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CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND YUGOSLAVIA: THE DEMOCRATIC HURDLE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN A MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETY

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Abstract

The events of 1989 rewrote a term that was hidden for decades on the European political agenda: self-determination. Firstly as a need for the re-unification of the German States, then as a tool for boosting national emancipation movements. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, two countries with multinational systems, witnessed the arrival of democracy as the result of their common project and territory: new foreigners, different borders. Both States were born at the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had significant national minorities and faced a socialist experiment. But the regime change was diametrically different. Far from providing an explanation of the Yugoslav break up or the Velvet divorce, the comparative study analyzes similarities/differences in the élites addressing people/voters during the critical moment of regime change in 1989-1990. To what extent did the presence of an external dominator (Moscow) help the Czechoslovaks in behaving differently from the Yugoslavs? And on the other hand, how much did the absence of a greater enemy lead Yugoslavia to find guiltiness/innocence within its own people? The paper therefore focuses on the study of the presence/absence of "enemies" and their localization inside/outside the country, as two dichotomous variables that could have affected the political act of establishing new borders.

Keywords: *Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Othering, Borders, Nationalism, Self-determination*

Introduction

The events of 1989 and the end of the Cold War marked one of the most crucial and unpredicted turning points in World history. In few months, one witnessed both the formation/rebirth of several States and the abandonment of

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communism in favor of liberal-democracies as the leading system in Central-Eastern Europe. Hidden for decades, the 1989 events put the term of self-determination of the nations on the political agenda, first as a need 'from below' for the re-unification of the two German States (1990) and then as a tool for emancipation movements of long-oppressed peoples, as was the case for the Baltic nations (1991) (White, Batt & Lewis, 2007).

In central-eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, two countries with multinational systems, saw the arrival of democracy as the end of a common project – and the subsequent dismantling of their original form. More than twenty years after their dissolution, the two countries evolved differently. It is obvious that the crucial passage was in the Yugoslav war, but as with every conflict, reasoning on the complexity, and the interconnection of the causes is the first step towards understanding. Moreover, 'identity' issues that were the leading force behind the scene of the Balkan war, keep on dominating the political agenda of the region, while the Czech Republic and Slovakia kept a strong connection and cooperative approach.

Many reasons could be found in the social, historical and cultural diversities of the two countries' different peoples, yet the four decades of socialist experience show a common path that must not be underestimated. In regard to the system, the question that is posed, is to which extend did the presence of an external dominator (Moscow) helps the Czechoslovak in behaving differently from the southern Slavs? Further on to which extend how did the absence of a greater enemy lead the Yugoslavs in finding guiltiness/innocence within its own people?

The study is a comparative one, based on a brief overview of the two similar systems in the 'building of socialism' and the critical years of the regime change. Emphasis will be given to political statements, speeches and attitudes of the emerging rulers. The focus will be narrowed in studying the presence/absence of 'enemies' and their localization inside/outside the country, as two dichotomous variables that could have affected the outcome of raising boundaries in the chosen multiethnic societies.

Building socialism in multiethnic societies

The bullets from Gavrilo Princip's gun, in June 1914, propelled European history ahead. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were two of the several new States born at the end of the Great War. Both countries were composed of people of different nationalities, religion, historical identity, and saw the inter-war experience

ruled by a dominant ethnic group, even if this 'upper role' was exercised through different means. The Czech majority was leading a parliamentary system, in which it was *de facto* dominating (Czechs were around 50% of the population, ahead of Germans (25%), then Slovaks (15%), Hungarians (5%) and other smaller groups. (Wilner, 2002).

In the Western Balkans, the Serbs were not the absolute majority, but the Kingdom had a clear predominance by Belgrade (Serbs were the 38% – Croats nearly 24%, Slovenes 8,5%, Bosnian Muslims 6%, Macedonians 5% and others. (Banac, 1984).

During World War II, the Nazi-fascist axis was able to play the old adagio of *divide et impera*: while their armies invaded the countries, the smothered nationalisms came up, and both Slovakia and Croatia were the playground for 'Quisling state' in compliance with the invaders. The evolution of the world conflict heavily intensified the ethnic clashes (Petersen, 2002) of the two regions and the outcome that the victorious communist partisan movements had to face was quite problematic. In Yugoslavia, mass revenge killings against Croatians, Italians and a small proportion of Muslims who took sides with the Croatian State occurred (Malcom, 1994). In Czechoslovakia, two and a half million Germans, alongside thousands of Hungarians faced forced expulsion (Wilner, 2002). In the tumultuous end of the war, the communists established a sort of *pax romana*, a strict control over any disorder. The composition of Czechoslovakia became less variable, while Yugoslavia maintained its strong multi-nationality with all the dramatic echoes of the war.

Four decades of Socialism: 1948-1988

1948 was the turning point for Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. In the 'glorious February', the Communist Party (from now on CP) definitively took power in Prague, while in June, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform. It was the beginning of two paths, with a common goal (communism) under different international situations. Marked by being inside/outside the Warsaw Treaty and divergent position in the Cold War (aligned/non-aligned). A heavy internal regulation was trying to adapt Marxist ideology to complex countries: it was to both Communist Parties clear from the beginning that a copy of the centralist Soviet model was far from adaptable in their States.

However, this process of de-centralization was slower in Czechoslovakia than in Yugoslavia. When Klement Gottwald, the First Secretary of the CP, took power, he promised the 'Czechoslovak way to communism' with a guarantee of a Slovak autonomy (Schwartz, 1969), but the *de facto* process took more than fifteen years to be implemented. It was precisely the Yugoslav heresy that at the first instance stopped this process for two reasons. First of all, Czechoslovak Communists took power later than the rest of the socialist bloc, experiencing three years of uneasy coexistence with a parliamentary democracy; they had then to freeze the reform under Stalin's will. One of the most famous political trials during the purges of the early Fifties, to the Party secretary Rudolf Slanský and other 13 Party members, was in fact about the charge of being Titoist (Goldstücker, 1981).

Meanwhile in Yugoslavia, outside the direct control of Moscow, the experiment of workers' self-government was proceeding. It was with pure objectiveness that the scholar Jiri Kolaja could state (1965 p. ix) that the country occupied "*a unique position in the world today.*" His study of the implementation of workers' councils within socialist planning shows that the first decade produced a sensible growth for the economy, and in particular, for standards of living for its inhabitants (*ibidem*). Moreover, the decentralized system of production allowed a substantial presence of market regulatory system that was minimized in Czechoslovakia, where the central planned economy was strictly rigid (*ibidem*). In the Sixties, Prague had to face a *débacle* of the Soviet economic model that was no longer working (Boffito & Foa, 1970). The direction chosen for the reforms was indeed – the road of the Yugoslavs. The apex of this approach was during the 'Prague Spring', with the introduction of workers' councils before the *Normalization* (August 1968 – April 1969). (Bini & Anelli, 2008).

On the political side, the Sixties and Seventies saw a de-centralization of competences in both countries. In 1970 Czechoslovakia became a federation, while the Yugoslav constitution of 1974 provided more powers to the Republics and the two autonomous regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina (Williams, 1997; Wilner, 2002). The path towards de-centralization, in both countries was characterized by a double standard: it was in fact accompanied by consolidating the Party leadership, with the Normalization in Prague and Bratislava and Tito's nominee of 'President for life' in the same 1974 Constitution (Silber & Little, 1996).

The two countries ended up reaching 1988 in different critical situations. The crisis was notably deeper for the economy in Yugoslavia, which was more connected with the unstable international market, the change of policy by the Reagan

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administration (a declining interest in providing economic help to Belgrade) and the debt with International Monetary Fund (Laín, 2011).

Moreover, an important difference with the Soviet bloc was the absence of a strict employment control: the crisis led to a quick rise on the unemployment rate – that grew from 13% in 1981 to 17% in 1988, while the population under the poverty line was already at 25% at the end of 1984 (Woodward, 1995). The Czechoslovak Party had to face a crisis that was more political (since the standards of living did not change as much as in Yugoslavia), with the strengthening of insider dissident movements, like Charta77.

Drawing the border: finding the enemy of the society

When the year 1989 arrived, Yugoslavia, on the edge of an economic crisis, was already facing a strong political debate which was obviously within the CP (Silber & Little, 1996). The controversial memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, published in September 1986, is an example of the rise of nationalism within the Party élites. The memorandum clearly posed the ethnic issue: the Serbs, it stated, were victims of discrimination by Croat and Slovene countrymen (*ibidem*). Few months later (April 1987) Slobodan Milošević, chief of the Serbian Communist Party, was addressing in his famous speech 'No one shall dare to beat you' towards Serbs minority in Kosovo. The echoes of the nationalists' ride would sound in the whole country in the following years. While federal officers were reluctant to use the same politics adopted for decades by Tito, who was not tolerating any nationalism, and used to punish related demonstrations, national notions were gaining more influence in all the republics (*ibidem*).

Czechoslovakia was more rigid in its response to the crucial events of the late Eighties in the Soviet bloc (Roberts 1991). More similarly to the German Democratic Republic than to its Polish or Hungarian neighbors, Czechoslovakia's élite was reluctant in accepting the era of *Perestrojka* and *Glasnost'*; *"skepticism and distrust"* towards it were dominating in Prague (Michielsen, 1992, 44). Gorbačev himself was initially giving misleading messages of democratization under the Soviet umbrella, taking for granted that the gain of Socialism was to be considered permanent (Roberts, 1991). At the time, despite reform policies, the fall of Soviet control over Central-Eastern Europe was out of consideration. But the fall of the Berlin Wall meant the fall of European communism, Yugoslavia included. This fall pushed the countries toward pluralist systems in which the authoritarian

rule of the previous regimes was to be removed through new elections – a *"watershed in the transition to democracy,"* quoting Parrot (1997, 15). The élites had to face the problem of their new identities, promoting themselves to the electors as guardians of national borders: new boundaries disguised as ancient limits.

Czechoslovakia

As Roberts (1991, 15) pointed out, the political crisis of 1989 was not a merit of *Perestrojka*, but its failure. Gorbačev's attempt to change the system without losing communism gave an initial development towards reforms, but the outcome was the destruction of the regimes. Being ruled by an élite who based its legitimacy on the demolition of reforms (*Normalization*). Prague was deliberately against all the democratic developments in Hungary, Poland and finally Eastern Germany (Pehe, 1992, 348).The main antagonists of the regime – namely, the Charta77 group – were a restricted number of intellectuals which at the beginning of 1989 were still quite far from popular, even if known abroad (Agh, 1996, 44-68). Events changed quickly on the wave of neighboring countries. In summer a petition for democratization reached 40.000 signatures (Pehe, 1992). In November, with the development of the so called 'Velvet Revolution', the presence of these intellectuals at the centre of protests, was often considered as a sign of a 'revolutionary aristocracy' from the people in the streets (Agh, 1996).

Nevertheless, such 'aristocracy' was the first nucleus of the opposition; Havel and other dissidents, journalists, scientists, reformists and even workers under the direct control of the falling regime, formed the 'Civic Forum', the movement which started to lead the dissent. In Slovakia, in a similar way, the group 'Public Against Violence' was created after demonstrations in Bratislava and led by the actor Milan Kňačko. Surprisingly, within a few days the State apparatus was giving up to this new opposition, erasing the constitutional norm on the supremacy of the CP already in November 29th. On December 10th, Gustav Husák, the icon of Normalization, was dismissed as President; the very same day a new Governments were nominated in both Czech and Slovakia, with several dissidents as ministers and communists in minority. The former leader of the Prague Spring, Alexander Dubček, was appointed chairman of the Parliament. On December 29th, Václav Havel was nominated President of the federal Republic.

None of these changes were legitimated by elections, but were granted by the previous regime (the Federal Assembly), who chose the nominees (Roberts, 1991). This was a rather important passage of the ruling legitimacy based on the most *influential* actors in the wave of protests rather than a proper people's choice.

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Free democratic elections were set up for June 1990. While an anti-communist wave was shaking the region, if non-communists could finally 'get the mask off' and declare their political views, former communists were able to burn their membership cards and declare themselves as original reformists (Kuran, 1991). Especially in Czechoslovakia, where the revolution took place so quickly, in the absence of a prepared alternative, many Party members *"turned into devoted Christians overnight"* (Agh, 1996, 49). With this change, the debate was shifting from the small Party councils to the mass politics in which the first mobilization of voters was pro or against specific causes (Laín, 2011).

The factor against which the new political debate turned was then not one (or more) former leader rather than communism ideology itself. Even if it is obvious to state that the 'enemy' of the new rulers was the former regime, it is not equally obvious that all the leaders – therefore the prime party responsible – were not object of judicial/political prosecution (Roberts & Ash, 2009). The enthusiastic movement built 'against the past' is symptomatic in Havel's presidential New Year address to the nation for 1991 underlining the confusion of present state:

"*We have clearly defeated the monolithic, visible and clearly identifiable enemy and now – driven by our discontent and our need to find a living culprit – we are seeking the enemy in each other. [...] Our society is still in a state of shock*" (Legters, 1996, 371).

When analyzing this 'enemy', it is important to notice that at the time the Czechoslovak territory was still occupied by tanks and soldiers of the Warsaw Treaty. The legacy with the Prague Spring leads to discover the second aspect of the political evolution: the antagonism with Soviet Union. The figure of Alexander Dubček was in December 1989, after Havel, "*the most revered symbol of the resistance to Moscow and its local henchmen"* (Brumberg, 1996, 367). In connection with this, was also the spread 'be back in Europe' idea that saw the liberation from the Brežnev doctrine as was the restoring a real 'European-ness' (marked by the First Czechoslovak Republic in the interwar period) against the socialism (White, Batt & Lewis, 2007). Dubček, as a Slovak, was also the *trait d'union* with Bratislava: the so called 'revolutionary aristocracy' wanted the nations to be united. Movements for more autonomy or independence in Slovakia were born before the elections, but they were, at this stage, a minority.

The Civic Forum, with 'Public Against Violence', won the legislative elections (both at federal and local level); they gained more than 51% of votes resulting in 67% of seats in the Parliament. They stressed that the governments

would have been open to all parties except the communist one (which still had a surprising 13,6% of votes), and the Slovak separatists (11% in Slovak districts, 3,5% on total). The Civic Forum gave to the neo-liberal economist Václav Klaus (future leader of the Czech right-wing and twice President of the Czech Republic), the mission of setting aside the socialist economy (Kostelecký, 2002).

Emphasis: in Czech as well as Slovakia, political debate during the regime change was focused mainly on an antagonist factor (Communist ideology) seen as exogenous in the federation (Soviet imposition).

Yugoslavia

In 1989 the economic crisis in Yugoslavia reached a critical point. The topic was on the agenda of the League of Yugoslav Communists already since the beginning of the decade, with discussion on the XII (1982) and the XIII (1986) Congress on how to proceed. A serious conflict occurred between reformists – who wanted to take the International Monetary Fund suggestion on liberalization of the economy – and conservatives, who wanted to keep socialist identity (Laín, 2011). Meanwhile the IMF was insisting on the payment of the debt, and Yugoslavs' purchasing power was less than half of what it was ten years before. Bigger differences were mostly on the North/South direction. The poorest regions were Kosovo and Macedonia; in 1988 their average income was 66% of the Yugoslav average; but the situation took a serious turn also in the stronger Serbia, where the number of strikes increased from less than 200 in 1982 to 1850 in 1988; from ten thousands to 386.000 demonstrators in Serbian streets. Between 1986 and 1989 inflation grew by 250% (*Ibidem*).

When the League finally adopted changes in the federal constitution with the purpose of a first liberalization, the developments in Serbia and Slovenia made the focus on mere economic reforms, which were substantially obsolete (Woodward, 1995). The echoes of the Serbian memorandum had a strong influence in the tiny northwestern republic. In 1987-1988 youth and intellectuals started to play a key role in the growth of Slovenian nationalism, through continuous attacks on the Yugoslav Army (allegedly guilty of discrimination towards Slovenes) and calls to the Christian roots of the nation. Milan Kučan, the Slovenian Party leader, cleverly used a soft tone in condemning these events, "turning the other cheek" (Silber & Little, 1996). The Jugoslav National Army reacted strongly, with a trial to a satirical magazine ("Mladina") who attacked the federal defense secretary, Branko Mamula. In Slovenia demonstrators were rallying against the prosecution, seen as a political tool and symptom of the anti-Slovene feeling within the army (Silber & Little, 1996).

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The mistrust between Ljubljana and Belgrade spread quickly. However, Milošević and Kučan started to incorporate anticommunist nationalists within their groups. Although different in style (the more discreet Slovenians contrasted the more aggressive Serbs), the two leaders were fulfilling similar goals, claiming territorial rights and protection of their nations. At the beginning of 1989 it was still forbidden to mobilize people against the communist parties, but nevertheless the leaders were more connected with popular grievances (Woodward, 1995). When Milošević erased the autonomies of Vojvodina and Kosovo, Slovenia was the first to play against him: its leaders publicly denounced the situation of Albanians in Kosovo as being seriously in danger, suggesting for the first time general oppression created by the Serbs (Silber & Little, 1996). By mid-1989, the Croatian Republic was entering this political game; again, Kosovo played a key role.

On the famous 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Polje, while Milošević was showing his strength in front of thousands of Serbs and Montenegrins, the Serb minority in Croatia held a similar manifestation in Knin, accusing Zagreb of ‘assimilation’. The demonstration was interrupted by Croatian policemen, who arrested the leader of the manifestation. The arrest of the demonstrators simultaneously caused outrage in the Serbian media, and support to the growing Croat nationalist formation of Franjo Tudjman (Jović, 2009).

For longtime Croatian nationalism was due to the Ustaše State a strong taboo: it was the radicalization in Serbia and Slovenia that gave room for Tudjman to start again talking of nation’s interests; Milošević’s aggressive policy was Tudjman’s strongest propaganda (Silber & Little, 1996). Following the developments of 1989, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia started to consider the possibility of a pluralist system. In January 1990, the XIV Congress of the League of Yugoslav Communists eventually abolished the Party monopoly. Slovenia and Croatia were then the first republics to set new elections (in April and May), while Serbia postponed them to December. The other republics, less influential in the political debate, followed the example: Bosnia, Herzegovina and Macedonia set elections for November, Montenegro for December (Woodward, 1995).

The international context of 1990 is to take into consideration: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the return of self-determination doctrine in Europe posed the final push to the radicalization of nationalist debate in Yugoslavia. The elections of Ljubljana and Zagreb saw the victories of Kučan and Tudjman, while Milošević also confirmed his rule over Belgrade. Analyzing the focus on the antagonist factors used by these influential leaders, there could be some similarities noted: in Yugoslavia,

unlike the rest of Socialist Europe, the debate was not over an externally imposed ideology. Since communism was a home-grown feature, the Soviet antagonism was missing (White, Batt & Lewis, 2007). For the northern Republics, Slovenia and Croatia, the call for 'going back to Europe' encountered its hurdle in an unfair federation of nations (i.e. a space in which they do not belong). From the Serb perspective the enemy was again not communism itself but the discrimination towards its nation (Silber & Little, 1996), linked with Milošević's personal fight against 'bureaucracy' (he wanted to be the 'people's prince'– the head of popular discontent) (Jović, 2009).

It is assumed that the consensus building of the late Eighties was based essentially on the fragmentation, putting the line between 'us' and 'them', that means, for the analysis, the creation of an external agent, an "enemy" to blame for in a critical situation. It is indeed crucial that the drawing of this border us/them could free the rulers from the responsibilities of their unlucky management; in other words, the causes of the crisis were connected to the presence of these external agents. This lack of "democratic responsibility" was therefore leading to a continuity of the élite – is this the case of Slovenia and Serbia, in which local leaders chose openly to not share the federation faults. It can be therefore affirmed that the main actors in Yugoslavia created an enemy factor in the political debate, and that this enemy was external (other nations) as well as endogenous in the Federation (within other republics).

Drawing the border: main differences in the political attitude

The pluralist elections of 1990 marked the turning point in the transitions of the two countries. In the previous four decades, the two Parties established their legitimacy on the 'utopia' of communism, the promise to create the ideal state of justice and equality, free of conflict and exploitation (Jasiewicz, 2007, 163). During this period, elections were giving citizens little choice between CP candidates: in Czechoslovakia this was reduced even to single-name elections (only one candidate to vote for), while Yugoslavs had more opportunities, but restricted to a selections of individuals. The Party was therefore the only center of power. This ideological base collapsed in late Eighties, for several reasons: the international development certainly was decisive, as was the strong connection of European communism with Soviet politics and crisis. Yet what was crucial was the failure of the utopia promoted by the same States, failure seen as a *"widening gap between popular expectations and the actual fulfillment of needs,"* as Jasiewicz states (2007).

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The regime-change on the sight imposed the State the need for a new legitimacy, based this time on popular consensus. In this frame, the emerging élites (both inside/outside the Communist Parties) started addressing the people with the desertion of the former ideology but without its contraposition; the creation of what I describe as 'political enemy' against which a popular consensus would speak out, was more identified in the ruling mechanism (the enemy, or the 'other' to take the distance from, was the 'normalized Czechoslovakia' and the 'bureaucracy/persecution in Yugoslavia') than the philosophical idea.

In fact as Kuran notes, until the mid- 1980s, in each communist nation the private support for socialist goals was remarkably consistent: *"while they overwhelmingly disliked the regimes they had much fewer problems with the goals of socialism*" (Kuran, 1991, 32). Still in October 1990 a symptomatic poll stated that more than 30% of Serbs were in favour of social justice as intended with communism, but 52% agreed that in Yugoslavia personal connections more than individual abilities were the mean for success (Jović, 2009).

In previous chapter the two paths taken by the political debate in the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav nations had been described. The former have built a common new legitimacy against an external imposition (outside the federation), the latter have turned the antagonist aggregator towards the de-legitimization of the others (inside the federation). Reminding the above-cited idea of the enemy as contrast between 'us' and 'them', the idea of this 'us' was broader in Czechoslovakia (a common intent in the federation) and more restricted (the single nations) in Yugoslavia. It had a stronger impact in the outbreak of the ethnic conflicts.

Table 1. Presence and impact of the 'enemy' in the political debate

Country	*Political enemy*	*Localization*	*Conflict*
Czechoslovakia	Present (single)	External (Moscow)	Lower
Yugoslavia	Present (multiple)	Internal (other nations)	Higher

Source: the author

If the Czechoslovaks could set aside the enemy with the dismissal of 'Moscow's henchmen', the Yugoslavs could not nullify the antagonism by means other than the attack on the unity of the State (leading to hate speech / xenophobia that would eventually lead to terrible consequences for enemy group – minorities – after the establishment of new borders). The differences in the history of the two

States are to be underlined with the stronger conflicts that characterized the war period in Yugoslavia and whose echoes resounded in the beginning of the nationalist clashes (Petersen, 2002). What was then called ‘ethno-mobilization’ was the creation in each national political arena of this anti-enemy consensus in the post-totalitarian regime (Laín, 2011, 100). The dangerous run in the nationalist enemy-building is based on stereotypical de-individualized characteristics of a community: a rapid passage from blaming the Serbian leadership to accuse *the* Serbs directly, as well as *the* Croats, *the* Slovenes and so on. As it is known, the situation in Yugoslavia kept falling into deep crisis soon after the new elections, the first sign of the dreadful end of the Federation – the Yugoslav wars.

Czechoslovakia, with the ‘Velvet Revolution’, did not experience the ethno-mobilization within its border, but the regime-change must not be considered as being developed by actors immune to nationalist rhetoric. As noted, the main opposition groups – the ‘Civic forum’ and ‘Public Against Violence’ – were linked but autonomously operating in Czech (the former) and Slovakia (the latter). It is curious to note that in the revolutionary weeks in the end of 1989, Havel’s speeches were in Czech language while Dubček’s ones were in Slovak: this is again understandable as a common fight through national differences (Brumberg, 1996). After the 1990 elections however, as the above-mentioned Havel’s New Year speech underlines, the situation in the country had undergone a radical change. Also Czechoslovakia, after defeating the old regime, witnessed a partial geographical fragmentation that eventually led to the ‘velvet divorce’ in 1992.

Conclusions

This analysis concludes at the first free, pluralistic elections, seen as the turning point in the post-communist transition. Rather than the elections’ outcome, the emphasis is on the process that led to the establishment of new social borders, in the shadow zone of the political preparation for the regime-change – in Arendt’s term, in the change of (popular) legitimacy of the power (Arendt, 1970). The process of the 1989-1990 changes could not be analyzed without a study of the previous context, summarized in the brief description of the birth and development of the two States. As it was shown, the common path of the two multi-ethnic States made during the First World War (creation) / the Second World War (destruction) / the socialist era (reconstruction), maintains several differences, that have proved to be decisive: for the interwar period, the presence of a democratic system in Czechoslovakia, while in Yugoslavia an authoritarian system prevailed; for the war clashes, the huge

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conflicts within ethnic groups that in Yugoslavia remained present while in Czechoslovakia the more controversial group (the Germans) was pushed out of the State's territory; for the socialism, the stronger de-centralization of Yugoslavia and the absence of Soviet control, but also its deeper economic crisis.

All these factors became political tools for the actors who led the changes in the end of the Eighties. The afore-mentioned search for popular consensus built on antagonisms, leads to the following synthetic statements:

(1) in Czechoslovakia the presence of a single, external and common enemy for the different components of the federation led to low conflicts between the ethnic groups in the passage from authoritarian to a pluralist rule;

(2) In Yugoslavia, the presence of multiple, internal and individual enemies for the different components of the federation induced a higher level of political conflict.

The outcome of these statements has to be taken from a negative perspective: the emphasis of this study is not on the positive feature of having a common enemy, but intends to be a reflection on the dangerous dynamics of consensus-building in weak liberal democracies in post-ideological contexts. Moreover, especially in the Yugoslav case, this enemy-based strategy permitted a substantial continuum for authoritarian élites, who avoided the rulers' responsibilities of a country in crisis, and regenerated themselves as political winners. The state-building process is also at stake: as we have seen, the creation of borders (to surround and unite a community, as well as to separate and divide it) is a political action that may evolve extremely quickly, and with different outcomes.

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