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**Between Hopes and Fears:
Rural Eastern Europe on its Way to Europe***

Abstract

This paper discusses basic issues of the process of European integration in selected East European countries which finally became members of the European Union on May 1, 2004. Such a focus raises the fundamental – at least from the East European perspective – question: was May 1, 2004 the final step in the process of overcoming the longitudinal division in Europe which materialised in the form of enemy political and military blocs after World War II? Or is it simply the beginning of a new era in the domination of the Western economy and civilisation through supranational political institutions? Such questions encapsulate the basic hopes and fears shared by East Europeans, especially those living in rural areas.

In order to discuss these issues the author analyses three areas of problems in different parts of this paper. In the first part the determinants and modalities of East European backwardness are briefly discussed resulting in the ‘catching up’ or ‘complete modernisation’ dilemmas shaping the present situation of the rural East inside the European Union. The second part of the paper focuses on the pre-accession period starting around 1990 with the political breakthrough in the region and resulting in – what has been called in sociological literature – “anticipatory socialisation.” The author gives a brief review of the effects of pre-accession funds for rural areas, political struggles as well as hopes and fears noticeable in public opinion studies in various East European societies. Finally, the third part of the paper offers some tentative conclusions and hypotheses focusing on the possible paths of development in the rural areas of East European EU member countries, illustrated with evidence data from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

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Introduction

Further to the current discourse on the EU condition, the issues of agriculture, rural development and, using the general theme of our Congress – “common European countryside” have turned out to be among the most important questions needing reconsideration. Moreover, as the discourse shows us, the whole question has been much more complex than simply this or another scheme of support for farmers, food producers and the preservation of the rural, natural and cultural landscape. It also shows that rural areas, the countryside are not a separate part of society, that the discourse focusing on their problems has to be part of a more complex consideration including the character of basic social, economic, political and cultural tendencies in contemporary societies as well as some divergent paths of their historical development. Such a historical perspective should be helpful in order to describe diversities among new EU members to understand the shape of their agricultural systems and rural areas. Some authors call for the necessity of such a historical perspective in order to think about the future of the EU and its members. For example, as Stefano Fella says: “the importance of understanding historical processes is indispensable to any examination of future trends in the EU’s development” (2002: 3).

Diversity of Historical Paths in Central-Eastern Europe

In this part of my paper I intend to focus on some issues faced by three new EU members. I would argue that before we start to consider major agricultural and rural changes it is important to look at the more general political and economic development. Agricultural and rural processes cannot be properly described and understood without a brief description of the general social, economic and political context. Moreover, in the case of the countries under our consideration such a context has not been entirely the same despite many stereotypes and thoughts. One might stress that “the other” – as it has sometimes been called – Europe has not just been “the other,” “the new one,” but “a bunch of others.” Despite their almost 50 years’ experience of communism which may be treated as a common project, each of these countries has had its own particular experience. As Grzegorz Ekiert (1996) stresses, the history of three communist Central-East European countries (Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland) has been diverse despite all the images of similarity. The similarity has been perceived as a result of the “...forced imposition of identical political and

economic institutions” (Ekiert, 1996: 305). This is, however, only one side of the coin. The other has shown a surprisingly colourful picture of peculiarities and differences while focusing on political processes of defiance, resistance and opposition to the communist system. According to Ekiert: “...cross-national differences in the region and distinct characteristics of different state-socialist regimes were a result of successive political crises and complex responses of the party-states, regional power and actors within society to these crises” (1996: 4).

As one might treat these crises as key factors shaping political, economic and social reality they also had their own dynamics and produced different results. They occurred in different periods of the history of communism in Central-Eastern Europe. Ekiert has theorised about the political processes in Hungary in the years 1956–1963 rooted in the crisis of the Stalinist regime there in 1953–1956; then about the process in Czechoslovakia from 1968 to 1976 rooted in, as he calls it, the delayed crisis of Stalinism in that country in the years 1962–1968, and finally the process in Poland in 1980–1989 rooted in the crisis of the post-Stalinist regime there from 1970 to 1980. Let me say once again that all the events and processes mentioned above heavily shaped the situation of agricultural sectors and the rural population in the countries under consideration. In order to show the differences among them let us have a look at the table presented below.

Table 1
Selected factors shaping political crises and demobilisation processes

Factor	Hungary	Czechoslovakia	Poland
Nature of the crisis	Popular revolt	Reform from above	Reform from below
Economic situation	Serious next improved	Stable next improved	Severe next aggravated
Independent organisation of society	Fragmented	Absent	Highly effective
Powerful ally	None	None	Catholic church
Effectiveness of international pressures	Low	Low	High
Effectiveness of Soviet economic assistance	High	Moderate	Low
Collective protest	Initial high next none	Initial moderate next none	Initial high next moderate
Termination of the crisis	Soviet invasion	Warsaw Pact invasion	Martial law

Source: Ekiert, 1996: 313–315.

In order to describe and explain the peculiarity of experience in the case of the rural/farming population one has to seek the peculiar factor that transformed not only the shape of agriculture in Central-East European countries but also the mentality of this part of the population. I would argue that such a factor should be found in the process of collectivisation. Moreover, as has already been mentioned elsewhere (see: Gorlach and Starosta, 2001: 41–43) I would argue that collectivisation might be treated as an East European version of depeasantisation which was also experienced in the West under the process of farmerisation. Despite the great difference between methods of such an agrarian change major results of collectivisation have recalled the basic effects of farmerisation, namely: the declining labour force involved in agriculture, the declining number of farms as well as the growing average size of farms.

Moreover, there was another similarity between farmerisation and collectivisation. They both took different paths in various countries. In order to theorise about this issue Nigel Swain (2000: 21–24) talks about four different models of collectivisation, namely: Stalinist, Neo-Stalinist (e.g. Czechoslovakia), abandoned (e.g. Poland) and Hungarian.

Abandoned collectivisation in Poland produced various characteristics of Polish agriculture and rural areas. First of all, it shaped the duality of Polish agriculture between the sector of state farms and the large sector of individual farms overwhelmed by small, traditionally run units, the so-called “post-traditional peasants” as they were called (see: Kochanowicz, 1992). Despite the initial abandonment of collectivisation in Poland in 1956 the authorities made several more attempts using some sophisticated measures to socialise Polish farmers, namely: the resignation from compulsory deliveries, the offer of credits for the development of specialised farms closely connected with state agencies, pensions for farmers transferring the land to the State Fund, etc. However, despite these measures the whole history has to be considered as one of “repressive tolerance” (Gorlach, 1989) or “growth without development” (Kuczyński, 1981) policies resulting – as Nigel Swain (2000: 22) puts it succinctly – in the fossilisation of peasant farms in their late 1940’s structure. Moreover, such an experience formed a relatively high level of political mobilisation as well as suspicion towards any initiative by the state. Ironically, at the same time it formed a high level of state support demand that might be rooted in two types of quite contradictory experience, namely: the unfair and perceived as unjust level of support for inefficient state farms during the communist period and the demonstrative effect of European Community support for West European farmers.

While Poland fought its peasant wars over collectivisation the situation in neighbouring Czechoslovakia seemed quite different. There the Neo-

Stalinist model based on the relative autonomy of co-operatives as a primary form of agricultural production emerged. It was associated with the increase of agricultural purchase process, replacement of compulsory deliveries by contract sales, the introduction of regular wages for co-operative members as well as pensions and social security benefits. Co-operatives were also encouraged to produce outside agriculture and their members were allowed to farm household plots which sometimes gave them higher incomes than regular co-operative wages (Swain, 2000: 23; Majerova, 2001). In short, the Czechoslovak model of agriculture was based on the dominance of productive enterprises combining their agricultural and non-agricultural production. One might argue that such a process resulted in a relatively stable system which was almost able to achieve self-sufficiency in agricultural produce.

Table 2

Types of collectivisation and their effects

Characteristics	Hungary	Czechoslovakia	Poland
Type of collectivisation	Hungarian (quasi-market)	Neo-Stalinist	Abandoned
Type of agrarian structure	Symbiotic relations between co-operatives and household plots	System of co-operatives supplemented semi-officially by household plots	Duality between state farms and peasant ones
Material satisfaction	Greater degree than elsewhere	Considerable wealth	Growing diversity
Social and political atmosphere	Embourgeoisement	Security	Political mobilisation and lack of confidence

Source: Swain, 2000 (elaborated by the author).

In turn, Hungary initially installed the Neo-Stalinist model of collectivised agriculture. However, as part of the process of economic reform undertaken in the 1960's this model was supplemented with two important features. Firstly – as Swain (2000: 24) puts it: "...a substantial 'symbiotic' relationship between large-scale socialist and small-scale private agriculture was self-consciously and systematically pursued." Such a policy encouraged a kind of division of labour between these two components of the system, like raising crops in large socialist co-operatives and breeding cows or pigs in smaller, more intensive labour private units. This economic

co-operation was strengthened by the state offering investment programmes. Secondly, in 1968 the whole process was additionally supported by the new economic policy called New Economic Mechanism which created a *de facto* quasi market environment where there were: "...no plan target, considerable real autonomy in decision-making and farm organisation, and genuine competition" (Swain, 2000: 24). Such a process was parallel to the development of a "dual economy" in manufacturing (see also: Stark, 1989; Szelenyi, 1989) in which groups of workers were encouraged to work on their own in formally state enterprises. In turn, this resulted in significant class changes in the Hungarian countryside promoting the development of an entrepreneurial class as well as an entrepreneurial culture, as has been documented by many Hungarian sociologists theorising about the embourgeoisement of Hungarian society (see e.g.: Manchin and Szelenyi, 1985; Szelenyi et al., 1988; Kovach, 2001). The major characteristics and effects of these three types of collectivisation are presented in table 2.

Trying to comment on all three cases presented briefly above I would argue that they should be treated as a strong confirmation of diversity in the Eastern European countryside. The Polish countryside has to be perceived as a battleground between rival models of organisation of agriculture as well as a stage of stormy relations between farmers and the state (Starosta, Kovach, Gorlach, 1999). At the same time the process of modernisation of Polish agriculture and/or the process of its de-peasantisation seems to be far from complete. The Czechoslovak and Hungarian cases show rather a successful economic transformation of rural areas. In both cases one might observe "...the generation of considerable wealth in rural areas" (Swain, 2000: 24) in Czechoslovakia (especially in the Czech part of the country) and "...a greater degree of wealth in the Hungarian countryside than elsewhere" (Swain, 2000: 24). Moreover, both of them may be perceived as the instalment of quite effective production systems regulated by the state but with a relatively high degree of co-operative managers' autonomy. The Hungarian case seems to be especially interesting since "household plot" farming was, in fact, transformed into a relatively independent system of production showing the peculiar process of "the silent revolution from below" (Manchin and Szelenyi, 1985). Quite ironically, the reforms introduced in the Hungarian economy and management system under the scheme of the New Economic Mechanism were based on the same assumptions as those that formed the background of failed attempts of economic reform in Poland undertaken in the late 1950's as part of the de-stalinisation process. It did not succeed in Poland a decade earlier but it succeeded in Hungary in 1968 exactly at the same time when Warsaw Pact tanks crushed the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia. At the same time Po-

land experienced the political turmoil of party fraction clashes, the anti-intelligentsia campaign as well as a wave of anti-semitism. This particular process shows the importance of different political timing and peculiarities of socio-political dynamics in the countries under consideration. Moreover, it shows the relative autonomy of the state in the Hungarian case which was capable of introducing at this particular time such a reform going far beyond the orthodox limits of the communist economy. Relative autonomy of the state might be gained in some particular historical moments when different forces having an impact on state structures and shaping key decisions of its apparatus become weak for one reason or another (Skocpol, 1979). I would argue that such a specific period can be observed in the second half of the 1960's in Hungary when the anti-communist opposition was crushed after the Soviet invasion in 1956 and the following period of severe repression and the external force (Soviet Union) focused mainly on the political crisis in neighbouring Czechoslovakia. That was quite different to the situation in Poland a decade earlier. In 1957–1958 the opposition was not crushed because the authorities, workers and peasants avoided a major confrontation and at the same time the whole game was played under the threat of Soviet invasion and last, but not least, all parts of the conflict drew heavily from the tragic Hungarian lesson. That gave the party-state apparatus little room for autonomy. The struggle of the Polish post-Stalinist regime to gain Soviet acceptance might be perceived in the whole context as a major factor blocking the introduction of liberalisation in the economy. One might finally argue that in such a way the dynamics of political processes shaped the situation in the countryside strengthening the differences and divisions among Central-East European countries forming the different legacies which became important during the post-communist period.

Entering the European Union: The Escape from Globalisation?

How should we conceptualise the process of change occurring in the considered countries after the major political breakthrough and the collapse of communist regimes? What kind of conceptual and theoretical framework would be the most promising in order to describe and explain the nature of the ongoing change? The dominant discourse in literature has been framed under the controversy between “transition” and “transformation.” I do not intend to go into a detailed analysis of schemes and proposals contained in the literature that has been focused on either the clear process of transition TO a market economy and political democracy or on the more complex process of transformation FROM a state-directed economy and authoritarian political regime. Such a discourse has also been focused on the problem

of the sequence of events and pointing out different stages. Moreover, the question of the completed transition or transformation has been posed as well as pointing at either the completed institutional arrangements or at "soft" characteristics of the considered societies, like: changes in values, emergence of the civilisation of competence, trust and other cultural factors (Sztompka, 1998). In this presentation, however, I would argue that the conceptual frames mentioned above are insufficient tools for describing and explaining the processes under consideration. Consequently, I would argue that one might consider all the issues of complex social change as well as the process of integration with the European Union that, in the case of three countries taken into consideration in this paper, has become inseparable from the post-communist transformation and consolidation, under the more general frame, namely: globalisation. In other words, it is globalisation that has a decisive impact on the political breakthrough as well as economic, political and cultural processes occurring in these societies. I entirely agree with Philip McMichael who says that: "We can no longer understand the changes in our societies without situating them globally" (2004: XXXIII). The same perspective may be found for example in Kulcsar's (2003) consideration focusing on territorial policies in post-communist Hungary. Trying to consider all major forces shaping the investigated processes the author stresses the global and European contexts having an impact on the Hungarian situation via the market and development policies adjusted to European standards and demands.

However, what is the nature of this very complex process which seems not only to re-shape the structure of the world order while becoming a major focus of discourse among economic as well as political elites? As McMichael (2004: XXXIII) puts it: "In the late twentieth century, *globalisation* replaced development as a serious discourse and project of political and business elites." Moreover, the concept itself as well as various attempts to theorise about the whole process seem to become the current *mantra* not only among historians, as Alan Milward (2002: 17) claims: "...historians are now purveying a different teleology: the globalisation of economy" but also among other not so teleologically oriented social scientists.

Let me also make some additional comments on the issue of connection between the globalisation and the whole process of the collapse of communism and its aftermath finally resulting in EU enlargement on May 1, 2004. One should start with the statement that globalisation has not only been the most current process shaping the state of the world. On the contrary, these current changes may only be treated as – following the famous Samuel Huntington's (1991; see also: Markoff, 1996) expression concerning democratisation – the "third wave of globalisation" (Wnuk-Lipiński.

2004: 25–27). It was preceded by two earlier waves, namely the first resulting from the great geographical discoveries at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries, while the second resulted from the industrial revolution and rapid industrialisation in the second half of the 19th century. Both of them were followed by waves of what might be called the “statisation” and separateness, namely by the development of the modern system of nation-states (The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 as well as the emergence of the United States in 1776 as symbolic events) after the first wave and the development of the modern welfare state after the second. As Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński (2004: 25) stresses following Hirst and Thompson (1995) in the period of the second wave of globalisation between 1870 and 1914, some dimensions of the economy were more open and even more integrated than nowadays. For example, the level of labour force mobility was relatively higher. In the same period the first international “food regime” developed as an important part of this type of world order (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989). According to Williamson (1996) quoted again by Wnuk-Lipiński (2004: 25) the increasing level of economic inequalities as well as the First World War and Great Depression formed the set of factors leading to the extinction of the second wave of globalisation. Then, the idea of the modern welfare state might also be perceived as a reaction, especially, to the Great Depression. The rapid development of the institutional arrangements leading to the formation of the welfare state was completed after the Second World War, almost exactly at the same time when the project of what is now called the European Union was born. It therefore seems to be quite clear that the European Common Market (one of the first mutations of the EU) was developed in the context of a rising statisation and strengthening of the welfare state including its agricultural component as one of the most important elements. It resulted in highly regulative economic regimes with nation-states and the agreements between them as the key part of the whole system. At the same time the bi-polar world order emerged based on the global rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The second “food regime” (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989) emerging after World War II based on the high regulation measures towards domestic agriculture and high protection of domestic markets in advanced capitalist countries as well as subsidised export to external markets became part of this system. The agricultural welfare state (Sheingate, 2001) reached the most developed and mature forms.

However, it seems quite obvious that changes in Eastern Europe starting in the late 1980’s and resulting in the case of some of the EE countries in EU membership took place in a changing social and economic environment. Moreover, I would argue that the whole process itself might be treated as part of the third wave of globalisation. The beginnings of this process

might be located in the 1970's especially with the first oil crisis and the failure of the Bretton Woods system (McMichael, 2004). Increasing economic inefficiency as well as growing economic dependency of the Soviet Union and other Soviet bloc countries resulted in the weakening of the political system and finally led to its collapse. I am not inclined to say that all types of activities taken by people in the Soviet Union and other countries, like Gorbachev's reforms under *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the Solidarity movement in Poland, the velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia, political compromise in Hungary, the collapse of the Berlin wall and many other examples of what has been called by sociologists as human agency had no impact on the changes under consideration. However, one might recall Marx's statement that people/individuals are able to make history but in the context of already established structural conditions. Without a doubt globalisation or, more precisely, its current wave forms such a key structural condition in the process under consideration.

Globalisation as a major structural condition of current economic and political processes world-wide also had an impact on the discourse focusing on the character and possible evolution of the European Union. I would however argue that such a perspective might also result in a fundamental perception of the major task which was perceived as a background of the common Europe project set up roughly fifty years ago. Without spending much time discussing all the historic details let me stress that despite the "economic" name of the first two forms of what is now called the European Union, namely: European Community of Coal and Steel as well as European Economic Community the background of the whole project was clearly political. The idea had been rooted in the bitter awareness that the two destructive world wars of the 20th century resulted from the contradiction of interests and the inability to reach a compromise between major European powers. The aim seemed quite clear, focusing on the development of the system of international relations preventing the petrification of contradictions and conflicts between major European states, France and Germany in particular. Such an idea was later reflected in changing the name of the project to the European Community and, as a result of the Maastricht Treaty, to the present European Union. It has been associated, first of all, with the growing focus on political measures of unity, namely: common migration policy, common defence policy, common foreign policy, common rapid reaction forces as well as debates about European heritage. Ironically such debates clearly focusing on social, cultural and political issues have been accompanied by the growing significance of economic questions under the process of globalisation. Alan Milward is right in stressing: "The rise of globalisation as an explanatory factor for integration now brings more attention to the economic foundations of the EU" (2002: 18). I there-

fore started this paper addressing the recent discussion on a new economic philosophy suggested mainly by the British Prime Minister as a result of the serious problems with the agreement concerning the future EU budget. I will therefore focus on mainly economic issues in the following part of this paper. Such a consideration however should discover both hopes and fears associated with the whole process and experienced by the population under consideration. Such hopes and fears, I believe, form a kind of human exposure of major social, economic as well as political changes.

The collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989–1991 resulted in the growing uncertainty in the political future of all former members of the Soviet bloc. For many of them the political future has been associated with the membership in NATO while the economic one has been perceived as membership in the European Union. For example, Poland had already established formal relations with the EU in 1989 i.e. in the year of the beginning of major economic and political reforms (Gorlach and Mooney, 2004). In July 1989 during the meeting of G7 countries in Paris the European Commission earned political approval to co-ordinate the economic assistance of the West for countries of Central and Eastern Europe. 24 countries, members of OECD at that time joined the initiative. Moreover, the European Community elaborated its own assistance programme called PHARE and initially directed towards Poland and Hungary. Later until the end of 1990 eleven Central and Eastern European countries became members of the enlarged PHARE treated first of all as technical assistance for the development of the administrative, legal, financial and trade frames required for the market economy. At the beginning of 1993 an orientation of the whole programme was widened towards investment as well, mainly to develop the technical infrastructure. In December 1991 first three countries, i.e.: Czechoslovakia (at that time), Hungary and Poland signed “the European Treaty” confirming their special relations with the Community. The initial three were later followed by Romania and Bulgaria in 1993 as well as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Slovenia. The basic aim was to strengthen the economic relations between CEEC and the Community and develop a political framework composed of human rights, political pluralism, free elections, foundations of a market economy and, last but not least, the rule of law.

Some significant changes in the economic system of the CEE countries can be observed mainly as the process of integrating the world economy. One can argue that the “europeanisation” of economic relations of the countries under consideration was also a kind of globalisation process. It therefore had its bright and dark sides. For example, Chytil and Sojka (2001: 29) considering the reintegration of the Czech economy into the world economy stress that: “The incentives implied in ‘cheap labour’ are likely to promote a further shift towards lower value added branches. Such

a 'regressive specialisation' can have negative implications, including the risk of a brain drain and an increasing technological gap in relation to the advanced market economies." The whole globalisation process in the case of the Czech economy showed in the second part of the 1990's some promising signs. As both previously quoted Czech authors claim: "After a significant decline in the share of manufactured goods [...] between 1989 and 1993, in 1999 the share of manufactured goods was a bit higher than in 1989. Exports to the European Union rapidly increased at the end of the 1990s, and the growth rates of commodities with high value added were the highest. In 1999, 70% of Czech exports were sold in the European Union and 64% of imports originated there" (Chytil and Sojka, 2001: 30). Such a performance of the Czech economy can only be perceived as an example of complex processes occurring in those former Soviet bloc countries that introduced the rapid method of privatisation of their collectivised economy.

However, the privatisation process was the common type of policy but only on the most general level. Polish, Czech and Hungarian privatisation were different when one looks at them in greater detail. As Hungarian authors Ehrlich and Revesz (2001: 45) stress: "The CEE countries have adopted different approaches to the process not only in their methods of privatisation but also in *their scope*." It was Hungary that introduced the most – let us use this term – "aggressive" way of privatisation including quite quickly the national infrastructure (gas, electricity, communications and large state-owned banks). However, within a period of several years the Czech Republic and Poland seemed to follow the same route with the involvement of foreign direct investment (FDI) that is perceived as one of the key components of the globalisation process.

Table 3

FDI inflow and volume 1992–1999 (USD million)

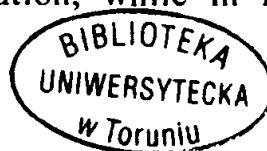
Period	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland
1992	1003	1474	678
1999	5180	1944	1700
Inward volume (USD/capita)			
1999	1583	1895	775

Source: Ehrlich and Revesz, 2001: 67.

While reintegration with the world economy as well as the introduction of direct foreign investment seemed to be the most important issues of general economic change after 1989 in the Czech Republic and Hungary, the

story of Poland was slightly different. Poland was long perceived during the communist period as the searcher of the communist bloc. The Czech and Hungarian economies were definitely in a much better shape than the Polish one. As I have already mentioned Poland did not fix a major economic reform in its de-Stalinisation period. Moreover, in the 1970's the Polish communist authorities using the image of the most moderate communist regime in the Soviet bloc developed the ambitious programme of economic modernisation based on considerable loans from Western countries. This resulted at the end of the decade with uncompleted modernisation and a heavy national debt accompanied by high inflation causing a major economic crisis as well as social and political perturbations with the emergence of the relatively powerful democratic opposition movement and "Solidarity." Therefore, the major task of the economic reform after the 1989 political breakthrough was perceived as a stabilisation of the whole economic situation i.e. cutting inflation as well as reducing debt. In such a case Poland seemed to be the most vulnerable for the pressure of the International Monetary Fund as well as the World Bank introducing shock therapy strategies and austerity measures as the main legitimised tools of handling the messy economic situation. Therefore, I would argue, the aims of the Polish austerity programme had been of more short-term character compared with the other two countries under consideration. The results were quite measurable. As Czyżewski and others claim: "In 1990–91 inflation was brought down from a level of 600% to 60%" (2001: 83). And later they stress that inflation has been even curbed: "...from a level of 60% at the end of 1991 to 6% at the beginning of 2001..." (Czyżewski et al. 2001: 83). A similar change can be observed in the case of foreign debt. According to leading Polish economists: "The most frequently used indicator for the evaluation of the long-term debt of the economy, the relation of net debt to GDP, fell not so rapidly, but all the same it was a breakthrough. This ratio was 70% in 1990, and only 15% in 1997. According to all international standards this means that Poland is no longer in the group of highly indebted countries" (Czyżewski et al., 2001: 85).

Privatisation seems to be the key element in the process of change in former communist economies and societies in Central and Eastern Europe. It should also be stressed that even such processes resulting from particular policies had different dynamics in the investigated countries. On the basis of the major division between the so-called distributive privatisation (distributing some assets freely and at preferential prices among the population) and the so-called privatisation by sale (state enterprises are offered for sale to domestic and foreign investors) Hungarian authors, already quoted in this paper, stress that: "The Czech Republic and Slovakia selected distributive privatisation, while in Poland both forms were em-



ployed. Privatisation by sale was predominant in Hungary from the very beginning of the privatisation process" (Ehrlich and Revesz, 2001: 45). In all countries however these processes resulted in a significant predomination (over 80% of share in GDP) of the private sector (Gorzalak et. al., 2001: 369). Again such processes shaped an important frame for fundamental change in the agricultural sector including its de-collectivisation and other structural changes.

Let me now briefly present the main changes in agriculture and rural areas in the period of globalisation in the three countries under consideration. Many researchers point out de-collectivisation as a main process. However, despite the common phrase the reality described by the concept of de-collectivisation has been slightly different. That has been quite understandable because of many varieties in the path of development already mentioned above. As Maria Halamska puts it: "The de-collectivisation process has a slightly different rhythm and flow in each of the analysed countries due to differences in historical factors (the pre-collective agrarian and rural structures), the national versions of collectivist models of agriculture, the specific economic, social and political situation in the different countries at the time of collectivisation and different internal rationales of the transition process" (Halamska, 1998: 221). But on the other hand: "One must also bear in mind that de-collectivisation is not the only process which the Central European village and agriculture are undergoing" (Halamska, 1998: 224). I would argue that it has been associated with complex processes of globalisation and integration of the CEEC economies into a world economy.

De-collectivisation however has not been that important because it led to some changes in the organisation of the agricultural economy and rationality of production. The whole process has not been linear and has not been completed in many countries of Eastern Europe. However, what might be even more important lies in more indirect changes that might be observed in CEEC agriculture and rural areas from a longer perspective. As Maria Halamska stresses: "As a result of the process of de-collectivisation, four basic types of social structure of the organisation of production developed in each of the analysed countries" (1998: 221). Such types contain: a) state/public large-scale farms, b) large-scale neo-collective ones, c) large-scale group farms, d) private farms (both large-scale post-collective estates and family farms) (see table 4).

One might put forward the statement about another result brought about by the de-collectivisation process, i.e. the re-traditionalisation of the structure of landholdings. As Nigel Swain stresses: "First, the immediate consequence of the restitution and co-operative transformation processes was a reversion to the highly fragmented pre-socialist pattern of land owner-

ship" (2000: 27). That might be visible especially in the case of Hungary (see also: Csilag, Elek, Nemeth, 2002). However, it should be stressed that it reflects mainly the "formal layer" of the structure of property and hides the system of informal renting and using the land behind. Therefore, the agrarian structure has not been as fragmented as it appears in the official statistics. It also brings the issue of quite a large number of "passive owners" (Swain, 2001: 28) that may sometimes play an important role in the countryside.

Table 4

Changes in ownership structure (in % of arable land)

Type of farm	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland
State in 1991	34	33	19
Collective in 1991	62	52	4
Small producers in 1991	4	15	77
State in 1995–1997	2	4	7
Collective in 1995–1997	43	28	3
Group in 1995–1997	32	14	8
Private in 1995–1997	23	54	82

Source: Halamska, 1998: 66.

Table 5

Number of agricultural landholdings in thousands (in %) in 2003

Category	EU-15	Czech Rep.	Hungary	Poland
< 5 ha	3533,00 (57.0%)	26,59 (58.1%)	693,29 (89.6%)	1444,81 (66.5%)
5– < 20 ha	1342,77 (21.8%)	9,09 (19.9%)	55,15 (7.2%)	619,19 (28.5%)
20– < 50 ha	685,68 (11.1%)	3,89 (8.5%)	14,22 (1.8%)	90,32 (4.2%)
> = 50 ha	620,46 (10.1%)	6,20 (13.5%)	10,72 (1.4%)	17,88 (0.8%)
Total	6153,08 (100.0%)	45,77 (100.0%)	773,38 (100.0%)	2172,21 (100.0%)

Source: <http://eup.eurostat.cec.int>

The globalisation process brought various results to rural areas in the countries under investigation. Let me point out at least four of them. Firstly, the continuous process of catching up modernisation resulting among others from pre-accession funds. Secondly, the lack of stability of income received by farmers resulting from the growing exposure to the global market. In fact, the EU itself has contributed to that as Fella claims: "...in shaping its relations to the east, the EU has placed the burden of adjustment on the CEE countries, obliging them to open up their markets to the west, while EU markets remain protected from competition from the east" (2002: 5). It is worth mentioning that at least in the case of Polish farmers a year of accession i.e. 2004 was the first one of their growing income after a whole decade. Third, major growing differences among various groups of agricultural producers have been observed, mainly between larger and successful ones and those smaller and marginalised (Gorlach, 2001; Majerova, 2001; Kovach, 2001). Finally, the declining significance of agricultural and food production has been observed together with the growing multifunctional character of rural areas (Kovach, 2001).

Then, summing up the transformation period resulting in the diversification of agricultural systems one should compare them with the advanced model of EU-15 countries. It should be stressed that the results of such a comparison produce some interesting results especially in terms of CEEC backwardness. For example, all of them show the higher than in the EU-15 average percentage of population economically active in agriculture (see table 6). At the same time one might consider the problem of the consolidation of production. As the dairy case shows such an indicator has not been as definite. Hungary seems to be the only country in which the level of consolidation of dairy farms has been higher than the average level in EU-15. On the other hand, the Czech Republic and especially Poland are far behind the EU-15 measures (table 7). And last but not least one might consider the percentage of the total labour force compared to that of EU-15. It should be stressed that both Hungary and the Czech Republic provide almost 11% of new workers in agriculture in the enlarged EU. But Poland seems to make a difference in this case. Its total labour force involved in agriculture has been on the level of roughly one third of that of EU-15. Such a situation really confirms that "big kids" mean "big problems" (see table 8).

All the indicators presented in tables 6, 7 and 8 show that processes of concentration of production seem to be lagging behind the general image of the "old EU" agriculture. As Stefano Fella puts it pessimistically: "...the manner in which economic relations with the CEE states have been shaped makes any narrowing in the economic gap between east and west extremely unlikely" (Fella, 2002: 5). Such a statement has been supplemented by his

rather dark prognosis that: "Enlargement to the east, where all the applicant states have levels of economic development (measured in terms of GDP per capita) considerably lower than the existing member states, is likely to increase the pressure for further differentiation" (Fella, 2002: 6). To support his ideas see data concerning GDP and HDI in the respective countries (tables 9 and 10).

Table 6
Economically active population in agriculture in % of total population

Year	EU-15	Czech Rep.	Hungary	Poland
1995	3.1	5.2	6.0	12.3
2001	2.5	4.5	4.9	11.0

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 2004: 782–783.

Table 7
Holdings with dairy cows in 2003

Category	EU-15	Czech Rep.	Hungary	Poland
In thousands	549,618	11,219	22,013	808,654
% of total number of farms	8.9	24.5	2.9	37.2

Source: <http://eup.eurostat.cec.int>

Table 8
Total farm labour force in 2003

Category	EU-15	Czech Rep.	Hungary	Poland
In thousand AWU	6326,72	166,4	525,79	2190,97
% of AWU in EU-15	100.0	2.6	8.3	34.6

Source: <http://eup.eurostat.cec.int>

All these numbers show the relatively backward character of the three countries under consideration in comparison with the members of "old Europe." However, one may challenge the pessimistic image painted by Fella and raise the question: can this backwardness be treated not as aggravating circumstances but, on the contrary, as a kind of comparative advantage in the context of searching forces that might have an impact on

Table 9

GDP per capita 2000–2002 (PPS; EU 25 = 100)

Country	GDP per capita	Country	GDP per capita
Luxembourg	215	France	114
Ireland	130	Germany	110
Denmark	125	Italy	110
Netherlands	123	Spain	93
Austria	123	Portugal	77
Belgium	117	Greece	76
Sweden	117	Czech Republic	66
United Kingdom	116	Hungary	56
Finland	114	Poland	46

Source: EUROSTAT News Release, 47/2005.

Table 10

EU-15 plus Norway and accessing countries: HDI in the period 1990–2002

Country	1990	2002	Position in (1990) 2002
Norway	0,911	0,956	(4) 1
Sweden	0,895	0,946	(12) 2
Netherlands	0,907	0,942	(6) 5–6
Belgium	0,897	0,942	(9–10) 5–6
Ireland	0,869	0,936	(21) 10–12
United Kingdom	0,883	0,936	(17) 10–12
Finland	0,889	0,935	(9) 13
Austria	0,893	0,934	(12) 14
Luxembourg	0,882	0,933	(19) 15
France	0,902	0,932	(8) 16–17
Denmark	0,897	0,932	(9–10) 16–17
Germany	0,887	0,925	(15–16) 19
Spain	0,885	0,922	(17) 20
Italy	0,887	0,920	(15–16) 21
Greece	0,870	0,902	(21) 24
Portugal	0,847	0,897	(26) 26
Czech Republic (1995)	0,843	0,868	(32) 32
Poland	0,802	0,850	(41) 37
Hungary	0,807	0,848	(37–38) 38

Source: Human Development World Report, New York 2004: UNDP.

sustainability, especially on the rural sustainable development? I try to address this issue in the next section of this paper.

From Backwardness to Sustainability?

The following part of this paper focuses on the most significant, I believe, issue concerning changes in rural areas as well as agriculture in contemporary Europe, namely: sustainable development. However, in the context of the consideration presented above as well as some current theoretical consideration that might be found in the most recent discourse on rural development the basic question seems to be as follows: does backwardness matter? Or, in other words, is backwardness a kind of comparative advantage (to use the language of the globalisation discourse) in the context of sustainable development? Or, to put it more precisely, is backwardness the case in agricultural production as well as in some rural areas of CEEC a kind of comparative advantage in the context of rural sustainable development in the enlarged Europe?

The starting point for such a consideration should focus on the core of identity of rural populations in contemporary societies. Due to growing productivity as well as the enlargement of the global food-supply chains rural community identity has been seriously threatened. Particular *places* located somewhere in rural areas became parts of the global rural *space*. The same process might be observed in Central and Eastern Europe. As Halamska claims: "The rural populations of Central Europe are in the process of identity transformation" (1998: 223). However, this identity seems to be exposed to a significant threat since the collapse of the former system. As one might stress the former, existing under the communist system types of identity have vanished. "Now that the agrarianist and collectivist myth is no longer timely, the Central-European village is looking for a new adhesive with which to cement its identity" (Halamska, 1998: 223).

As I have already mentioned, the factor that plays the most significant role in the changes after the collapse of communist regimes in CEE countries has been identified as globalisation. However, globalisation has its other side. It has, therefore been associated with the significant change of the source of the most important identities. As Manuel Castells puts it: "The institutions and organisations of civil society that were constructed around the democratic state, and around the social contract between capital and labour, have become, by and large, empty shells, decreasingly able to relate to people's lives and values in most societies" (2004: 420). Such constructions seem to be connected to main social processes that might have an impact on contemporary societies including agricultural systems and rural communities as well.

I would argue that all the issues mentioned above should now be theorised in the context of rural sustainable development, as a key perspective challenging previous processes of modernisation of agriculture and rural communities. Following Goodland (1995: 3) one might point out at least three different types of sustainable development. The first has been called the social sustainability that might be achieved only "...by systematic community participation and strong civil society." The second has been called the economic sustainability that was based on the assumption that: "Economic capital should be stable. The widely accepted definition of economic sustainability 'maintenance of capital,' or keeping capital intact, has been used by accountants since the Middle Ages to enable merchant traders to know how much of their sales receipts they and their families could consume without reducing their ability to continue trading." Finally, the third has been called environmental sustainability and, in turn, was based on the idea that "...ES is needed by humans and originated because of social concerns, ES itself seeks to improve social welfare by protecting the sources of raw materials used for human needs and ensuring that sinks for human wastes are not exceeded, in order to prevent harm to humans..."

As the approach offered by Goodland shows the basic factor of sustainable development seems to be associated with its social dimension. Systematic community participation and strong civil society seem to be the pledge for such a type of development. In other words, sustainable development seems to be equal to the "reflexive" one if community participation and involvement of civil society really mean "reflexiveness." If this is the case one may argue that sustainability can only be achieved in post-modern, late modern or at least not-backward societies since, as some sociologists claim (see for example Giddens, 1984) reflexivity has to be treated as a factor of contemporary globalising society. However, in my opinion the main problem lies not in the fact but in the content of this reflexiveness. One may imagine a situation in which such a reflexiveness will be dominated by a particular group, for example modern farmers who will focus on intensive agricultural production based on the economy of scale. This is, of course, not the case of sustainable rural development. May we find such a required type of reflexiveness in backward societies and communities? There may be such an opportunity but again it depends on the particular coalition of interests focusing in a conscious way on the more extensive and diversified development of the particular community.

How about economic sustainability? The story seems to be similar in this case as well. In order to get the sustainable type of development one should preserve some intact capital. That means one should be guided – to use the famous Max Weber's (2004) typology – by rather substantive but not formal rationality. In other words, the economy must be treated as

a way of life and not as a business. Such an approach seems to be in contradiction with a path of Western, European, capitalist development. Again however, to achieve such an economic strategy seems to require the particular type of coalition of interests and forces promoting such a type of economic development. Is it possible to force farmers in backward societies to accept such a strategy while they seem to be hungry for increasing incomes and financial gains comparable to the incomes of "old" EU farmers? In other words, is it possible to convert EE not so modernised farmers to neo-peasants (to use van der Ploeg's (2003) term)? This cannot be taken for granted and requires the reflexive type of economic policy.

The case of environmental sustainability seems to be the simplest one in the context of backwardness. For example, as Lucjan Kocik (2000: 38–43) stresses traditional peasant culture developed a kind of solidarity with nature. Traditional peasant culture seemed to be a part of nature presenting the non-extractive but rather a kind of symbiotic approach to nature and its resources. However, I would argue that this is rather an "idyllic" description of the traditional farmer. Anyone with the slightest experience with the so-called traditional peasants in modern Poland (during the communist period or even now during post-communism) knows exactly that such an image is oversimplified. Such a peasant may be seen as a person treating the natural environment as a place for dumping all the waste produced by his/her household as well as using some aggressive techniques in order to prepare, according to his/her knowledge, a better place for the cultivation of wheat, grass or another type of plant. One can experience the manifestation of such attitudes while observing the burning of fields or pastures in contemporary Poland. The peasant common or lay/local/tacit knowledge has been based on the assumption that burning fields or meadows is a kind of natural enrichment of the soil and the environment. Experts however say that this is not the case. According to them, burning grass or pasture results in the destruction of the natural environment and the killing of many types of small field animals and micro-organisms. Therefore such a technique has nothing to do with the symbiotic relation to the natural environment and may not be treated as a contribution to sustainable development.

Further to the consideration presented above one should stress that backwardness does not seem to be a kind of miraculous means towards sustainable development. On the contrary, the background of such a strategy seems to lie in the content of the discourse emerging among various actors involved in socio-economic development. Backwardness definitely does not seem to be a kind of miraculous protection against purely extractive, intensive and industrial type of development. Consequently, resistance facing such a type of development cannot only be based on traditional, pre-modern, "peasant" values. It has to be based on something else. As Manuel

Castells puts it: "Resistance identities are not limited to traditional values. They can also be built by and around proactive social movements, which choose to establish their autonomy in their communal resistance as long as they are not powerful enough to mount an assault on the oppressive institutions they oppose" (Castells, 2004: 421). Once again, it should be stressed that it has to be based on agency and governance, i.e. on the ability of particular communities to form a proper strategy of development and to execute it under the frame of a modern, or rather post-modern, political regime.

With the European Union to Where?

Such a question was raised many times at the beginning of the post-communist transformation in my native Poland (I assume that it was quite similar in the Czech Republic and Hungary, and probably in all other countries), i.e. where are we going? Or, in other words, it was formed as follows: from communism to where? However, the answer has changed since 1989 because of the changing situation. The first response at the beginning of 1990's was the immediate and seemingly obvious reaction: from communism recognised as a state-directed economy and authoritarian rule to a market economy and political democracy, or – even to be more direct – from communism to modern capitalism. However, the later sobering effect brought more doubts and resulted in a vaguer response, i.e. a kind of a social market economy and a socially responsible state. The last solution has been found in the European Union project, especially in its features which have been focused on the regulation of markets as well as stress on cohesion, anti-marginalisation, exclusion and, finally, on the opportunities for sustainable development. In other words, the European Union seemed to be the icon of capitalism with a human face which might fulfil CEE dreams. However, many activities in CEE societies under communist rule were associated with various efforts to change the existing (at that time) economic and, mainly, political system into socialism with a human face. Such efforts could be noticed in the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 as well as in the Solidarity movement in Poland. The phrase "socialism with a human face" became the symbol of the reformist movement in Czechoslovakia in the period called the Prague Spring. Does that mean that we can theorise about the future of the EU and its new, post-communist members? Further to the statement presented in the introduction to this paper one may say that history can even help do such things. But some authors have significant doubts about that. As Alan Milward puts it: "History is not a good predictor. It cannot reduce the world to a sufficiently small number of variables to turn theory into predictive models. It can be

suggestive, but only on the basis of analogies which by definition are imperfect" (2002: 19). So this means that while we are able to explain the current state of affairs referring to the path of historical development we are unable to forecast fully the future state of affairs on the basis of the same path.

Therefore, let me make some suggestions about the possible future course of events. However, in order to make some final comments, I intend to identify the key issue of the historical path of development in CEE countries generally, and especially in the three countries under consideration. The whole path seems to be the long way between the Scylla of hopes and the Charibda of fears. During the communist period fears were associated with the threat of collectivisation and total subordination of the peasant economy and peasant communities to the state authorities. In turn, hopes might be identified with the possible liberalisation of the economy and the political system, the recognition of household farming in Hungary, the relative autonomy of large farms in Czechoslovakia, the Solidarity movement and the abandonment of collectivisation in Poland. Under post-communist reality globalisation seemed to be a major source of fear. But at the same time the possibility of joining the European Union, a possibility that became the major political project in all countries considered here as well as many other countries of Central and Eastern Europe formed the counterbalancing platform of hope. However, such hope could now be threatened. As I noted before a recent debate in the EU might be treated as a major redesigning attempt of the whole project. Once treated as a relatively safe haven and a place for escaping from globalisation now seems to be threatened by globalisation itself. Is there any kind of possible escape from this threat? The answer may be found in the formula of sustainable development, in the case of agricultural economy and rural economies in rural sustainable development. But the key to such a solution has to be designed. As I pointed out before it has to be designed by forming a proper structure of governance, an adequate civil society, an adequate economic strategy as well as an attitude towards the natural environment. However, all that means that it is a long way ahead of us and the final state does not seem clear.

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