

Minutes of the presentation "Democracies in Central-Eastern Europe: A Comparison"

Professor Vello Pettai, November 14, 6 pm

Overview:

- I. Comparing democracies
- II. Democracy in CEE: the erstwhile success narrative
- III. Democratic erosion: new forms
- IV. Varieties of Democracy datasets
- V. V-Dem in CEE
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 1. Electoral Democracy
 2. Liberal Democracy
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I. Comparing democracies

Definition: Democracy is one form of regime, that is opposed to totalitarianism (fascism, communism, religious totalitarianism) and authoritarianism (military government and/or government of a "strongman").

There are different kinds of democracy: full democracy and minimal, consolidated and flawed. CEE-States are democratic. But what kind of democracy?

II. Democracy in CEE

The general narrative is positive: The CEE states had a successful transition to democracy and stabilization from collapse of communism. There is steady and core support for democracy in the populace, strong constitutionalism, i.e. commitment and adherence to democratic institutions. Some countries are faster: Visegrad and Baltics are faster in development than the Balkan states.

III. Democratic erosion: new forms

For decades predominant cause of democratic breakdown were coups and takeovers. Many political scientists thought this was the only possible way. Today's views are much subtler, because in democratic breakdown, many core components of democracy remain intact. This is why in the *Freedom House* index, which aims to measure "freedom" and categorize states into three groups, no changes can be seen for the states of CEE.

To describe this phenomenon further, it is important to take a closer view on different kinds of

democracy, for example the difference between electoral and liberal democracy. The core of electoral is simply the act of going to vote, while the concept of liberal democracy sees some further core principles of democracy, like civil liberties, equal protection, judiciary, and the possibility of participation.

In the closer view, we can see, that the erosion of democracy in CEE happens more on the liberal side.

IV. Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-Dem)

V-Dem is an international network of 2,500 scholars, with a lot of regional centers. The index is based on 400+ variables, each being a question for the same country in the same year and answered by five different experts - this is condensed in an index.

The variables are part of different categories: electoral democracy, liberal, deliberative, participatory and egalitarian. The people can build their own indexes.

V. V-Dem in CEE

Through the 2010s, everything is fine on the electoral democracy score and as well on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI), but with Orbán election it is going down in Hungary. In Poland, there are signs of erosion since 2016. The LDI went down in Poland more than in Hungary. The reason is mainly, that LDI in Poland was higher than in Hungary.

VI. Comparing Poland and Hungary

Focusing on clean elections, we can see, that it went down in Hungary and in Poland not. On LDI, the observation proves, that Poland went down rapidly in media liberties, while this process in Hungary happened in long-term and is lower than in Poland - the same development can be found in academic freedom, in judicial constraints and high court independence.

On the Deliberative Democracy index, we can see, that Poland's numbers decreased while in Hungary the deliberative element was never strong.

VII. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is to say that democratic development in CEE went down and that there are more problems in LDI and deliberative culture than in electoral democracy. As well we can note, that liberal democracy and deliberative culture were never strong in Hungary, while it went significantly down in Poland after 2015.