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Emergence of Multi-Party System in Central European Region

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a detailed historical insight to the evolution and development of multi-party system in the Central Europe with special reference to Hungary, Poland, and Czech Republic. Political development, in the above countries, went through two distinct phases of political transformation, one during the communist regime and other during the post-communist regime. Considering the significance of comprehensive discussion, this article is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the political scenario during the communist era and its socio-political impact on the evolution of revolutionary movements in Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic. This section also includes a detailed note on revolutionary developments in the above mentioned countries especially, the Revolution of 1956 in Hungary, Solidarity Movement in Poland, Prague Spring, and Velvet Revolution in Czech Republic which can be considered to be the foundation steps for the emergence of multi-party system in this region. Further this section includes a short study of the political transformation during 1980s. The political transformation during this period is considered to be a connecting bridge between the authoritarian regime and the new opposition which resulted in the formation of democratic governments in the above countries. The second section deals with the development of multi-party system in the post-communist regime. It throws light on the development of diverse political parties which emerged after the collapse of communist regime.

Key Words : Democratic movement, Multi-party system, Ideological Division of Political Parties

INTRODUCTION

Hungary, Poland, and Czech Republic can be characterized as emerging democracies where multi-party system emerged after the collapse of communism in 1989. Since these countries are located in the same region of Central Europe, they hold some common experiences of the end of communism. Communism was marked by a combination of elite concessions, oppositionist pressures and broad public support for change. People of Central Europe and the former Soviet Union demanded right to freedom of speech, democratic assembly, private property and free market. Since the state was not ready to concede these demands, there was widespread opposition against the state policies in the entire region[1] .

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With the fall of socialism a broad front of anti-communist opposition evolved, which included all variants of anti-communist political opinion. The Solidarity movement in Poland, Civic Forum in the Czech Republic were some such broad anti-communist fronts. These fronts began as mass protest movements that provided a focus for mobilisation of broad based and spontaneous popular pressure against communist power. Nevertheless, taken together these forums and civil movements led to the collapse of communism and evolution of multi-party system in Central Europe. These fronts themselves soon fragmented due to their inner contradictions paving the way for the rise of a great plurality of political parties. Thus more distinctive political groupings began to emerge at later stage. From another perspective the onset of multi-party politics began from 1985-86 with entry into parliamentary politics of a number of independent rather than regime-endorsed deputies.[2]

Democratic Movements in Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic in Communist Period:

Post-World War II period witnessed the establishment of Marxist-Leninist regimes over those areas of Central and Eastern Europe, which had been designated by the allied power as a part of Soviet sphere of influence. As a result, communist governments were established in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania. Though, the democratic movements in these countries did not occur in a systematic process, it happened through the process of several reformist movements till disintegration of Soviet Union. People were dissatisfied with the existing communist governments, and therefore revolts and protests against the rule, broke out in several countries. However, after the death of Stalin in 1953 and Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956[3] , the dissatisfaction among the masses in these countries gained stimulus and ideas of reform began to gain ground.[4]

Instances of mass political protests occurring during this period include the Berlin uprising of June 1953,[5] a small scale worker's revolt in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia in June 1953; worker's strikes in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria; the Poznan uprising of June 1956 in Poland[6] ; and the dramatic revolution in Hungary in Oct-Nov 1956. Apart from these, such political events as the political crisis and the student's revolt in Poland in March 1968; the Czechoslovak reform movement the same year; and two waves of workers unrest in Poland 1970 and 1976 might also be included in the first historical cluster.[7]

These emerging protests and movements challenged Stalin's supremacy in the region. Besides, Yugoslavia emphasized a "different road to socialism" based on the local conditions, which eventually made their communism appear different from the Soviet type. Several changes took place regarding the reformist movements, such as decentralization of decision making to local government in 1949, which was closely followed by devolution of certain powers to economic enterprises and emergence of the first self managing councils. Yugoslavia thus set the tone for the future reforms in Central and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the end of the Stalin era brought decompression and new departures both in the USSR as well as in Eastern Europe[8] .

As a result, a mild reform began under the name of "new course".[9] It was first initiated in Hungary under Imer Nagy., and then in a more economic form in the former Soviet Union under leadership of Malenkov. The Hungarian programme entailed the making of planned

quotas in industry, a slowdown of the collectivization of agriculture, a promise that private initiative would be tolerated in retail trade and small industry, a pledge that "abuse of legality" would end the abolition of concentration camps and release of many political prisoners. These steps were taken to reduce the challenges posed by Stalin's administration. Nevertheless, the "new course" could be seen as a stepping stone which prepared "unreformed" Communism of the Stalinist variety for more profound changes.[10]

It could also be noted, that reformism in Central and Eastern Europe was closely related to its sub-regional diversities. Thus, in Central Europe the reformist ideas propagated were distinct from the rest of the countries in the communist bloc. Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, which belong to this reformist category, always displayed their distinctiveness. Further, it was this peculiar strength of Central European reformism, based as it was on wider social support, which created condition for almost violence free and smooth transition from socialism to liberal democracy in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In the following sections the issue of political development in the above countries is systematically analysed.

Hungary:

In Hungary, Stalinist leader, Matyas Rokosi was reluctant to implement Moscow's "new course", and allow for a measure of power sharing with moderate leaders. In 1953 Rokosi was forced by Kremlin pressures to resign from the premiership and was replaced by Imer Nagy who limited repression and restrained the forced collectivization programme, though he was soon expelled from the party. Rakosi's return in 1955 reversed the liberalization process, but failed to stem rising popular aspirations for democratization. Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956[11] against Stalin's policies breathed new life into Hungarian reformers and

Fig. 1 : Budapest, October, 1956 (Source:FIA Rue des Archives Forum:http://webgallery.fh4u.net/)

helped to increase dissent among student as well as the implementation of numerous civil liberties.

Though, the leadership in Hungary changed several times, but it failed to satisfy the masses who by now were demanding substantial political reform. A mass demonstration in Budapest on 23 October 1956 triggered the Hungarian uprising. The rebellion swiftly spread and the number of armed insurgents rapidly increased. They were also joined by units of Hungarian army, and by sympathetic policemen who are reported to have supplied weapons and ammunition and fought alongside the insurgents against the Soviet forces.[12]

During the protest, the rebels put forward a programme for extensive political, economic and social change including broad pluralism, civil liberties, free elections, independent labour unions and workers councils, the abolition of security police and collective farms and the restoration of parliamentary democracy and mixed economy. The Hungarian leadership by Imer Nagy was significant during 1956, as with the temporary Soviet withdrawal, he announced the abolition of 'one party system'. This was to involve the recreation of independent political parties including the Small holder's party and the re-establishment of an authentic coalition government in which the communists would occupy a minority position in line with their actual support base in the country.[13]

Local self government councils were formed in several parts of Hungary to represent various social and occupational workers council to effectively take over factory management. Nagy succeeded in laying down a concept of alternative economic, political and cultural policy within the parameters set by the communist ideology and stimulated an authentic politicizations process which was not in essence a form of anti-communism, but a discussion of nature and goals of the communist system and of how to secure a purer and more virtuous form of communism.[14]

The Soviet authorities dissolved Nagy's government and assembled a group of loyal pro-Moscow Hungarian Communists to form a new administration under the leadership of Janos Kadar.[15] He declared martial law in the country and banned all autonomous organizations, and re-established Communist controlled bodies in all areas of public life. Once the resistance was crushed, he tried to win the trust of people and maintained a delicate policy balance between Stalin and Nagy. The Hungarian uprising of 1956 was spontaneous and leaderless. It was a movement of masses and influenced by anti-communist ideology. This movement transformed the political scenario in Hungary. The experience of the resistance stayed on and impacted future democratisation in the region.

The Republic of Poland :

The evolution of political parties in Poland can be traced from the Solidarity movement. Solidarity was not a political organisation, it evolved as a trade union. Subsequently, it became a social movement as many of its members considered themselves as social activists[16]. Poland was also different from other communist regimes as it experienced extensive cooperation of the intelligentsia and workers after 1976 when Committee in Defence of Workers (KOR) was formed. This circumstance provided a strong base for the opposition with large counter-elite who in the sunset years of communism assumed power and lead the country's transition from communism.[17]

There had been three earlier revolutions in 1956, 1970-71 and 1976 in Poland. They were not successful, as it was driven by self interest of the factions of Solidarity movement. It did not acquire popular support by the masses; therefore easily suppressed by the state. In 1980s ,once again there was workers upsurge in Poland. This movement, unlike the earlier struggles was more tightly organised , enjoyed widespread support (10 million workers from the nationalised sector of industry, six lakh peasants in rural Solidarity and a third of the communist party members), and had a greater political clarity.[18] After the Second World War, the newly re-formed communist party and the Polish Socialist Party were merged with the support of a sizeable section of the working class[19] .

There was political instability in Poland. People were frustrated with the existing political system, which led to state disruption. The active rebellious intellectuals were those, who associated with Po-prostu magazine and Kersey Kolo discussion clubs. During 1956, a number of pro-reformist working class centres of debate were also formed in several major cities. One significant consequence of the widespread popular agitation and discontent which resulted in the public protests by workers in Poznon was the replacement of the party first secretary Edward Ochab by the native Communist Gomulka[20] in October 1956.[21]

Gomulka, who represented an anti-Stalinist "national focused" brand of communism, gained the support of many critical students and non party intellectuals who believed that they could provide support to the growing liberalization movement. Uneconomic collective farms were largely dissolved, which led to re-privatization of the bulk of agriculture. Religious freedoms were restored through a guarded reconciliation with the Catholic Church. However, the significant democratizing gains of the "Polish October"[22] gradually eroded. The worker's councils were rendered powerless and no significant economic improvements took place.

Fig. 2 : Local Polish Rally for Solidarity December, 1981 (Source: http://csudigitalhumanities.org/exhibits/files/original/rally-for-solidairty014_6cad1f5fe5.jpg)

But in respect of voting rights, it had been regularly extended as all candidates remained communist party nominees.[23]

The worker-intellectual groups gave rise to the origin of independent free trade union Solidarity on 31 August 1980. It followed a wave of strikes and protests on economic situations. The union raised such political demands which were unacceptable to the communist regime. Therefore, as protest resumed, martial law was enforced in the country to prohibit those demands and political organizations. In order to escape from the escalating political instability in Poland, the government agreed to negotiate with the opposition. As a result, Roundtable negotiations between communist officials and Solidarity representatives began in February 1989 and ended in April 1989 with signing of several successful agreements on political and economic reforms.[24] The main resolutions of the negotiations were the establishment of second chamber of Parliament *i.e.,* the Senate; parity elections to the Sejm, the establishment of the office of the President chosen by both the houses of Parliament for the term of six years.[25]

Czechoslovakia:

After the Second World War, the Communists, with Soviet backing rapidly increased their political power in Czechoslovakia. The Communist leader Klement Gottwald became Prime Minister of the country. The Communists gained control of the ministries of education, interior, and communications. Major industries were nationalized. The conservative political parties were banned and prominent anti- Communists were assassinated or exiled.[26]

The Prague Spring :

At the beginning of 1968, a progressive section of the Czechoslovak Communist Party realized the need for necessary radical changes to prevent a major economic devastation of the country. In January, Novotný was replaced as general secretary of the party by Alexander Dubcek.[27] This was done to liberalize and democratize Czechoslovakia, and weaned it from its dependence upon USSR, which is formerly known as the Prague Spring. The reformers guaranteed freedom of speech, press, assembly and religion. These reforms gave a greater role to non-Communist parties and groups. It adopted economic reforms, including decentralized decision making and profit incentives. The programme won the support of the people and communist parties in West Europe. However, the reformers met the enmity of the Soviet Government and the Warsaw Pact members. The latter feared that popular demands for reform would spread to them as well. In the meantime the Czechoslovak Government promised to keep the Communists in power and to remain in the Warsaw Pact.[28]

The former USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies decided to end Prague Spring. On 20 August 1968, 600,000 Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops occupied Czechoslovakia. The intervention was broadly condemned throughout the world. A treaty was signed allowing Soviet troops to remain in the country. Dubcek was replaced by Gustav Husákas President of Czechoslovakia. Reforms of the Prague Spring were scrapped.

Czechoslovakia again became a Communist state loyal to the USSR. However, people agitated against the policies and measures of Government with the enactment of Charter 77 in 1977.[29] The Charter 77 gave voice to the oppressed people, as it stressed on the protection

Fig. 3 : (Prague residents surround Soviet tanks in front of the Czechoslovak Radio station building in central Prague during the first day of Soviet-led invasion to then Czechoslovakia August 21, 1968. Czech Russian/Invasion Reuters/Libor Hajsky), Sources: https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/soviet-invasion-czechoslavkia

of human rights. Hundreds of people signed a document charging the government with violations of human rights. The spirit of resistance of these movements echoed in the Velvet revolution of 1989, which transformed the political situation in the Czech Republic.

The Velvet Revolution of 1989 :

On 17 November 1989, a peaceful student demonstration initiated revolutionary events in Prague, which was suppressed by the police. However, the outcome of the events was not easily forgettable. It sparked a movement against the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. This led to the origin of "Civic Forum" (OF) as a political movement of dissatisfied people of the existing regime. People accepted Vaclav Havel as the leader of the Civic Forum.

In 1989 the communists in Czechoslovakia were unable to hold back the tide of reform. In November 1989 the Communist Party leaders stepped down, and the government started negotiations with the opposition under the name of Civic Forum, led by the Czech writer Vaclav Havel. Dubcek was elected as Chairman of the Federal Assembly and Havel was chosen as President of Czechoslovakia. The Civic Forum negotiated with the Government on several issues. The agreement focused on the liberalization *i.e.* the release of political prisoners; the elimination of constitutional articles on the leading role of Communist Party in society and in the National Front's political system; the legalization of opposition groups and

also unrestricted access to the media and so on[30] . In the spring of 1992 it was agreed to hold a referendum to decide the future of Czechoslovakia. The majority voted to create two separate republics, the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia. The break-up of Czechoslovakia was the result of conflicts which led to formation of Civic Forum by Czechs and Public Against Violence (VPN) by Slovaks as separate citizen movements. The emergent system consisted of separate Czech and Slovak Political parties.[31]

The country specific discussion shows that in each case, there were significant policy changes in neighbouring countries, and collective efforts were made to prevent the crisis. It is logical to argue that when largely similar condition prevail in particular geographic region, a crisis in one country tends to create similar processes in other neighbouring countries and elicit pre-emptive responses from the ruling elite. In this sense, the logical connection between Polish Solidarity movement, October1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Prague Spring can be easily understood. They signified the continually recurring political stability, fragility and vulnerability for the party-state's institutional order. Each such crisis was followed by a massive demobilization of the popular challenge to the regime and reconsolidation of the institutional system of the party-state. These movements were actually the response of the failure of Stalinist domestic and regional policies in Central and Eastern Europe, which were caused by the breakdown of forced industrialization and collectivization policies leading to an acute economic crisis and several shortages on the consumer front. Most importantly, these events are significant examples of the "interactive nature of political crisis within a unified geographical state system."

Evolution of Multi-Party System in Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic: in Post-Communist Era :

The communist system collapsed in 1989 followed by the disintegration of USSR into several democratic countries in the region. This was followed by countries adopting democratic constitutions which in turn formed the basis of creating democratic institutions of governance such as; the presidency, parliament and assemblies, independent judiciary, regular elections, codification of individual and group rights and liberties. This provided a conducive atmosphere for the political parties to develop and participate in the political process.[32] A number of political parties developed in Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic which is discussed in detail.

Hungary :

There had been a kind of negotiated revolution in Hungary that ushered in political transition. A set of political agreements and understandings between the outgoing and incoming political elites were concluded in 1989-90. The National Roundtable (NRT) negotiations of June–Septemer1989 were an important agreement that brought several changes in the political system.[33]

In Hungary, the evolution of political parties was based on three important factors *i.e.* cultural, ideological and personal factors. There was no trace of civic forum type of opposition to the communist regime appearing. In fact, the multi-party system of Hungary is determined by strong competition and polarized characters. On the basis of these three factors, three

political camps had formed – the liberal, the national conservative/Christian and socialist respectively.

The socialist camp was formed by the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the liberal camp by the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) and the Federation of Young Democrats and the national conservative/Christian camp by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Independent Smallholders Party (FKGP) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP). During the second half of the 1990s, some change occurred in this structure, with Fidesz moving from the liberal camp to the national conservative camp. Each camp was tied together not only by common political and ideological orientations, but also by the similar socio-cultural composition of their core political elites, electoral bases and by shared political attitudes and world views.[34]

Table 1 : Characteristic of the three political camps during the first half of the 1990s

	Socialist	Liberal	Conservative
Parties	MSZP	SZDSZ, Fidesz	MDF, KDNP, FKGP
Ideology	Left wing/modernizing, social democratic	Based on human rights, liberal economics	National, Christian, conservative
Party elite	Nomenklatura elite	Liberal/radical intelligentsia	Intelligentsia of
Social elite	Leaders (functionaries of the kadar era)	Intelligentsia	Christian middle class
Social basis (electoral base)	Former MSZMP Members	Those not integrated into church or communist system	Church going Christians
Cleavage	Nomenklatura	Secularized, not integrated into communist system	Religion

Source: Andras Korosenyi /Alan Renwick 1999: 32.

The Origins and Establishment of the New Parties in Hungary :

The democratic transition in Hungary began, after 1989. The disintegration of one party system that had dominated for four decades began in the mid-1980s and by 1987-88 various critical and oppositional groups sought to organize politically. During 1990 elections, a party system emerged, in comparison with the diffuse anti-communist movements in the other transition countries.[35]

After 1980s, several political parties were formed, which could be classified into three groups.[36]

(a) The first group was composed of historical parties – the Independent Small- holders Party (FKgP), the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), the Hungarian Social Democratic Parties (MSZDP) and the Hungarian People's Party (MNP). Among them, only the first two entered parliament in 1990 and 1994, and only the Smallholders gained parliamentary representation in 1998. The common feature of all of these parties was that they were driven by their historical perceptions.

(b) The second group comprised of those new parties, which formed from the dissident intelligentsia group during the last years of the Kadar era. The Hungarian Democratic Forum

(MDF), the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) and the Federation of Young Democrats (Fidasz) belong to this group. The 1990 election brought success for these parties. In both 1994 and 1998 they won close to 40% of the votes, but their relative strengths had changed totally by 1998. While Fidesz had by then become a large party, the SZDSZ had gradually fallen back, and the MDF had become very small indeed.

(c) The third group were successor of the old Communist Party. The Communist Party (officially, the Hungarian Socialist Workers party, MSZMP) split into two at its October 1989 congress. The reformers, who gained the upper hand at the congress, formed the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), while the conservatives continued to operate under the old MSZMP banner, later shortening it to the Workers' Party (Munkaspart, MP); The MSZP was able successfully to inter competition with the opposition. It entered parliament as the fourth largest party in 1990, with 11% of the votes and in 1994 it was the electoral victor. The MSZMP/workers' party has, by contrast, been unable to enter parliament and has fallen to the political periphery.

Republic of Poland :

Poland was the first Central European state to end communist rule in 1989. However, the process of party development in post-communist Poland has been complex and unstable for long period[37] . After the spring 1989, Roundtable Talks between the Solidarity opposition and the communist authorities, the partially free elections to the Sejm were held in May-June1989. Due to this, a competitive party system emerges. In that election, Solidarity-backed candidates won all 161, openly contested seats for the Sejm *i.e.,* the lower house of Parliament, and 99 of the 100 seats in the Senate, i.e. the upper house. A new government formed, in August 1989, led by Solidarity advisor Tadeusz Mazowiecki.[38] The historical context of party formation in post-1989 Poland can be divided into six broad, historical phases:

A) During the first phase of Polish party development several political parties which were functioning in the communist period were legalized. In this period politics and the process of party formation were dominated by developments within the Solidarity movement and its subsequent decomposition.[39]

B) In the run-up to the first fully competitive parliamentary elections of October 1991 the process of party formation accelerated and the number of parties flourished during this second phase of party development,[40]

C) The third phase of party development was the period between 1991 election to 1993 parliamentary election. It was characterized by splits, disintegration and re-merge of political parties, which originated from the Solidarity camp. The large number of newly emerged parties created unstable coalition government at the Polish political scene.[41]

D) The fourth phase of party development ran from the September 1993 parliamentary election through the November 1995 presidential election. The new SLD-PSL coalition government, which emerged under PSL leader Waldemar Pawlak, was the first since 1989 to enjoy a stable majority in the legislature.[42]

E) The fifth phase of party development, from November 1995 presidential election until the September 1997 parliamentary election, opened with the SLD-PSL coalition government immediately involved in crisis.[43]

F) In the sixth phase of party development, from September 1997 to the October 1998 local elections, it was characterized by the consolidation of the party system around four of these six groupings- AWS, SdRP/SLD, PSL, and UW-with ROP and UP which slowly declined in the Polish party system.[44]

Poland was the first European country of the region to establish non-communist government based on the Warsaw Pact and the historic round table agreement held in April 1989 between the communist government and the opposition movement led by Solidarity.[45] After dismantling the communist regime in 1989, Poland's political development faced multiple challenges in establishing democratic government. Parliamentary elections were held in October 1991 and the parties which contested in the election were found to be weak, fragmented and ill equipped to sustain effective government[46]. It led to the expression that a 'deep and dangerous political crisis' had in Poland and its transitional institutions seemed to lag behind the developments elsewhere in Central and Eastern European region.[47]

However, as explained in the above sections, the political development of Poland was the result of several factors. Poland was the first of the East European countries to break with the communist power monopoly which created plentiful of complex issues. It was also the first to implement a radical programme of economic reform and take a range of measures to establish a market economy. This certainly imposed considerable costs on the population.[48] It fostered sentiments of resentment both to the realm of politics in general and to liberal (*i.e.* free-market inclined) politicians in particular.

A significant factor contributing to the uncertainty of Polish political scene and fragmentation of the 1991-93 parliaments was the application of an electoral system of proportional representation without any threshold being imposed to discourage the representation of large numbers of small political groupings.[49] In fact, the knowledge of the Polish history alerts one to particularly the fragmentation of the post-World War I parliament and abundance of parties that provided the context for Pilsudski's coup *d'état* in 1926.[50] There were widespread feelings that the problems of establishing organised political discipline and developing a viable multi-party system, derived in some way from Polish cultural traditions, and that might also be expected in the context of post-communist transition.[51]

The Polish Solidarity camp developed soon after the victory of 1989, while the gradual process of consolidation took place on after wards, marginalized left. The presidential campaign and an intensifying war at the top within the Solidarity leadership were major factors that contributed to the polarization of the movement as parties began to form.[52] In August 1990, a law on political parties came into force as the struggle for the presidency deepened. A centre accord was founded in May 1990 to promote Walesa's campaign for the presidency, the association being transformed into a political party in March 1991. An equivalent party was set up by Mazowiecki supporters in December 1990 as the Democratic Union. The old communist party dissolved itself in January 1990 and established a new Social Democracy of the Police Republic.[53]

In Poland, political parties which established on the background of the former regime had absolute advantages and maintained a significant political presence, whereas the fate of most other parties across the centre and right-wing was more mixed. These political parties such as, The Democratic Union which was renamed as the Freedom Union following a

merger with the congress of the Liberal Democrats in 1994, survived more successfully than most other parties. Its performance in the 1997 elections was found to be better than other parties.[54] More right-wing, populist parties generally did less well in the 1990s although the Confederation for Independent Poland, founded by dissident activist Leszek Moczulski during 1979, won some parliamentary seats both in the first fully competitive elections of 1991 and those held in 1993 elections.[55]

The newly formed parties did not help the initial emergence of stable party system. More than hundred parties existed in early 1991 and around seventy-five had been formally registered.[56] Until the enactment of new legislation, a party only needed fifteen members to qualify for registration. This minimal requirement led to the party proliferation. Though, the number of officially recorded parties did not necessarily present an accurate reflection of the number of effective organisations in existence. By 1997, when new legislation was passed, as many as 370 parties were said to exist but in early 1998 only forty had been registered under the new regulations. The others were deregistered and disappeared from the scene altogether. However, the field was still open for the formation of new organisations. Solidarity was nevertheless, revived as an organised electoral force only in June 1996 and it proceeded to win the elections held in September the following year.[57]

Ideological Division of Political Parties in Poland :

The Polish political scene is characterized by a large number of parties and groupings with various political affiliations. In September 1992 there were 150 registered political parties rising to 174 by January 1993. There were also a number of unregistered political groups.[58] In Poland, several political parties have formed on the basis of varied ideological and social orientations. Few of them come under Socialists and Social Democrats political parties, while others are liberal and leftist political parties.

Socialists and Social Democrats *:*

Political Parties such as Democratic Left Alliance (DLA), Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SDRP), Union of Labour (UL), National Party of Senior Citizens and Pensioners (NPSCP) and All-Polish Accord of Trade Unions were formed on the principle of democratic socialism and state control.[59]

Liberals*:*

Political Parties such as Freedom Union (FU) and Liberal Conservative Movements of the One Hundred (LCMOH) are liberal parties existing in Poland. Liberal parties are dominated by urban intellectuals and the most educated section of society. They tend to focus on the role of states in the economic reform process. They oppose authoritarianism, nationalism and state authority in their policies.[60]

Christian Democrats*:*

Political Parties such as Solidarity Electoral Action (SEA), Christian National Union (CNU), and Conservative Peasant Party (CPP), Non-Party Bloc for the Support of Reforms (NBSR), Centre Democratic Accord (CDA) and Union of Real Politics (URP) are based

on the principle of Christianity and associated with the Catholic teachings.[61]

Agrarians :

Polish Peasant Party (PPP) was one of the largest political parties in Poland working successfully in its rural constituencies. Mikotajczyk-Polish Peasant Party (M-PPP) and Peasant Alliance (PA) are other large agrarian political parties. Agrarian parties are more successful in the region with an extensive farming sector, a tradition of rural politics and government policies which have negatively affected the rural people. They have diverse ideological and programmatic profiles in seeking favourable governmental policies towards farmers.[62]

Greens*:*

Polish Green Party (PGP) is an environmental based political party. There were three main representatives of the Polish ecological movement *i.e.* Polish Green Party (PGP), the Polish Ecological Party of Greens (PEPG) and the All-Poland Union of Greens (APUG). Its priorities were the protection of the natural environment and changing ecological attitudes in society. However, due to single-issue focus, it remained marginal political parties in the region.[63]

Nationalists :

Confederation for Independent Poland (CIP/KPN) challenged the communist ruling and called for an independent Poland. Movement for the Republic (MfR/RDR), National Democratic Party (NDP/SND), and National Party (NP/SN), Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland (MRP/ROP) are some of the nationalist based political parties of Poland. These political parties placed more emphasis on ethnic identity, language, culture and religion for determining citizenship rights.[64]

Czech Republic :

In Czechoslovakia the early post-communist period was dominated by the presence of Civic Forum which was established on 18 November 1989 (in Czech) and Public Against Violence (in Slovakia) and closely allied social movements.[65] A major breakthrough was achieved by the opposition on 27 November 1989. General strike erupted in several major cities which resulted into formal talks between the Civic Forum and the government. The initially moderate position of the forum encouraged communist leaders, including Prime Minister Ladislave Admec, to enter into a dialogue with the opposition. During the dialogue process, the Federal Assembly removed the clause in the constitution which guaranteed the predominant role of communist party in the state. On 3 December 1989, a new government was formed which included five non-communist ministers.[66]

All these post-communist developments laid the foundation for multi-party general elections. The preservation of the mass coalition movement led to charges of obstruction in the development of political pluralism.[67] This transitional federal administration endured until 29 June 1990; its main task was to lay the legal foundations for free elections and multi-party system.[68]

A Federal law was passed in January 1990 which permitted citizens a right to form political parties. In accordance to the new law, 10,000 signatures were need for registering a new party[69] . Civic Forum and Public Against Violence as well as the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia were the first few parties to be registered.[70] During the first few weeks of the decree, over 90 parties emerged, ranging from reform communists to nationalists. Though, most parties had almost identical general principles *i.e.,* a commitment to democracy and market economy. The process of 'programmatic specification and differentiation' became more prominent after the national elections. However, numerous small parties disappeared or merged; resulted into a clearer political situation. Four main clusters emerged during the transition process: communist inheritors, former satellites, post coalition parties and independent formations.[71]

The new electoral law which was passed in February 1990 became the basis for the first free elections in Czechoslovakia in 44 years. It was an important step in framing the structure of the new parliament and determining the degree of political stability. In order to qualify for parliamentary seats, several restrictions were placed for political parties. Under the system of proportional representation a party needed to gain at least 5% of the total vote. As a result, several dozen groups failed to qualify for balloting, only 23 political parties, movements and coalitions completed in the elections.[72]

Most of the major parties in the Czech Republic can be described as leftist, centrist, or rightist. Several of the major parties in Slovakia, on the other hand, are pursuing nationalist agendas without adopting clear stands on other issues. The extreme right of the political spectrum is occupied by the Republican party-Association for the Republic. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, a political monolith only a year ago, has disintegrated into several groups whose views range from Stalinist to social democratic.

At the end of 1990 it became clear that the centrifugal forces within the civic forum and the Public Against Violence would eventually cause both movements to disintegrate. In January 1991 a Civic Forum Congress voted to transform the Forum into the political part. The Civic Forum finally disintegrated in February 1991. Although it initially split into two groups- the right-of-centre Civic Democratic Party led by Claus and the left- of-centre Civic movement led by foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier-other groups, such as the conservative Civic Democratic Alliance, also eventually emerged from the forum. The Civic Forum ceased to exist as a political organization.[73]

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, too, was plagued by internal disputes. There was a growing rift between the predominantly Conservative Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia. Active in the Czech Republic, and the Slovak Communist Party, which renamed itself the Party of the Democratic Left in January 1991.as a result of the disintegration of Civic Forum, the Public Against Violence, the Association for Moravia and Silesia, the coalition of Christian Democratic Parties and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the composition of the federal and Republican parliaments changed radically.

Ideological Division of Political Parties in the Czech Republic :

Socialists and Social Democrats:

Czech Social Democratic Party (CSDP/CSSD), Liberal National Socialist Party (LNSP/

LSNP), Democratic Left Party (DLP/SDL), Left Bloc (LB), Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS/SDS) and Pensioners for Secure Living (PSL/DZJ) are socialists based political parties.[74]

***Liberals**:*

Political parties such as, Civic Democratic Party (CDP/ODS), Civic Democratic Alliance (CDA/ODA), Freedom Union (FU/US), Free Democrats (FD/SD), Free Democrats-Liberal National Socialist Party (FD-LNSP), Czech People's Social Party (CPSP/CSNS), Liberal Social Union (LSU), Party of Businessmen and Tradesmen (PBT), Democratic Union (DU/DEU) and Right Bloc (RB) focus on privatization and limited control of state authority.[75]

***Christian Democrats**:*

Christian Democratic Party (CDP/KDS) and Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (CDU-CPP/KDU-CSL) are among the oldest political parties of Czech Republic. CDP was formally established as a Christian official group in mid-1980s and later emerged as a political party. However, CDU-CPP was older than CDP. It was formed in 1918 through the merger of several Czech Catholic groups.[76]

***Greens**:*

Green Party (GP/SZ) is the only environmental based political party in Czech Republic which was established in 1989. It adhered to the principles of "green international" and became the largest of the new environmental groupings in the Czech Republic.

***Communists**:*

Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM/KSCM) was established before the transition period in Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, it reorganized in 1989 after several splits during the post-Cold War period. Political parties such as, Czechoslovak Democratic Forum (CDF) and the Independent Left (IL) were offshoots of CPBM during reformist period. They advocated democratic socialism and social market economy as their political agendas.[77]

***Nationalists**:*

Association for the Republic-Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (AR-RPC) and Club of Committed Non-Party Members (CCNPM) are conservative nationalist political parties. AR-RPC was a nationalist and racist party with the support of young, less-educated and unemployed voters in large number. CCNPM was a right-wing political party, which did not get much support and therefore never represented in the Czech Parliament.

Conclusion :

This article discussed the evolution and growth of multi-party system in the Central European countries with special reference to Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic. In doing so, this article not only highlighted the historical evolution of party system in the above countries, but also elaborated the political reformation processes which took place during the

communist and post communist period. The establishment of democratic institutions in Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic are result of broad mass movements which led to the end of communism in the above region. The peaceful revolutions of 1989 was based on the resistance legacy of the region as reflected in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Prague Spring and Velvet revolution of Czechoslovakia and the Solidarity movement in Poland. They have continued the process of transformation from eastern bloc communism to independent, democratic and free-market-oriented states integrated into Europe. Internally, successive governments have been consolidating market economic reforms and democratic institutions. Externally, Central European countries are seeking to integrate with Western Europe and achieve membership in the European Union (EU) and NATO.[78]

However, the process of emergence of multi-party system has been same in Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic; while its consequences are different. Political stability varied among these countries. Social movements like Solidarity movement of Poland and Civic Forum of Czech Republic were initially seen as a substitute for parties; not just a force that was significant in bringing about the end of communism. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the emergence of parties has not always been welcomed, the political activities surrounding their growth sometimes unstable and parties' performance inconsistent. Nevertheless, the emergence of a stable party system in Hungary, growing fragmentation of the organized political framework in Poland and Czech Republic cannot be judged as failure. The political processes in these new democracies are strengthening in present times with increasing participation and representation of its people.

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