was a wise decision as they manifested their position as the party for Hungarian minority.

Iliescu's conservative FDSN shifted rhetorically in the direction of "red-brown" parties: the Socialist Labor Party (PSN), the Party of Romanian National Unity (PUNR), and the Greater Romania Party (PRM). Nationalist rhetoric became an important factor in Romanian politics. In the period before the elections, political forces consolidated in two broad groupings, which may be characterized as collectivist-nationalist and liberal-universalist (Crowther: 370). The elections of 1992 illustrated clearer political competition in comparison with the completely FSN-dominated founding elections. Winner was FDSN and Iliescu but at no point they came close to the percentages that they received at the previous election.

The FDSN (renamed in Party of Romanian Social Democracy – PDSR – in July 1993 ) formed a government under prime minister of Vacaroiu with parliamentary support from the nationalist Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR), and Greater Romania Party (PRN) as well as from Socialist Labor Party (PSM).

PDSR after the elections found itself unable to effectively reform or manage the country's economy, something that led to political and economic stagnation. Ilescu continued to stabilize the support that PDSR enjoyed among peasants and workers and also tried to postpone substantive reforms in order not to cause problems in the elite affiliated with the party.

The most important feature of the period 1992-1996 was the ongoing corruption, nepotism and the "influential role that holdover elements of the communist regime continued to play in public life. These included both managers from the state sector enterprises and the nomenklatura class of politically connected individuals who benefited financially from the economy's intermediate stage between market and plan, in essence trading on their access to the state" (Crowther: 382). Inefficient and with high debts state-owned enterprises were highly receiving state subsidies because these enterprises were controlled by members of the elite allied with the regime. High level civil servants hostile to market capitalism hindered the activities of businesses in the private sector.

Nevertheless, Vacaroiu promoted measures so as to control inflation, to move faster the privatization program. Romania's tax system was rationalized, and deficit spending was sharply reduced (Roper 2000: 96).

In spite of the efforts, economic stagnation remained a fact in Romania.

In the political sphere, the governing coalition was facing huge internal problems. In January 1994, the stability of the coalition became problematic when the PUNR threatened to withdraw its support, unless given cabinet portfolios. After intensive negotiations, in August, two PUNR members received cabinet portfolios in the government. In September, the incumbent justice minister also joined the PUNR. PRM and PSM left the coalition in October and December 1995 respectively. Overall, the cooperation was highly unpopular among other European leaders and in no case it did not upgrade the profile of Romania internationally as a country moving to democracy. This was the most conservative regime to govern Romania in the post-communist era and was determined to block any effort of the democratic groups to obtain power (Goldman 1996: 286). At the end of 1995, Vacaroiu's government had lost public and parliamentary support but it continued to rule due to the support of president Iliescu. Romanians, especially in Bucharest, hated this government because it had done little to improve living conditions.

Until the elections of 1996 the opposition parties continued to work together and were able to present a stronger and more coherent CDR in 1996. In addition, a new coalition was born when Petre Roman's new party, the Democratic Party (PD), and the Social Democratic Party (PSDR) formed the Social Democratic Union (USD).

In the elections of 1996 CDR came out a clear winner and formed a new coalition government under CDR Prime Minister Victor Ciorbea. Emil Constantinescu was the new president, winning his opponent Ion Iliescu in the second round.

The vote in these elections was a vote of dissatisfaction for the economic hardships, the declining living standards, the corruption. The vote was a movement away from Iliescu and PDSR

rather than an ideological movement towards CDR and Constantinescu.

CDR invited Petre Roman's Democratic Party and UDMR into government in order to secure its electoral majority.

To accomplish the goals of EU and NATO accession, the new CDR government planned a radical restructuring of the economy, in compliance with the desires of the International Monetary Fund. Its first goals were to reduce budget and trade deficits, cut governmental social spending, and eliminate "non-profitable" state sector enterprises either through privatization or through outright closures.

CDR quickly ran into trouble. The previous government's legacy of international debt, the fiscal imbalance, and the overvalued exchange rate presented a serious obstacle to new reform efforts. The ambitious reform agenda was proved to be a tremendous challenge even for CDR itself. Inflation rose to 151 % in 1997 as a result of implementation of liberalization policies, real wages declined by one fourth.

The immaturity of the political elite in terms of corruption did not serve CDR well neither. Charges were brought against senior officials of the previous administration but it proved difficult to follow through on prosecutions of individuals connected with the political elite (Gallacher 2001: 396). Once they assumed power, it very quickly became apparent that the reformers themselves were corrupted. The country's ambitious economic reform program stagnated and the government was criticized by IMF for delaying the privatization program. Because of the absence of political consensus Romania's economic transformation slowed down in the late 1990's. Officials remained nervous about the social implications of their reform measures. They feared public protests against financial hardship and the planned closure of several state enterprises.

The privatization and restructuring of several major state industries was obstructed despite the government's commitment to a market economy.

Within the government, the CDR and its coalition partners represented a broad range of political perspectives. The CDR itself was a coalition of smaller parties including the National Peasant Christian Democratic Party (PNTCD), the National Liberal Party (PNL), the National Liberal Party-Democratic Convention (PNL-CD) and the Democratic Party (DP).

The task of holding all of the parties in government together was not an easy one and the government was hardly able to govern effectively, something that is testified by three changes of prime ministers in the course of four years.

Romanians were faced with a failed second chance of reform. Disillusionment with the reformist parties was both deep and widespread. 75.9 % of the population favored a market economy but only 7.6 % expressed positive attitudes toward political parties in general and only one of the governing parties (PNL 6.6 %) could claim more than 5 % support. Only 4 % expressed any level of positive reaction to government's effort to deal with corruption.

This ongoing weakness of the democratic system generated a political crisis. Romanians were deeply disappointed by all the successive political authorities that governed the country between 1990–2000, a decade of political instability, corruption, and great hardship.

The beginning of a new era in Romanian politics was marked in 2000 elections (won by ex-communist). Political actors were pushed to adopt new strategies in order to reinvent themselves. The increasingly rapid integration of new stage in European Union was an essential factor in this process.

It should be emphasized that Ilescu and prime minister Nastase decided to appeal not to the dissatisfied with the consequences of the political and economic transition as they did in the past, but to these groups of the population that did not support them in the past – the urban middle class and those groups committed to European integration.

Furthermore, Ilescu avoided any alliance with a Greater Romania Party as he did in 1992-1996 and assured a majority through an alliance with Hungarian Minority Party (UDMR).

Many crucial reforms were undertaken after 2000, as the introduction of legislation in respect to the use of minority languages in public affairs that benefited the Hungarian Minority. Those reforms made the Romanian government a more serious partner for discussion with the EU.

To conclude, we could say that 2000 elections signaled the end of the political transition after a very difficult decade.

## **BULGARIA**

On 10 November 1989, a day after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Todor Zhivkov's "resignation" was accepted after a meeting of the BCP's Politburo and Secretariat. This event initiated Bulgaria's transition to democracy.

But how did we get to that point? What were the reasons behind that "resignation"? Who were responsible for that?

In order to answer to these vital questions, we should bear in mind the bad economic and social conditions that the country faced on the last decade of communist rule.

In the 80's the economic growth rate started to slow down and it became apparent that the economy was in a deep crisis.

Foreign debt reached ten billion US dollars in 1989. Energy shortages arose because Soviet Union, which for many decades exported oil and gas at privileged prices with the exchange of enormous influence in the internal politics of Bulgaria, announced that they would stop these practices.

Moreover, there was a high shortage of consumer goods and an overall decline of living standards, rendering the Bulgarians hostile against the government. Furthermore, the rapid industrialization of the country was accompanied with an increasing environmental pollution. Bulgaria suffered from an ecological disaster as bad as anywhere else in Europe. "Under the communist regime, a production-at-all-costs economy promoted short-term output goals at the expense of nature and of human health. The system of party domination, bureaucratic and personal discretion and public corruption aggravated the problem.

Finally, the hollowness of apparent legal protection, left the environment almost totally defendless against degradation" (Friedberg and Zaimov 1998: 83).

The overall deterioration of the economy was accompanied by rampant corruption among the communist party's apparatchiks and the security police.

The main problem of Zhivkov through 80's was about how to reconcile political and economic reform but in a framework that guarantees Party's continuing role in society.

## **THE LAST PHASE OF COMMUNISM IN BULGARIA**

When Gorbachev took over the leadership of Soviet Union and craved for immediate and deep reforms both economically and socially as well (perestroika and glasnost), it was inevitable that Zhivkov (as he was always loyal to Soviet Union), would in his turn propose and implement such reforms adopted in the Bulgarian context.

There were three major issues: "Firstly, it became clear that the Soviet Union was neither willing nor able to go on propping the Bulgarian economy, in view of its own desperate needs. Secondly, glasnost would mean allowing criticism, although Bulgarian intellectuals had hitherto been kept unusually docile. Thirdly, a Bulgarian perestroika would entail the grave political risk of demanding real and sustained sacrifices from the Bulgarian people" (East 1992: 23).

In 1987, Zhivkov represented the "July Concept", a campaign against bureaucracy, corruption and inefficiency which quickly took back, wanting to keep perestroika out of Bulgaria. Nevertheless, it seemed to be a first sign that Zhivkov could not

anymore control the party and the country and strengthened the courage among the weak opposition forces and the reformist faction in the BCP who desired more effective changes.

## **CLEAVAGE WITHIN THE RULING ELITE**

Already since the mid 80's, a kind of intellectual and technocratically minded opposition was critical of the regime. This opposition, consisting of younger members of the nomenklatura, pushed Zhivkov to promote reforms, accusing him of not following the spirit of times and the changes in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Environmental problems and above all the expel of Turkish minority after Zhivkov's decision, provoked the initiation of a strong cleavage within the ruling elite.

Zhivkov in the winter of 1984-85 called for an enforced Bulgarianization of ethnic Turkish minority, replacing their names with Christian Slavonic ones. He tried to legitimate the regime and sought for public support by "playing" the nationalist card. In the summer of 1989 the assimilation campaign was ordered to speed up and after the refusal and demonstrations of ethnic Turks, Zhivkov decided to open the borders, so as to allow the minority to migrate to Turkey. Over 300.000 ethnic Turks moved to Turkey and Bulgaria was condemned internationally for this action.

The members of the anti-Zhivkov cleavage within BCP aware of the intellectual criticism from below, decided that only a coup d'etat would calm down the whole situation. Considering the fact that the Soviets would not protect Zhivkov because they were reluctant to maintain military and political hegemony in Eastern Europe, a coup d'etat finally took place.

It was organized by the Prime Minister Georgi Atanasov, the foreign minister Petar Mladenov (who visited Moscow just before the Central Committee Meeting) and the minister of foreign economic relations, Andrei Lukanov. They had also ensured the neutrality of the army, as the minister of defense General Dobri Dzurov, and old supporter of Zhivkov, refused to back him (Giatzidis 2002: 75) and voted for his replacement by Petar Mladenov on 10 November 1989.

## **MAIN FEATURES OF THE COUP**

There were three main features of the coup: First, high ranking members of the communist party carried out the coup: it was change from the top and not the result of a popular mass movement. In this respect, it resembles the political reforms in the Soviet Union under the banner of perestroika.

Second, the coup was thought necessary because of widespread discontent traceable to worsening economic problems.

Third, leaders within the Party, the military and the militia preferred reform and self-preservation, to confrontation and possible defeat and banishment from politics altogether. (Melone 1998: 28)

Those who removed Zhivkov aimed to reform the party from within by creating a new type of democratic socialist party. They pledged to promote pluralism, eliminate the role of the state security forces, promote respect for the rule of law, halt the persecution of the ethnic Turks and allow opposition groups to register legally. But the BCP still controlled the process of change and "in contrast to Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia where the

transition to democracy followed a path of inter-elite negotiation or an implosion of the old elites, in Bulgaria the communists initially managed to hold on to political power by pre-emptive reforms and the strength of their local entrenchment, particularly in the countryside" (Kitschelt 1995: 146). Only in this way the communist party could have managed to maintain a strong influence over the transition process and we should not forget that BCP did not collapse but renamed to Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP).

## **TRANSITION IN A PEACEFUL MANNER**

The transition to democracy took place under a very difficult environment (country's economic crisis, the issue with Turkish minority) but rather peacefully for several reasons: The common political background of the new political elite. The anti-communist opposition that was formed was inexperienced in politics so it had to appeal to former members of the BCP. Secondly, there was consensus on the question of redistribution of national wealth (restitution of the property confiscated by the communists). Thirdly, the "round table" talks between all political forces (except for MRF) at the beginning of the transition. The strategy of BSB (instead of confronting with the opposition, something that would probably have disastrous consequences for BSB, chose to cooperate with them) proved to be ideal, because in this manner gained political legitimacy and appeared as a party that should have a word in Bulgarian politics.

The national round table (which began in January 1990) served to be a provisional parliament aiming to create a new constitution. At the end of national round table negotiations a

national consensus on common principles was established with respect to the following: the political system, the economic system, the basic rights and freedoms of citizens, the organization of state power under the transition to parliamentary democracy, a strong competent and responsible government and a call for elections (Melone 1994: 271).

An important issue of democratic transition is the adoption of a new constitution. The constitution of 1991, "which was modeled on the constitutional tradition of the developed democracies, lays the foundations of a parliamentary, social and law-based state, asserts the division of power and provides for a plural society whose citizens enjoy equal rights and the freedoms normally associated with democracy.

The constitution established a parliamentary form of government, with a directly elected president, and a Constitutional Court to oversee parliament's compliance with the constitution. The electoral system is proportional, with a 4 % threshold of parliamentary representation. One of the more controversial provisions limits the power of the President to security matters and ceremonial functions (Giatzidis 2002: 51).

Party and political pluralism was restored and rather quickly independent-minded political activists were forced to scramble to create new organizations or revive old political parties to participate in the discussions although there were no active dissident movements at the time.

In December 1989 and in the early 1990 the BCP renamed to the new Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) made up of former communist party members, eliminated all references to communism and Marxian socialism in its program and policies. It gave up its political monopoly, halted the persecution of Bulgarian Turks and invited those who had fled to return to Bulgaria. Finally, the BSP agreed to elections for a new parliament, with the aim that this new

parliament (Grand National Assembly) will draft a new constitution that would make Bulgaria a democratic and pluralistic state.

The new opposition came from an evolving middle class made up of people owed their professional success to communists, frustrated by Zhivkov's failure to adopt the political reforms of Soviet perestroika, joined groups and clubs critical of the regime for not implementing perestroika reforms. Some groups were concerned with human-rights abuses, in particular with a discrimination against the Turkish minority. Workers organized Podkrepa (support) an independent trade union in February 1989.

Another group was the Independent Association for the Defense of Human Rights established in 1988.

These groups encouraged in November 1989 by the "demonstration effects", the attacks of communist party rule in Eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia, performed large anti-governmental demonstrations in Sofia by middle class Bulgarian citizens, calling for democratization (Goldman 1996: 89-90).

In the "round table" talks Mladenov chose June 10 as election day in spite of the fact that many party leaders as Lukanov wanted elections to be held earlier "to take full advantage of the BSP's control of the state and of the weaknesses of new groups challenging the party's leadership". A proportional representation was agreed to be established in these elections.

## **THE TWO MAIN POLITICAL OPPONENTS**

The initial stage of transition was dominated by one major division and conflict, reform communism versus liberal democracy. This cleavage in the case of Bulgaria was revealed in the struggle between two main political blocks: the representatives of the old system grouped around the communist party and the supporters of

reform political forces movement called the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF).

The conflicts and political struggles between them determined initial party formation (Karasimeonov 2004: 419).

The BSP was divided into two major groups – the supporters of reform, who also were divided into a radical wing (pro-democrats, total break with the past) and moderate wing (to preserve the Party in power as long as possible) and the so-called neo-communists including “old-guard” authorities fighting for preserving their privileges, and “hard-liners”.

Those who emerged out victorious in controlling existing structures of the BCP, renamed it the Bulgaria’s Socialist Party. BSP claimed legitimacy as a new democratic party, as a party of social democrats, aiming to represent and express the interests of a wide spectrum of people, including workers and the middle class.

Regarding its political character and program, the BSP emphasized the necessity of a democratic and humane society, scientific socialism, a plural civil society based on the rule of law.

The central objective of economic reform was outlined as establishing a social market economy, so that the achievement of economic efficiency and development was linked with assuring social and economic security to all citizens. A social market economy was conceived as a mixed economy where private and state forms of ownership were not only treated equally, but also participated relatively equally in the creation of the national wealth.

Party’s economic program was in favor of a gradual transition of a market economy in which no one would suffer, opposing strongly the shock therapy.

BSP supported accession to the European Union, but the NATO membership issue was debatable as BSP during the 1990’s maintained an anti-NATO stance (Giatzidis 2002: 56).

The UDF, founded on 12 December 1989, was an heterogeneous coalition of new parties that were formed in the months after the downfall of the older regime, comprising sixteen parties and organizations formed on a merely anti-communist basis trying to cover the whole political spectrum from left to extreme right.

Three major groups could be distinguished among the members of UDF: one consisted of "historical parties" existing prior 1947, as the Social Democratic, the Bulgarian Agrarian Peoples Party "Nikola Petkov", the Democratic Party and the Radical-Democratic Party. These parties were led by surviving members of these parties in the pre-communist era.

The second, the liberal center of the Union, included dissident intellectuals and former members of the communist party who were opposed to the Bolshevik type of party and to the ruling nomenclature who had been closely connected with Zhivkov and had taken part in various protest action against the communist regime. The most famous were the Club for Glasnost and Democracy, whose leader Zhelev became the first UDF Chairman, and the committee for the Defense of Religious Rights.

The third included newly created parties or organizations that had been founded shortly before or after the overthrow of the regime – as the Republican Party and the Christian-Democratic Party, the Green Party (whose leader Philip Dimitrov succeeded Zhelev), Eco-glasnost and the Podkrepa Trade Union.

The UDF support basis was mainly in the city areas and among the intelligentsia, professional people, people who had suffered under communism, young people irrespective of social status, ambitious career-seeking political opportunists and even a number of people who had just left the ruling party.

The UDF called for a multiparty system and a market economy. Zhelju Zhelev, an advocate of shock therapy, was the

party leader. He denounced Bulgaria's social system as corrupt form of state socialism with a totalitarian superstructure.

The supporters of UDF could be categorized in two main groups: The conservatives (those who were privileged before the communist era) and the modernists (new generation calling for Westernization). There were also radicals, supporting revolutionary "de-communization" ("dark blues") and moderates, accepting the rules of parliamentary democracy and evolutionary change ("light blues").

All these groups had a common goal in spite of the internal struggles: the removal from power of the former communists. When this was achieved, divisions within them came up to the surface.

The "historical parties" not only did not gain electoral support, but they quickly marginalized, testifying the irrelevance of the old "historical" cleavages (labor/capital, center-periphery, rural-urban cleavages) that these parties had reflected in the past.

UDF considered private ownership as the basis of economic democracy, while state monopoly of ownership should be eliminated. This would lead to the disestablishment of the ruling party elite from state ownership, which had provided the material basis of communist dominance of the economy and public life. It called for shock therapy – an immediate and complete transition to a market economy – but did not make clear how it would be effected or how the most vulnerable elements of the population would be protected.

From the beginning, the UDF was in favor of the restitution of the land confiscated by communists to its pre-communist owners (de-collectivization).

A structural adaptation of the economy was crucial in order Bulgaria to participate in international financial institutions.

UDF was a pro-EU and NATO party, craving for Bulgaria's integration in these organizations.

## **THE FIRST ELECTIONS**

The first free and democratic elections in Bulgaria (since 1931) for the 400 member body Grand National Assembly, were held on June 10 and 17, 1990.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party won the elections (57 %) while the UDF received 36 % of the total number of seats.

### **WHY BSP WON?**

Coming as a surprise to many, the BSP won the elections and Bulgaria had a socialist president (Mladenov) and a socialist government (under Lukanov).

What are the explanations behind this success?

To begin with, the BSP was well organized, especially in the rural areas of the country, where many Party organizations remained intact. They possessed the political skills and experience necessary to get voters to the polls, the opposition did not.

Second, UDF leaders were ill-advised when they gave in to the request to hold the election at an earlier date than they had originally thought to be the right one, because of US pressures.

Finally, the inexperienced opposition was overconfident. "Assuming that the populace was given the opportunity to vote freely it would automatically reject the BSP, the UDF sought to make the election a referendum on the past forty five years, focusing its campaign on the past. Hence the election results came as a shocking disappointment to the opposition. Due to UDF's excessive anti-communist aggressiveness, numerous tactical mistakes, poor organization and the short time available for the

election campaign, the opposition's expectations had been unrealistically high" (Bell 1990: 428).

After the elections, the BSP appealed for a cabinet consisting of representatives from the other opposition political forces but opposition forces refused to join Lukanov's government. They claimed that the socialists were too reluctant to accept radical change. There was also a widespread belief that the socialists had no attention of dismantling existing totalitarian structures.

Lukanov's tenure was short-lived, lasting just a few months before falling on 28 November 1990.

This government could not function properly because of the non-cooperation tactics of UDF and massive protests because it could not handle swiftly the economic crisis.

In the October 1991 elections UDF was the winner with a slight margin (34.36 % and BSP 33.14 %).

These elections signaled the rise to the political scene of the Turkish ethnic party, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms. It figures heavily in the ability of the two major parties to form a government. MRF supported the election of a UDF government with Philip Dimitrov as prime minister.

This government passed legislation such as laws on the restitution of property and the amendment of the land law to initiate de-collectivization.

It failed to move faster the privatization process and even more, various deputies within UDF's ranks declared themselves "independent".

Economic reforms and land restitution made the MRF leave the alliance.

UDF was also accused for its obsession with anti-communism, giving priority to restitution instead of privatization and to retribution (on de-communization) instead of democratization. It

took “retrospective” measures against the old communist party, alienating even Zhelev.

Furthermore, the restitution of land and property was viewed as a threat to the effective restructuring and marketization of agriculture.

Finally, in December 1992 MRF withdrew its support and UDF government collapsed.

Until the next elections held in 1994, a coalition of MRF and BSP took over with Lyuben Berov as prime minister but did little, having no popular mandate, no reform strategy and no consensus. As a result, the economic transition was even more slowed down.

At 1994 elections BSP was highly benefited from the overall not functioning governance of UDF and the terrible economic conditions that the Bulgarians were facing during the transition and won the elections with a clear parliamentary majority.

BSP managed to create a new image “the image of experience and of good administrators managing to get away from the image of the politician and get into the image of the technocrat” (Dainov interview).

Young persons took over the leadership of BSP and a more managerial and technocratic profile was adopted. Zhan Videnov, the prime minister, was at first seen as someone who could make things return to law and order.

By promising to improve the economy, BSP had a great appeal on older and rural part of the population who were frustrated on the ongoing decline in their living standards.

But BSP could not come to the expectations. The economic situation continued to remain the same and from all the circumstances only criminals were favored. Corruption flourished because of the delayed “structural” reform (privatization) and the continuing state management of the economy with the consequent economic disaster. Furthermore, BSP was blamed for doing deals

with powerful criminals and that the former communist elite exploited privatization in order to gain enterprise assets.

Most of the financial elites were connected with BSP as ex-members of the nomenklatura or as part of the foreign trade officials and old State Security Apparatus that was at the moment connected with the shadowy criminal underworld.

Under Zhan Videnov's government the banking system became a tool to rob the people of their savings.

Consequently, government had lost public trust, even in the internal of the ruling party's elite.

Economic position was deteriorating. The average wage at the end of 1996 could buy less than the average wage at the end of 1919.

People took to the streets demanding elections and rapid economic reforms, meaning that "what had not happened in November 1989 took place in January and February 1997. While it was a coup "from above" that brought down the Zhivkov regime, the BSP government was forced to resign by a coup "from below" " (Giatzidis 2002: 69).

The 1997 elections (won by UDF) proved to be a crucial event in Bulgaria's transition to democracy. It signaled the takeover of new political elite with more realistic profile, which left behind all the obstacles that had slowed down dangerously Bulgaria's transition.

People saw that this was the last chance for Bulgaria to move further. The two-thirds of the MP's was elected for the first time, something that meant that the communist – anti-communist "vendetta" would stop.

The pace of privatization was accelerated, judicial system was reformed and organized crime was cracked down.

To sum up, the solution of the problems that Bulgaria was facing at the political level during the early 90's was almost over noting the end of the Bulgarian political transition.

## CONCLUSION

At the end of the political transition, both Romania and Bulgaria had gone through of a decade which proved to be very difficult. The initial euphoria for the fall of communism and the initiation of the transition to democracy, of a multiparty system, a market economy withered away very quickly.

The two countries, more or less, bore a strong resemblance in many fields. Both had a strong bipolarization party system, in both countries the transition to democracy was initiated by an internal communist party coup d' etat, the minority issue was a very crucial one during the early years of transition in these countries and many times parties played the nationalist card in order to gain more votes. It is certain that Romania and Bulgaria faced a huge problem with corruption and the organized crime. As long as privatization was not moved to a faster pace and economy remained in an intermediate of a market economy and a planned economy, criminals accomplished to obtain assets from state own companies and became the new business elite.

The first hypothesis is proved to be true. Both in Romania and Bulgaria the transition was initiated by internal coup of communists belonging to the second echelon of the Politburo of the communist party and managed to take over the leadership of the party. Both were allegedly backed by Soviet Union.

The second hypothesis is false. Surprisingly enough, FSN and BSP won the first free elections something that came as a shock to the opposition. There are several reasons for that: BSP and FSN enjoyed advantages from assuming the reins of an absolutist state and exploited these advantages to the maximum such as

intimidation, harassment, violence against the opposition supporters, opposition was deprived time in state-owned tv for its campaign. They were more organized in the countryside where opposition was audible. The opposition was weak at this time and overconfident that these elections will be a referendum condemning the communists for the abuses of the past.

Shocked by the consequences of initial political and economic transition period that these countries suffered in the mid 90's, 1997 in Bulgaria and 2000 in Romania marked the adoption of a strategy of leaving behind the communist - anti-communist struggles and implementing faster economic reforms. It was almost certain that the political transition was completed.

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