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Veronika Pasyukova: Labour and Politics in Post-Communist Europe: Do Trade Unions Matter?

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to the analysis of the role of trade unions in the labour policy process in post-communist East European countries. At the moment, most East European trade unions have communist roots and can therefore be analysed as successor trade unions (although this term is not very popular among political scientists) or former official trade unions. After the communist regimes collapsed in Eastern Europe, successor trade unions were considered a possible source of civil society in post-communist states. It was expected that trade unions, once rid of party-state control, would assume the traditional function of defending workers' social and economic rights. The social and economic hardships suffered during the post-communist transformations prompted the public to appeal to trade unions for support, but their role in forging the labour policy that followed has been regarded with ambivalence. On the one hand, post-communist trade unions were considered to be ineffective vis-à-vis labour conflicts, because they were not influential actors in the social dialogue process and were still weak and subordinated to the state. On the other hand, trade unions could follow various strategies in their negotiations with governments and achieved some benefits as a result of effective collective bargaining in labour policy.

To determine whether post-communist trade unions are institutionally weak or not, one should analyse their role and position in a number of East European cases. The criteria of institutional weakness have already been discussed by researchers citing the communist legacy of the trade unions, the low mobilisation level of the workers, political instability etc. However, trade unions in Eastern Europe should not be analysed from the labour perspective only, for when trade unions regulated labour conflicts, they were also acting as mediating institutions, political players and economic interest groups.

The paper provides a theoretical overview as well as a comparative analysis of East European cases based on the general framework of rational choice theory and nested game theory. This approach considers the role of trade unions in post-communist Europe in various institutional arenas, including institutional design, the electoral sphere and social dialogue. The countries surveyed are Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and Russia. The initial results show that a number of models of labour policy regulation can be defined according to the strategies trade unions as well as the state used on the institutional arenas under scrutiny.

Introduction: some theoretical remarks on East European trade unions

Trade unions are considered one of the fundamental institutions of civil society in contemporary democracies. It is supposed that the central function of trade unions is the defence of the social-economic rights of employees with respect to the regulation of wages, work conditions and labour conflicts. Evidently, trade unions can serve either as initiators or mediators of labour conflicts. Rooted in the organised labour movement of the 19th century, West European trade unions have commonly played a crucial role in launching social conflicts as effective instruments for defending civil rights. However, for the analysis of East European trade unions, the use of Western theoretical models of labour relations is hardly appropriate. The functions and essence of the trade unions in the post-communist democracies under discussion differ greatly from their Western counterparts, mainly due to their communist institutional legacies.

Most trade unions in Eastern Europe today have “communist origins”,¹ which makes it possible to analyse them as “successor trade unions” (this term is not prevalent in research literature) or former official trade unions. According to the definition of successor parties,² there are trade unions that developed in the post-communist period as the legal and legitimate institutional heirs of their communist predecessors. Because

1 Kubicek, Paul: *Organised Labour in Postcommunist States. From Solidarity to Infirmary*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004, p. 17.

2 Mahr, Alison / Nagle, John: *Resurrection of the Successor Parties and Democratization in East-Central Europe*, in: *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 1995 (vol. 28), No. 4, pp. 393–409; Ishiyama, John T.: *The Communist Successor Parties and Party Organizational Development in Post-Communist Politics*, in: *Political Research Quarterly*, 1999 (vol. 52), No. 1, pp. 87–112.

the new trade unions assumed their forerunners' organisational resources, including finances, properties and personnel, they should be recognised as successor trade unions.

As communist regimes collapsed across the continent, official trade unions were regarded as a possible foundation for civil society institutions; once the trade unions had shed communist party control, they were expected to start fulfilling the traditional function of defending workers' social and economic rights.³ However, the role of trade unions in the post-communist period turned out to be ambiguous due to the influence of various factors, including the so-called "communist legacy".⁴

To analyse the variety of factors that shaped the development of trade unions in post-communist Europe and the unions' role in labour policy regulation, a theoretical model that is capable of considering trade unions and their strategies from different perspectives is required. Because the unions were simultaneously mediating institutions, political players and economic interest groups, some dimensions of their activities in the post-communist period were likely interrelated. G. Tsebelis' theoretical model, based on rational choice theory and nested game theory, is useful for the analysis of the various permutations.⁵

First of all, it is the institutional design arena that determines the general institutional conditions for the participants of the game, which in this case include the state, political parties, trade unions, employers' associations, etc.

Second, the electoral arena is where electoral coalitions form between parties and trade unions (for example, successor parties and former official trade unions) prior to elections.

Third, it is the social dialogue arena where the state, trade unions and employers' associations engage in tripartite negotiations. Here, clientelist contacts often come into play, because they are more effective for lobbying trade unions' interests than the complicated and unpredictable social dialogue process with employers' associations as the third partner.

The disintegration of the communist economic model and party-state system resulted in the collapse of formal organisational links between trade unions and the party-state.⁶ Since it was extremely important for the former trade unions to obtain the recognition of the post-communist state, they had to build corporatist relations on the basis of the tripartism or social dialogue principle. These constituted the institutional mechanism for the regulation of labour relations in a democracy that included the state, trade unions and employers' associations as participants.⁷

It is argued that there were also corporatist elements in communist regimes, but that system was in fact bureaucratised in the late communist period. Trade unions actively used bureaucratic mechanisms to defend their interests, and informal links between trade unions and enterprise management were established and developed. The informal links were widely used in the post-communist period, in spite of the fact that the former institutional links between trade unions and the party-state had collapsed or, more precisely, had been replaced by the new model of relations based on social dialogue and corporatism. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of so-called "residual corporatism" meant that contacts between trade unions, enterprise

3 Herod, Andrew: *Theorising Trade Unions in Transition*, in: Pickles, John / Smith, Adrian (eds.): *Theorising Transition: The Political Economy of Post-Communist Transformation*, London, New York: Routledge, 1998: pp. 197–217.

4 See, for example: Kubicek, Paul: *Civil Society, Trade Unions and Post-Soviet Democratization: Evidence From Russia and Ukraine*, in: *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2002 (vol. 54), No. 4; Sil, Rudra / Candland, Christopher: *Institutional Legacies and the Transformation of Labour: Late-Industrializing and Post-Socialist Economies in Comparative-Historical Perspective*, in: Candland, Christopher / Sil, Rudra (eds): *The Politics of Labor in a Global Age. Continuity and Change in Late-Industrialising and Post-Socialist Economies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 285–308.

5 Tsebelis, George: *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics*. Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1990.

6 See, for details: Csanádi, Maria: *Party-States and Their Legacies in Post-Communist Transformation*. Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar, 1997.

7 Matthes, Claudia-Yvette / Terletzki, Peggy: *Tripartite Bargaining and its Impact on Stabilisation Policy in Central and Eastern Europe*, in: *The International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 2005 (vol. 21), No. 3, p. 372.

management and the state remained on the enterprise and national levels, which impeded the institutionalisation of social dialogue. In addition, most former official trade unions had undertaken no significant organisational or ideological reforms, which precluded the effective mobilisation of workers' protests or the use of strikes as the main weapon in their negotiations with the government. Trade unions had to resolve conflicts with the state by using bureaucratic and clientelist contacts inherited from communist regimes or by taking government dictations.⁸

It has been noted that in the post-communist period, along with the realisation of the traditional defending function in the social dialogue, trade unions took on strongly pronounced political functions. The shift to the political arena could be explained in terms of specific features of the transformation period, during which trade unions had to participate directly in policy-making if they wanted to influence the transition process. In so doing, the unions were able to institutionalise and assume their defending function under the conditions of the transition to a market economy. To be effective, the trade unions needed political representation in the legislative and executive institutions of the post-communist regime.⁹ It seems only logical that in order to gain representation in the political field, trade unions turned to the electoral arena: they had to look for partners to participate in parliamentary elections.

When the ruling communist parties collapsed, their formal contacts with trade unions were also broken. It is symbolic that trade unions everywhere claimed their independent status from the communist party and abolished its leading role in their statutes. However, the emergence of successor parties in the political arena revealed that the unions had in fact kept their informal relations with former official trade unions intact. The liaisons served as a breeding ground for political alliances between former communist parties and trade unions. Together they participated in parliamentary elections and engaged in reciprocal lobbying of each other's interests in the social dialogue.

The most elaborate model of relations between successor parties and trade unions in East European countries was developed by M. Orenstein.¹⁰ He cited the Polish and Hungarian successor parties as the most successful examples and distinguished two phases in the successor parties' transformation. The first phase included the intra-party split into conservative and reformative wings. During the second phase, in which the latter wing prevailed, co-operation with former official trade unions was established that determined the mass mobilisation of the successor parties' electorate and clinched their success in parliamentary elections.¹¹ The explanation given by Orenstein emphasises the successor parties' links with trade unions. However, his model does not constitute a universal theory for explaining the developmental trajectory of those successor parties that are influential participants in the political process without having close relations with trade unions. It has been pointed out, for example, that the Russian trade unions that had no contacts with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, refused to collaborate with the successor party, preferring to co-operate with "parties of power".¹²

The models of trade unionism in post-communist Europe

During the communist era, the state established economic interest groups, which, along with the ruling communist party, formed a functional conglomeration. There were also mass organisations that served as important structural elements of the "party-state" and represented different social groups: women's organi-

8 Kubicek, Paul: *Organised Labour in Postcommunist States. From Solidarity to Infirmity*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004, p. 43.

9 See: Herod, Andrew: *Theorising Trade Unions in Transition*, in: Pickles, John / Smith, Adrian (eds.): *Theorising Transition: The Political Economy of Post-Communist Transformation*, London, New York: Routledge, 1998: pp. 197–217.

10 Orenstein, Mitchell: *A Genealogy of Communist Successor Parties in East-Central Europe and the Determinants of Their Success*, in: *East European Politics and Societies*, 1998 (vol. 12), No. 3, pp. 472–499.

11 Orenstein, Mitchell: *A Genealogy of Communist Successor Parties in East-Central Europe and the Determinants of Their Success*, in: *East European Politics and Societies*, 1998 (vol. 12), No. 3, pp. 486–487.

12 March, Luke: *The Communist Party in Post-Soviet Russia*. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2002.

sations, Komsomol, trade unions. The various echelons of the government system included the so-called triangle consisting of the communist party secretary, a Komsomol representative and an official trade union representative.¹³

As mass organisations, the trade unions' official role was to represent workers' interests and to serve as the formal base of the communist regime. At the same time, trade unions played the double role that was assigned to them by Vladimir Lenin at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in 1921, at which the well-known discussion on trade unions took place. At first, trade unions were regarded as "transmission belts" from the communist party to the masses; they were later to function as a "school of communism" that was the source of party cadres.¹⁴ Communist trade unions were organised according to the territorial and branch principles, and they were controlled under the doctrine of democratic centralism that encompassed the whole trade union hierarchy from the local committees on enterprises to the national trade union centre. The trade union hierarchy was built on the pattern of the communist party structure.¹⁵ Correspondingly, the main function of the trade unions was to vertically and horizontally conduct the party decisions to which the institutional amalgamation of trade union and party organs had contributed; meanwhile, the function of defending workers' social and economic rights was of secondary importance.¹⁶

The described model was typical for the Soviet Union and was implemented with some deviations in East European countries after the Second World War, when communist regimes were established there. In practice, the Soviet model varied according to the influence of national traditions and social resistance to communist regimes. For instance, in Poland, Romania and Hungary, there were workers' committees alongside trade unions in the enterprises. The committees were expected to be self-governing organs, but their activity was ineffective due to strict limitations on their autonomy imposed by party and trade union organisations.

The most significant attempt to establish an alternative trade union structure in a communist state was launched in Poland when the "Solidarity" trade union was organised in 1980–1981. In the East European countries in which social democrats exerted a strong influence on trade unions before the communist regimes were established (Czechoslovakia, Hungary), trade unions were somewhat independent of the ruling parties. In contrast, trade unions in communist Romania, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union correspond to the classical Soviet model.¹⁷

The "dual" role of communist trade unions has been examined by researchers from different perspectives. According to B. Ruble, the ambiguity of the trade unions' role arose from their functions of mobilising the workforce and securing the execution of production plans while simultaneously defending workers' rights against violations by enterprise management and the state. On the other side of the spectrum, S. Clarke believes that to define the role of trade unions in the communist period, it is necessary to consider their legal status. According to this perspective, the relations between trade unions and party management are of primary importance, because they could conflict with the relations between trade unions and enterprise management, placing the trade unions in a precarious position.¹⁸

13 Csanádi, Maria: *Party-States and Their Legacies in Post-Communist Transformation*. Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar, 1997.

14 Herod, Andrew: *Theorising Trade Unions in Transition*, in: Pickles, John / Smith, Adrian (eds): *Theorising Transition: The Political Economy of Post-Communist Transformation*. London, New York: Routledge, 1998: p. 199.

15 Simon, Rick: *Labour and Political Transformation in Russia and Ukraine*. Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 50.

16 Crowley, Stephen: *Explaining Labor Weakness in Post-Communist Europe: Historical Legacy and Comparative Perspective*, in: *East European Politics and Societies*, 2004 (vol. 18), No. 3, pp. 394–429.

17 Hausner, Jerzy / Pedersen, Ove K. / Ronit, Karsten (eds): *Evolution of Interest Representation and Development of the Labour Market in Post-Socialist Countries*. Craców: Cracow Academy of Economics, 1995, p. 369; Herod, Andrew: *Theorising Trade Unions in Transition*, in: Pickles, John / Smith, Adrian (eds): *Theorising Transition: The Political Economy of Post-Communist Transformation*. London, New York: Routledge, 1998: pp. 200–201.

18 Simon, Rick: *Labour and Political Transformation in Russia and Ukraine*. Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 49.

P. Kubicek observes that during the communist period, trade unions actually fulfilled a triple role due to the fact that along with serving as “transmission belts” of the ruling party and a “school of communism” (as Lenin’s classical model implied), trade unions formally represented workers’ interests. They composed the structure that formed the basis of enterprise management, including party and trade union management at enterprises.¹⁹ For instance, trade unions had the right to dispose of social benefits and social insurance as they pleased, which gave trade union leadership access to substantial material resources. As a result, trade unions were an element of the governing system that included party-state authorities and enterprise administration.

At the beginning of the post-communist transformations, that is, after the ruling parties and the former system of labour relations had collapsed, official communist trade unions had to launch organisational and ideological changes. First of all, trade unions claimed to be both independent from party structures and to have adopted democratic principles. The continued existence of the former official trade unions was assured when post-communist state recognised them as a legitimate institution in the labour relations system. Most communist trade unions obtained legal status, and their next goal was to preserve the material resources of their predecessors. Both the state and the so-called “alternative” or “independent” trade unions established in the post-communist period were vying for the trade unions’ property. The alternative trade unions also competed with former official trade unions for their membership. The most powerful alternative trade union to emerge in the East European was Poland’s “Solidarity”; the Bulgarian “Podkrepa” also made a strong showing.²⁰

Researchers of trade unions describe at least four distinct models of trade union movements in post-communist Europe. The first model, based on events in Poland, entailed the emergence of independent trade unions in the communist period. As mentioned above, the “Solidarity” trade union was the main political agent in the post-communist transformation period in Poland. Other Polish trade unions, including the official All-Poland Agreement of Trade Unions (OPZZ), also participated actively in the field of politics.

The second model reflects the Czech experience. The evolution of trade unions was shaped by the impetuous collapse of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, followed by the establishment of strike committees that took control over the official trade unions. This shift in power resulted in the emergence of the united and powerful Confederation of Trade Unions of Bohemia and Moravia, which acted as a partner of post-communist governments and supported liberal economic policies.²¹

In the third model, which refers to the Hungarian case, the formation of divergent political parties spurred the establishment of new trade unions with close connections to political parties under the auspices of the National Trade Union Council. The National Confederation of Hungarian Trade Unions was recognised as a successor trade union.

The fourth and last model derives from Russia, which saw the emergence of various formally independent trade unions in the post-communist period. These turned out to be subordinate to other interest structures and corporations, serving as instruments of those groups in their struggle for the redistribution of economic and political resources.²² The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia assumed the monopoly position among Russian trade unions.

19 Kubicek, Paul: *Organised Labour in Postcommunist States. From Solidarity to Infirmary*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004, pp. 23–24.

20 Ost, David / Crowley, Stephen: *Conclusion: Making Sense of Labor Weakness in Postcommunism*, in: Crowley, Stephen / Ost, David (eds): *Workers After Workers’ State. Labour and Politics in Postcommunist Eastern Europe*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001, pp. 219–234.

21 Hausner, Jerzy / Pedersen, Ove K. / Ronit, Karsten (eds): *Evolution of Interest Representation and Development of the Labour Market in Post-Socialist Countries*. Craców: Cracow Academy of Economics, 1995, p. 402.

22 Hausner, Jerzy / Pedersen, Ove K. / Ronit, Karsten (eds): *Evolution of Interest Representation and Development of the Labour Market in Post-Socialist Countries*. Craców: Cracow Academy of Economics, 1995, pp. 403–404; Cook, Linda J.: *Labor and Liberalization: Trade Unions in the New Russia*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1997.

An intermediate variant between the first and second models is presented by the Bulgarian case. The “Podkrepa” trade union was a powerful competitor with official trade unions in Bulgaria, and the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria acted as the government’s partner. Romania’s case shows some parallels to the third model, because there were some prominent trade unions closely related to political parties along with the Romanian Confederation of Independent Trade Unions.

Do trade unions matter?

B. Geddes, who analysed the role of trade unions in the rebuilding of former ruling parties in Latin America, evaluated East European trade unions sceptically, noting their organisational weakness and fragmentation (Geddes 1995).²³

The problem of institutional weakness in East European trade unions attracted the attention of researchers, who tried to define the criteria of former official trade unions’ “strength” by analysing their membership and effectiveness. It turned out that the formal criteria of trade union membership did not provide a relevant picture of the trade unions’ effectiveness or ineffectiveness, because the official data did not necessarily accurately reflect the unions’ actual mass support base. But even the official data furnished evidence of a decrease in trade union membership in East European countries in the post-communist period (see Table 1).

Table 1. East European Trade Union Membership in 1990–2001 (thousands)²⁴.

Country	Trade Union	1990–1991	1993	1995–1996	1999–2001
Bulgaria	Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria	3600	1664	1070	680
	„Podkrepa“	250	500	510	154
Czech Rep.	Confederation of Trade Unions of Bohemia and Moravia	4500	3500	2300	1500
Hungary	Hungarian Confederation of Trade Unions	2700	1300	892	235
Poland	„Solidarity“	2200	1500	1300	1200
	All-Poland Agreement of Trade Unions	6000	4782	2500	1700
Slovakia	Slovak Confederation of Trade Unions	-	1500	1200	830
Russia	Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia	66000	64300	45000	38000

S. Crowley and D. Ost use the following criteria to measure the strengths and weaknesses of East European trade unions: formal membership numbers, managerial style, the effectiveness of the collective bargaining system, the number and effectiveness of strikes and protests, the types of political co-operation, the influence of the unions on policy-making and workers’ standard of living.²⁵ A comparative analysis of the Eastern European cases according to the defined criteria was conducted. The data indicated that the trade unions in the region were weak based on decreases in trade union membership, the hierarchisation of management systems, ineffective systems of collective bargaining, decreases in the number of collective strikes and protests, the absence of political alliances with parties, a low standard of living, and, finally, the weak influence of trade unions on policy-making. The researchers argued that the key factor was the general crisis of socialist ideas in the region.²⁶

23 Geddes, Barbara: A Comparative Perspective on the Leninist Legacy in Eastern Europe, in: *Comparative Political Studies*, 1995 (vol. 28), No. 2, pp. 239–274.

24 Adapted from: Kubicek, Paul: *Organised Labour in Postcommunist States. From Solidarity to Infirmity*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004, p. 34.

25 Crowley, Stephen / Ost, David (eds): *Workers After Workers’ State. Labour and Politics in Postcommunist Eastern Europe*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001, p. 4.

26 Crowley, Stephen / Ost, David (eds): *Workers After Workers’ State. Labour and Politics in Postcommunist Eastern Eu-*

As mentioned above, the level of trade unions' influence on policy-making processes was taken as a criterion of their effectiveness in East European countries. In most cases, trade unions were not able to fully take part in the social dialogue due to state pressure and the relative impotence of employers' associations at the beginning of the post-communist transformations. In any case, the social dialogue was under state control, and trade unions could be more or less subordinated depending on their independent or non-independent positions. As S. Crowley and D. Ost noted, during the post-communist transformations, trade unions were one of the weakest institutions and were therefore unable to influence policy-making or defend the social and economic rights of workers.²⁷ Nevertheless, the comparative analysis of the East European cases made by P. Kubicek demonstrated how the different strategies of relations with the state resulted in benefits for trade unions subsequently able to participate in the social dialogue and co-operate with political parties.²⁸ In this light, some trade unions might be considered relatively effective as institutions; this was certainly the case in Poland, especially during the early years of the transformation.²⁹

Generally, the reasons for the institutional weakness of the trade unions included the communist legacy, the passivity of the workers and the dependence of trade union leaders on political figures. The communist legacy can be understood as residual institutional links between trade union leadership, enterprise management and the state, which were mostly evident in the Russian case.³⁰ On the other hand, S. Crowley, in referring to the resource mobilisation theory, explained the weakness of trade unions as the result of the low level of worker mobilisation and worker passivity.³¹ Moreover, P. Kubicek pointed out that though there was growth of the workers' activity level in the post-communist period, their activity was somewhat limited, since most workers had not retired from former official trade unions and remained passive in order to keep their positions and resources. One more reason for the trade unions' weakness was identified: the trade unions' subordinated position to political figures and the government.³²

Hence, several different approaches evolved for explaining the institutional weakness of the trade unions. The first one refers to the communist legacy of the official trade unions, which determined their strategies in the post-communist period. The second approach considers the significant influence of the post-communist transformations along with the uncertainty that was typical for new political and economic systems; the trade unions had to find different adaptation strategies. A third approach, based on the economic theory of strikes, postulates that trade unions were not able to organise strikes and protests because of high unemployment rates and an unstable economic situation; in such circumstances, workers were apt to turn to informal economic structures in order to survive rather than organise strikes. Finally, there is an approach that explains the weakness of trade unions from the perspective of the political exchange theory, whereby trade unions supported the policy of their political partners if they formed a government and returned to strikes if they were in opposition to the government.³³ In my opinion, all the approaches explain the institutional weakness of the trade unions to some extent, but individual cases might demonstrate deviations or even exclusions from the general analytical model.

rope, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001, pp. 220–229.

27 Crowley, Stephen / Ost, David (eds): *Workers After Workers' State. Labour and Politics in Postcommunist Eastern Europe*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001, p. 1.

28 Kubicek, Paul: *Organised Labour in Postcommunist States. From Solidarity to Infirmary*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004, p. 39.

29 Crowley, Stephen: *Explaining Labor Weakness in Post-Communist Europe: Historical Legacy and Comparative Perspective*, in: *East European Politics and Societies*, 2004 (vol. 18), No. 3, p. 396.

30 Kubicek, Paul: *Organized Labor in Postcommunist States: Will the Western Sun Set on It, Too?*, *Comparative Politics*, 1999 (vol. 32), No. 1, p. 90.

31 Crowley, Stephen: *Hot Coal, Cold Steel. Russian and Ukrainian Workers from the End of Soviet Union to the Post-Communist Transformations*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997.

32 Kubicek, Paul: *Organised Labour in Postcommunist States. From Solidarity to Infirmary*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004, p. 31; Kubicek, Paul: *Organized Labor in Postcommunist States: Will the Western Sun Set on It, Too?*, *Comparative Politics*, 1999 (vol. 32), No. 1, p. 90.

33 Crowley, Stephen: *Explaining Labor Weakness in Post-Communist Europe: Historical Legacy and Comparative Perspective*, in: *East European Politics and Societies*, 2004 (vol. 18), No. 3, p. 398.

During the post-communist transformations, there were different forms of social dialogue in East European countries, including tripartite consultations and negotiations on the national level. Correspondingly, the key events for the social dialogue institutionalisation in East European countries were the establishment of tripartite commissions and the reconsideration of the labour codes. The first one to establish the Council on Interest Concordance in 1990 was the Hungarian government, which thus completed the first phase of their negotiations with trade unions and employers as social partners. After that, the Council on Economic and Social Accordance in Czechoslovakia and the Tripartite Commission on Social and Economic Issues in Poland were established.³⁴ Simultaneously, the former labour codes were amended according to international principles of labour relations; for instance, new labour codes were passed in Czechoslovakia in 1991, in Hungary in 1992 and in Poland in 1994.³⁵ As a result, during the initial period of the post-communist transformations, preconditions were imposed for the development of corporatist institutions as well as for the system of negotiations between the state and interest groups. The indicated tendency meant that the state at least formally recognised the role of the trade unions in the economic transformations, especially since the unions had demonstrated their mobilisation potential when they organised mass strikes and protests in 1989–1994. Consequently, in all the countries in the region, trade unions acquired the right to take part in consultations and negotiations with the government on different social and economic issues as well as the right to participate in the process of policy-making.³⁶

Conclusion

As the comparison of the East European cases demonstrates, the establishment of social dialogue institutions did not guarantee the trade unions leading positions in policy-making. After the formal dissolution of the ruling communist parties, the former official trade unions obtained the status of independent organisations, with the primary goals of using their mobilisation potential and obtaining recognition from the state as a social dialogue partner. Trade unions also acted as political players: they organised electoral coalitions with communist successor parties (most prominently in Poland and Hungary), but their parliamentary role was minimised by political parties and the government.

It was the social dialogue that formed the basis for relations between trade unions and the state in the post-communist period, but to assume the positions of representatives of workers' interests, former official trade unions had to compete with alternative trade unions for membership. Actually, the relations between the trade unions and the state in the social dialogue were determined by the positions of the politicians in the post-communist governments. Liberal-oriented governments were generally hostile to trade unions, drafting anti-trade union policy, as was the case, for instance, in V. Klaus' government in the Czech Republic.³⁷ On the other hand, left-leaning governments with ministers related to trade unions recognised trade unions as social partners and aspired to use the mechanisms of social dialogue to resolve social conflicts in the liberalisation period.³⁸ These governments' policies resulted in the wide spread of corporatist institutions in East European countries. However, these corporatist institutions might not provide effective tripartite bargaining between trade unions and the state; this in turn can be explained by the fact that the establishment of social dialogue institutions was launched "from above" by the state.

34 Casale, Giuseppe: Experiences of Tripartite Relations in Central and Eastern European Countries, in: *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 2000 (vol. 16), No. 2, pp. 133–134.

35 Pollert, Anna: Trade Unionism in Transition in Central and Eastern Europe, in: *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1999 (vol. 5), No. 2, pp. 209–234.

36 Kubicek, Paul: Organized Labor in Postcommunist States: Will the Western Sun Set on It, Too?, *Comparative Politics*, 1999 (vol. 32), No. 1, p. 87.

37 Pollert, Anna: Labor and Trade Unions in the Czech Republic, 1989–2000, in: Crowley, Stephen / Ost, David (eds.): *Workers after Workers' States. Labor and Politics in Postcommunist Eastern Europe*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001, pp. 13–36.

38 Orenstein, Mitchell A. / Hale, Lisa E.: Corporatist Renaissance in Post-Communist Central Europe?, in: Candland, Christopher / Sil, Rudra (eds): *The Politics of Labor in a Global Age. Continuity and Change in Late-Industrializing and Post-Socialist Economies*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 262.