

Korovicynova, Natalia: With Russia and Without Her. The East-European Way of Development. (S Rossijej i bez neyo. Vostochnoevropejskij put' razvitya)
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Russian view of the post-Communist transformation in Central Europe

It has been 10 years since the fall of Communist regimes in Europe and we see a growing number of attempts to summarise and offer a systematic explanation of the social changes in those European countries, which had previously been part of the Soviet bloc. These states formed the military pact known as the Warsaw Treaty, or were part of Soviet Union (Baltic States). Usually they are joined by part of former Yugoslavia (neutral as regards military pacts) – Slovenia. These states have recently become members of NATO and EU, or, in case of Bulgaria and Romania, have a chance to acquire EU membership soon. Basically – they are the states of Central and Eastern Europe without Albania, Serbia, Croatia and remaining parts of former Yugoslavia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldavia.

It is remarkable that we think it politically correct to call these countries "countries of Central and Eastern Europe" although quite obviously they represent merely a subset of states located in this region. With the exception of Slovenia, they have common characteristics other than the transition to a democratic regime and market economy – they all broke away from Russia. And it is this viewpoint, the examination and investigation of socio-cultural prerequisites and causes of the association with Russia after 1945 and the radical alienation from Russia after 1989 that lies in the centre of attention of Korovicynova's book "With Russia and Without Her. The East-European Way of Development."

The central issue of the book is defined correctly – attempts to explain the wave of post-war pro-Soviet and pro-Russian orientation just by referring to political arguments, Treaties of Yalta and Potsdam do not explain all issues – for example why even non-Communist political parties actively or quietly supported the turn towards Russia, why such political efforts existed in countries which had not been subordinated under the Soviet influence by treaties, and so on. In a similar way, this problem is described by European experts for example in the international study *Three social science disciplines in Central and Eastern Europe*, the review of which was recently published in journal *Sociologia*. The definition of the problem is also correct from the other side of historic continuity. Why was the breakdown of Communist regimes in Europe so quick and easy? Why was it that the pro-Russian orientation became so very unacceptable; why did it lose all its social support?

Natalia Korovicynova searches for answers to these questions in the results of sociological surveys. These should confirm her basic hypothesis, according to which Central European countries between the end of Second World War and the end of the 1980s experienced such deep-reaching changes in the society's culture that they led to a change in their political orientation. Part of this hypothesis is the assumption that these cultural changes in European socialist countries took place simultaneously and the power centres in the Soviet Union and other countries with planned economy were unable to react accordingly. This in effect dismantled the functioning of Communist political system and allowed even a weaker political impulse to start off its fall.

This hypothesis is not new. Several Central European sociologists have some time ago proved the existence of various cultural peculiarities, analogies of which were obvious in other Central European socialist countries, too. Already in the early 1960s Stefan Nowak was pointing out the changes in value orientation of students and in the 1970s he was writing about the phenomenon of "sociological vacuum" in Polish society caused by prevailing dual identification of the people – with family at the micro-level and with the national state at the macro-level, while civic mezostructures of social integration were lacking. The development later confirmed his observations. As soon as such mezostructures appeared in form of independent trade unions – Polish "Solidarita", or began their active functioning as independent religious structures in Slovakia or East Germany, they began to dismantle the socialising mechanisms of the authoritarian state. Here too we are familiar with the explanation of the causes of decay of the Communist political system by the mechanism of families, as formulated by Ivo Možný. In this respect, however, it makes no sense to merely quote results of sociological surveys. Social scientists are well aware of the depth and effects of cultural changes in the second half-time of Communist regime. Evolution of arts – literature, theatre, film-making, visual arts and architecture in Central European countries, along with its social consequences is obvious and well documented.

It is Korovicynova's undisputed contribution that she concentrated and clarified her knowledge, and attempts to build a unified socio-cultural framework for the interpretation of all significant changes in culture and value orientation of people in Central Europe. She concentrates particularly on Czechoslovakia (Czech

and Slovak Republics), Hungary and Poland. She also takes into consideration cultural changes in Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania. She divides the social development after Second World War into two periods of great social transformations – the first one socialist, taking place particularly in the 1950s and the other liberal, starting after 1989. The liberal social transformation is linked to the previous socialist one by the fundamental cultural changes taking place in the end of the first one. According to this explanatory technique, the book is divided into three parts: 1. *First great transformation and social mobility* (The evolution of an industrial society – working class. The transition to post-industrial development – intelligentsia).

2. *Perestroika – the shift in system of values*. (The East European family model. The world of "home socialism". Its boom and signs of decay. Synthesis of traditions and post-modernity. The heroic-romantic finale of conservative modernisation. The change in the characteristic features of revolution of conscience – from political needs to economic expectations).

3. *Second great transformation – return to the West*. (Post-Communist region on the world map. Expansion of pragmatism and materialism, drama of the intellectual elites. The religious worldview – its two phases in the epoch of transformations. Family manners between the civilisations at the change of centuries).

I will try to briefly convey Korovicynova's explanation of evolution of societies in Central Europe. After Second World War countries in Central and Southeast Europe chose the same development route as the Soviet Union was taking, which thus acquired typical "East European" characteristics. According to Korovicynova it is a way of an accelerated transformation of rural agricultural society into an industrial, urban society with high qualifications while preserving several elements of the traditional social structure with matching value orientation. The Soviet programme of modernisation was based on deep technical-technological and institutional innovations. However, this programme did not imply a shift away from the models of everyday life from early-industrial or even pre-industrial types of society. The high concentration of elements of social classification, culture and social conscience which actually correspond more with the previous historic epochs were the price paid for the fast pace of post-war economic growth taking place in a regime of social mobilisation.

In Korovicynova's opinion, the forming of a working class is a social consequence of the first phase of the East European way of development, while the forming of national intellectual elite, intelligentsia, is a consequence of the second half of this process. Urbanisation and educational revolution in the 1970s were the peak of the transition to "the present" in these countries. *The East European way of development was taken by Russia along with her Western, predominantly Slav neighbours. The East European person everywhere is separated from his peasant's past just by one generation.* In the 1970s the difference between working class and intellectual elite diminished considerably. Small social differentiation became a characteristic feature of Central European countries. The fact that the processes of social transformation in all European socialist and later post-socialist countries were identical is largely due to similar or identical existing social conditions. According to Korovicynova, sociological data proves that general patterns of both structural transformations – that which had started in Central and Southeast Europe in 1940s and 1950s as well as that of the early 1990s, prevail over national characteristics. Making this assumption, she quotes H. Domansky and his *On the doorstep of convergency. Social stratification in countries of Central and Eastern Europe*. Here, the author is basing his arguments on the results of an extensive international comparative survey, whose concept was created by D. Treiman and I. Széleányi.

The East-European model of development came into existence within the so-called "Soviet bloc" when, after Second World War, Soviet Union had become a world power. The socialist development project was an alternative to the way taken by the Western, capitalist part of the European continent. First and fundamental step in implementing this project was industrial growth, "great jump" during first 5-Year-Plans. The year 1989 was the culmination of a long-lasting process of changes, which had started four decades earlier and peaked when the geopolitical orientation of these countries changed dramatically from Eastern to Western. Vital role in this turn was played by the "demonstrative effect" of the Western standards of quality of life. Value orientation of the society played a similar role four decades earlier when the project of socialist changes found mass support in the desire for a society based on "equality and justice", desire for one's own, urban and industrial world.

The 1970s and 1980s were a short period of relative stability during a time when modernisation strategy was being changed. It was at the height of the process of building "the supporting pillars" of society as it exists now. At this time in Central European countries returning to one's traditions prevailed over innovation. The cultural autonomy of these countries manifested itself strongly. In order to understand the specifics of East European development model, Korovicynova asserts, we need to concentrate on socio-cultural evolution and its researches carried out in Poland. The transformation from socialism to capitalism

took a whole decade in Poland and its condensed scenario was repeated in other countries. Polish system transformation thus became a model for the whole Eastern Europe. The specific feature of the Czech society is the fact that it was first in the region to complete the programme of building “the fundamentals of capitalism” just as it had done forty years earlier with “fundamentals of socialism”.

Korovicynova’s attempts to interpret fifty years of Central European history merely on the basis of cultural facts is interesting and slightly provocative, however unable to explain (and it does not even reflect them) the causes and effects of events which were of vital importance for Central European countries: the events of 1956 in Hungary and Poland, the year 1968 in Czechoslovakia, 1970 and 1980 in Poland. In other words, it is not possible to seriously claim that political and cultural changes took place simultaneously yet independently of each other. We do know that Polish culture from before 1956 is very different from that produced after 1956. Also we know that “normalisation”, the repressive measures that followed the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet army in 1968 put an end to a significant cycle in the cultural development, which had started in 1960. Quite on the contrary, we can claim that the pace of changes in culture and everyday life was different in each of Central European countries, and connected with the political development in a different way and caused a political crisis of the Communist system at a different point in time. Russian historians too should take notice of the fact that Central European countries were brought near each other by something else than non-Capitalist way of modernisation. Each time cultural changes within these countries merged with autonomous political development, a crisis evolved which provoked a military intervention from the Russian centre: in Hungary and Poland in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968. So far the question of events in Poland in 1980 is not fully clarified, but it is difficult to imagine that this intervention would have been possible without the support and possibly even direct pressure from the Kremlin. The culmination and logical outcome of that which Korovicynova calls “socialist project of the modern time” had always been prevented by the rigid Russian-Soviet conservatism, the inability to adapt to real-life conditions. Perestroika came too late and as far as Czechoslovakia is concerned it never did. Gorbachev was such a coward that up until the fall of Communist regime he feared to meet with Dubček.

Just as cultural changes’ obvious link to political changes, they cannot be understood without appreciating economics. The trouble is that the socio-economic processes, which Korovicynova considers to be unique for their time, were not so unique. At the same time as the Central European working classes emerged or increased in numbers during the post-war industrialisation, the same happened in Spain and Italy. In France there was an exodus of people from the countryside into the cities, from agriculture to jobs in industry and services. It is in this area that there are still today great differences between Poland and for example Slovakia. In Poland at the end of twentieth century more than 20 per cent of the population worked in agriculture, while in Slovakia it was just 6 per cent of economically active population. The causes of this difference are well known – collectivisation in Poland was stopped in 1956 while the collectivisation in Slovakia was finished. Also, Poland did not have the funds necessary for the collectivisation, while Czechoslovakia was able to acquire them through decapitalisation of the people by means of a currency reform in 1953. Here another question arises – if this was possible in Czechoslovakia, why not in Poland too? Was it because Beirut was politically less decisive than Gottwald? In Czechoslovakia simply the population had been wealthy, in Poland not. Decapitalisation of the people and system of planned economy allowed the volume of housing construction in Czechoslovakia to be kept up until 1955 at the same level as it had been during the economic crisis in the 1930s – in spite of the fact that ten years had passed since the war and the country was experiencing a baby boom. Number of flats comparable to that from the pre-war period started to be built only in the 1960s. In other words, this means that the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia was systematically utilising all resources and capacities which had been created in the previous historic period, carried out a rigorous nationalisation of these resources and used them for purposes other than increasing the well-being of the population.

This leads to another conclusion. The interpretation of the development of Central European societies on the basis of analysing cultural phenomena cannot abstract from facts of economic history, neither from former cultural and political development. The generalisation of the phenomena characteristic for the cultural development in Poland and claiming they are identical with those in Czech and Slovak Republics can be very misleading. For example, N. Korovicynova deduces far-reaching conclusions from “the tradition of the nobles’ culture, post-aristocratic mentality or the literary centrism of the Slav nations”. I cannot understand where these signs can be found when we look at Voskovec and Werich as the founders of popular genre, Suchý or Šlitř or Lasica and Satinský as their followers, with respect to L. Mňačko, J. Blažková or even V. Mináč from the 1960s. What was stirring Czech and Slovak culture in the 1960s, the literature and theatre, the peculiarity of Czech and Slovak film-making school, the contents of television production, which was being born at that time – all this had nothing in common with “post-aristocratic mentality”.

The traditions of nobles' culture were on the other hand well understood by Poles and Russians. They were even able to use them in a fruitful way, they cherished the post-aristocratic symbolic. At the beginning of the 1970s Edward Gierek decorated L. I. Breznev with the Polish decoration *Virtuti Militari*. Leonid Iljic shed tears of emotion although he was used to high decorations. This however was different, Gierek bought Breznev, and he suddenly became his closest friend. What is incomprehensible for us, is clear and legible for Russians and Poles. The *Virtuti Militari* decoration had been continuously awarded since the time before the partition of Poland, the Russian Tsars continued to award it and post-war Poland kept it as a traditional decoration, too. When Gierek gave it to Breznev, by doing that he promoted this international terrorist into the noble state. G. Husák could not do that, even if he had given him three White lions on golden chains – and he would have never thought that comrade would be so very flattered by that.

The historical development, even if we analyse just a limited period of fifty years, is a complicated process of interdependent political events, economic cycles, changes in everyday culture, but also of progressing transformations in people's mentality and for small societies also vital external, international influences. When Korovicynova interprets the development of culture in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, she moves too far away and abstracts too much from economic and political context. A deeper analysis of the historical changes does not confirm her hypothesis of a parallel development of real-life everyday culture, not even in neighbouring Central European countries. While it is true that until the end of the 1980s these countries experienced deep changes in culture of societies, in each of them this happened in a different way, and the ties with politics and economics were not identical. Most convincing proof of this assumption is the comparison between the process of changes after 1989 in Czech Republic and Slovakia. Up until 1990 it appeared that in Czechoslovakia a continuous process of economic, cultural and political together-coming of two national units was taking place. The separation of Czechoslovakia cannot be explained convincingly just by cultural, economic or solely political reasons – it came about through a complex of causes which could only have come about in a certain international context. The breakdown of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (RVHP) can also be explained only by a complex of causes. For a long time, cultural, economic and political reasons were mounting which all led to abandonment of this “non-Capitalist route of modernisation”. Already in 1956 and 1968 they had reached a critical level, but other historical circumstances blocked the change. In 1989, it could not be avoided any more which led to a domino effect – in the background we can see direct implementation of Gresham's law of political morale: fear does away with the rules and a self-preserving flight of one power elite becomes the instruction for flight of the next (N. Ceausescu did not die while protecting his presidential palace, nor did the Russian generals show particular heroism in defending communist principles).

“With Russia and Without Her” is a book, which deserves attention. It translates current sociological data from the Central European and even our Slovak environment into Russian. For us, it is interesting in that it provides us with a different viewpoint from the one which we have, it interprets our reality within different frameworks. After reading the book we realise just how far our understanding of events and phenomena of the Central European socio-cultural reality has moved from the Russian views on the same matter. We should probably put in more funds and effort into explaining our reality not only to Western Europe, but also towards Russia.

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