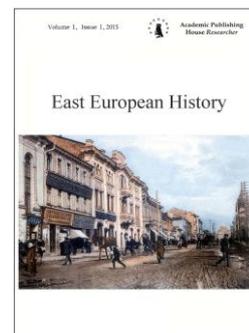


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## Making History: Multiple Contingencies in Societal Change

Nikolai Genov<sup>a, \*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Free University, Berlin, Germany

### Abstract

“Making history” might be reduced to the interplay between leading politicians or military leaders. The article starts with the complexity of the historical process due to multiple contingencies. They involve variety of actors, relations and processes which characterize the multidimensionality of social interaction. In all specific historical situations the interaction is determined by natural, technological, economic, political and cultural factors as well as by their interplay. Thus the differentiated concept of social interaction opens the prospect for a systematic comparison of two profound historical changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The first one is the establishment of socialist social order under the impact of a number of historical circumstances. The second profound social change is the replacement of the state socialism by a social order marked by the dominance of private property as well as by political and cultural pluralism. Both types of fundamental restructuring of the Eastern European societies were unique. However, the conceptual reproduction of both phenomena clearly shows that they followed the same logic of the change of actors, relations and processes.

**Keywords:** authoritarianism, making history, normative forecasting, paradigm of social interaction, socialist societal change, Post-socialist societal change.

### 1. Introduction

“Making history” conveys the message that individual and collective actors create, reproduce and change historical situations in a spontaneous or planned way by peaceful or violent interactions. The actors in historical events establish relations of the type of equality or inequality and change them intentionally or not in processes like social differentiation and integration. Thus “making history” is manifest in continuities and breaks of situations of social interaction. Consequently, the conceptual framework of social interaction with its three pillars of social actors, relations and processes is particularly apt for guiding descriptions, explanations and prognostications of historical situations and their change. Besides the concepts of actors, relations and processes there are some other general characteristics of social interaction. They concern the major determining factors of interaction first of all. One may be on sound ground by distinguishing ecological, technological, political, economic and value-normative (cultural) factors and related determination chains in interaction processes (Genov, 2018: 24). The determination is mediated by social institutions and historical circumstances.

Casting a glance at the historical specifics of the Central and Eastern European societies during the XX century one may discover an astonishing variety of historical situations and of efforts to cope with them. During the century actors in the eastern part of the European continent

\* Corresponding author  
 E-mail addresses: [genov@zedat.fu-berlin.de](mailto:genov@zedat.fu-berlin.de) (N. Genov)

have been permanently involved in interactions marked by cooperation, alliances and stability. However, even more often interactions have been marked by ideas and practices of confrontation, war and profound change. The specifics were usually incorporated in manifests and struggles for national consolidation and prosperity. One exceptional case has been the project aiming at the establishment of socialist social order. At the end of the 1980s the Central and Eastern parts of the European continents indulged in another extremely demanding project of profound social change. The time has come for re-establishing the capitalist social order in a more or less organized manner.

The repeated attempts at putting social interactions in society under control and change them purposefully have long records. Most often the attempts have been undertaken under the impact of the combined forces of religion or religion-like ideologies and political power (Joas, 2017). In the historically specific case of building socialist society the incentives were provided by a secular religion proclaiming the historical necessity of establishing an efficient, humane and just society. The repeated attempts at attaining such an ambitious goal have been often accompanied or followed by authoritarianism or dictatorship. Thus “making history” in Central and Eastern Europe included authoritarian and dictatorial governments both before and after the Second World War. The exceptions were few and practically negligible.

The rise and fall of real socialism in the eastern part of Europe is the most impressive among the attempts at large-scale social engineering. Its strategy followed Marxist ideas about the inevitable advent of socialist and some later communist social order. The argument was that the interaction of economic, political and cultural factors has already made the radical change of the social order in the European industrialized societies overdue in the second half of the nineteenth century. The change had to be practical implementation of the ideals of socialist collectivism, equality and justice. The profound societal change had to implement the progressive change of socio-economic formations.

The experiment intended to turn Marxist revolutionary ideas into practice started in the underdeveloped Eastern part of Europe in 1917. The territory of the experiment expanded after the Second World War with the emergence of the Second World of the Eastern European socialist countries. The Second World ceased to exist in 1989 but the debates on the causes, processes and effects of the most ambitious attempt at social engineering will take probably centuries. This happened with the reflections on the fundamental social changes in the history of the United Kingdom (Walter, 2017) or of France (McPhee, 2017), for instance. Nevertheless, the historical distance of thirty years is sufficient for drawing conclusions about the Eastern European socialist experiment from a contemporary point of view. Key questions are still open for discussion: Was the state socialist experiment an aberration from the normal path of the universal history? Was the profound change of Central and Eastern European societies towards state socialism due to the high dose of ideological opium taken by intellectuals in the region? Is the restoration of the capitalist social organization a turn back to historical normality?

The questions have been discussed in these or similar formulations. But they are so profoundly relevant in scientific and practical terms that their putting to discussion on the basis of the social interaction paradigm is just an expression of the need for continuing reconsidering of the major lessons from making history.

## **2. Discussion**

### **Dreams and realities in historical interactions**

The search for tentative answers to the above questions requires some historical retrospectives. The dream about the collectivist socialist society marked by equality and justice had already long history before 1917 and particularly before 1945. It is an undisputable historical fact that segments of several generations of Europeans have envisaged the better future of their societies in socialism. Having a strong historical sensitivity, Max Weber had conceived the crux of the matter: socialism is not an ideological illusion alone. His diagnosis of the complicated phenomenon is based on social-structural considerations: “all workers will be anew and anew in whatever sense socialistically oriented” (Weber, 1988 [1924]: 517). Weber had rich historical experience which made his point persuasive enough. Before the First World War socialist ideas and their organizational incorporations in social-democratic and socialist parties had a substantial electoral support in Western Europe. Millions voted the Social Democratic Party of Germany since

they wanted and expected profound changes towards better life as soon as possible and under the leadership of the social democrats. Their electoral programs seemed to contain enthusiastic visions and to convey the appeal of a new secular religion for progressive development of the individual and society. However, there was a question mark accompanying the Gotha (1875) and Erfurt (1891) Programs of the German social democracy. Even in the times of its intellectual and organizational maturity after the Bismarck era the leaders of the Social Democratic Party of Germany waged bitter debates about the contours of the desired future society. There were very strong reasons for the debates since the contours were outlined by the founding fathers of the Marxist ideology in a quite rudimentary manner. The ideas about the organization of the future socialist society had still to be conceptually developed and then tested in practical activity. The task was not simple since there were influential leaders of the German Social Democracy like Eduard Bernstein who went quite far in his famous statement that “what is usually termed the final goal of socialism is nothing to me, the movement is everything” (Bernstein, 1993 [1899]: 190). For him the *goal* (the establishment of the collectivist, egalitarian and just socialist society) was not an important topic for discussion. He regarded the socialist *movement* for improvement of the capitalist society as much more relevant issue for the social democratic ideology and politics.

The leaders of the Communist party of Germany had the historical opportunity to raise the issue in more details and in practical terms during the turbulent years after the First World War. At that time they seemed to be much closer to the realization of the aim of building socialist society than the social democrats before the War. The members of the Spartacus far-left organization even tried to attain the goal by applying military means. But serious discussion on the strategic topic never happened in the Party circles since all its intellectual resources were bound to the fierce political struggles of the moment (Hoffrogge, LaPorte, 2017). The Party remained without elaborated normative strategy about the building up of the new society after the expected successful socialist revolution. One may even assume that the leaders of the Party did not have real interest in discussing Weber’s warnings that the rather general vision of the future collectivist, egalitarian and just socialist society would lead to sobering surprises.

#### **How to deal with the normative forecasting?**

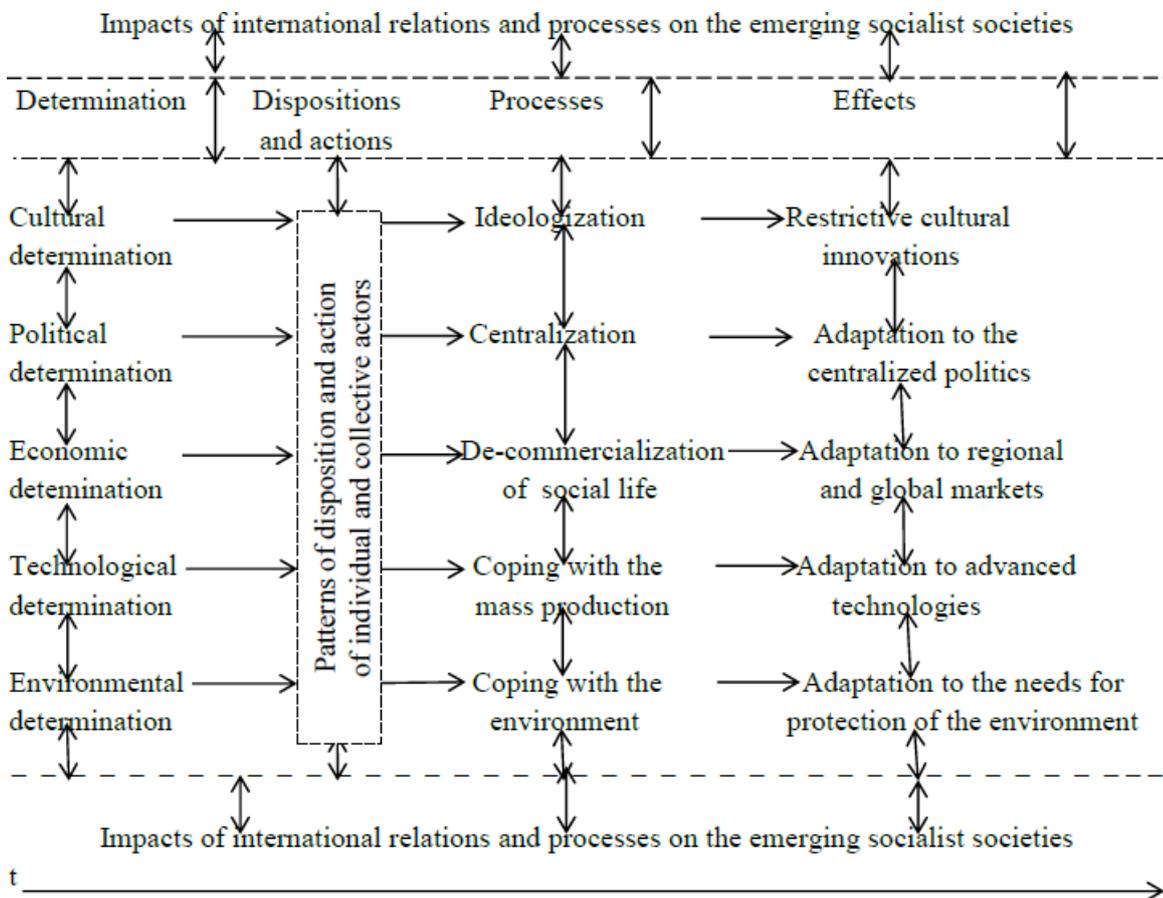
The analysis and argumentation further on will be guided by the concept of social interaction. Its framework of actors, relations and processes in situations of exchange of matter, energy and information opens the perspective for systematic studies on most complex historical situations and changes. The situations are usually complicated because of the interaction of a large variety of actors. They might be individuals, small groups like military junta or large groups like participants in mass demonstrations, informal and formal organizations, societies, supra-national associations, etc. As seen from the point of view of the determination chains there are well distinguishable five clusters of determinants of social interactions related to the preparation and realization of socialist society. In the social earthquakes accompanying its emergence the concentration of industrial workers due to available natural resources was of crucial relevance. Potential fighters for the socialist cause could be best mobilized in areas with developed technological infrastructure. The relevance of the economic and political determinants of social interactions preparing the emergence of socialist societies was manifest in times of economic crises and political turmoil, especially in times of war. The value-normative determination of interactions is evident in the success or failure of the project of socialist society. The culture in the European regions or localities could be supportive to the advocated revolutionary change or not due to differences in the religious affiliation, for instance.

Putting in motion the events of change caused by the interplay of the five clusters of determinants is the major task of the actors involved in making history. In the historical space and time before the First World War the leftist proponents of radical change in Western Europe were the social democratic and socialist parties and the trade unions under their influence. After the War the major bearers of the potential for radical change became the communist parties in Western Europe and the particularly radical and well organized party of the Russian Bolsheviks. The key component of their program for revolutionary societal change of the capitalist social order was the de-commercialization of economic life. The intellectual tool for resolving the issue had to be the normative prognostication for building of visions about desirable future situations of organizations and societies (Curaj et al, 2013). The organizational instrument for resolving the issue was the expropriation of key means of production and services.

This action program could be only materialized if the state would take the lead in the changes. Moreover, the task could be efficiently resolved if the state would be centralized and consolidated around the ideology and politics of the revolutionary party. In order to reach the best imaginable level of integration and efficiency the revolutionary actors had to incorporate their revolutionary ideology into societal institutions. In practice this means that structures and followers of the revolutionary party had to merge with state institutions.

These internal changes in Central and Eastern European societies had to take place under permanently changing configurations of unfavorable international relations. The precarious situations required that all political will and action had to be concentrated on the key issues of the political survival and the very end on the efforts to achieve victory in the violent military struggles. Under such conditions the environmental issues could only attract rather limited attention during the fights for establishing socialist organization of the societies in Eastern Europe.

The schematic presentation of the ideological innovations and the related practical actions has to stress the multiple causes, processes and effects of the changes which brought about the emergence of socialist societies in Central and Eastern Europe in two rather different historical stages after 1917 and 1945:



**Fig. 1.** Making history: Interactions in building socialist society  
Source: the author

**The practical turn of the utopia**

The leaders of the newly established Soviet Russia did not have the choice to postpone the debate on the establishment of the socialist order or not. Due to pressing domestic and international circumstances they had to follow the strategy of trials and errors in their efforts to practically materialize the socialist ideals. The attempts at socialist re-organization of the technologically and economically backward Soviet Russia might easily become subject for sarcasm or for bitter irony now. It would be intellectually more productive to explain the phenomenon as the outcome of interactions under rather complicated historical circumstances. They ranged from

the sufferings of millions of workers under the conditions of rapid industrialization in tsarist Russia, from the fury accumulated by the poverty stricken peasants, the imperial political suppression and reach the misery of the First World War. These objective conditions have facilitated the rise of the motivation for radical change. The motivation could be channeled into revolutionary action by the decades of efforts to build up an efficient revolutionary organization. In a crucial moment the efforts of the organization were fostered by the generous financial support of the German state.

The mutual influence of these objective and subjective, domestic and international circumstances brought about the material and cultural conditions of the socialist experiment in its first historical version in Soviet Russia. Could anybody of its founding fathers foresee the intermediary and final outcomes of the experiment Weber warned from? He specified his reservations concerning the attempt at practical realization of socialist ideas by taking the events in Russia as an example of unintended and undesirable consequences of actions which were supposed to be rationally guided and controlled by the actors. Weber was able to foresee the rule of administrators in the management of the state dominated socialist economy. He argued that this type of economic organization was bound to put constraints on the motivation for technological innovation and economic achievement. Weber predicted that the establishment of political authoritarianism and dictatorship will be another unpredicted and undesirable consequence of the socialist revolution. He had clear arguments why free associations of free individuals would be impossible under such organizational circumstances. The building of associations of this type was exactly the guiding idea of the activities of the European social democratic and socialist movements and parties and later of the Communist parties in the continent (Weber, 1988 [1924]: 492-518; Fiedler, 2004).

Weber's prognostications were confirmed already at the first steps in the building of socialist society in Russia. The interplay of domestic and international circumstances made the isolated socialist re-organization of the backward, multinational and multi-confessional Russian society a process which was met with controversial feelings and actions. They ranged from enthusiasm to fears, from cultural approval to rejection and from practical support to violent counteraction in Russia itself and by the world's powers. As seen from a long historical perspective the assessment of the process is controversial too. The model of the socialist modernization enforced by the state has its recognized achievements, although they were paid with a high social price. Under the conditions of technological, economic, political and cultural backwardness of the Soviet society the liberating dictatorship of the proletariat evolved into the merger of the state and party apparatus. The Marxist vision about free individuals in free associations did not materialize. Instead of differentiation of functions, roles, groups and organizations as it is typical for associations, super-integration emerged due to the subjugation of economy, politics and culture under the administrative power of the merged state and ruling party. This development substantially reduced the capacities for self-organization of actors in economy and culture by following their own logics in *autopoiesis* as it appears in the theoretical vision of Niklas Luhmann. The options for politics to develop its own logic were undermined as well. The actors in Russian politics could not attain the establishment and maintenance of functioning division of powers under the conditions of an active civil society.

The symbiosis of the state and party apparatus brought about the illusion that all leverages for steering the differentiation and integration of social actions and systems might be managed by the ruling elite. Nikita Khrushchev's voluntarism wasn't his invention. He followed the long tradition of socialist and communist voluntarisms in ideology and practice. Like many other leaders in socialist Eastern Europe he sincerely believed that the only condition for making dreams come true was the proper level of knowledge about the goals to be attained and what means can be applied for the purpose (Kolář, 2016). The extent to which this organization of social interactions did correspond to the wishes and desires of the previous generations of socialists concerning egalitarianism and justice in social life is an interesting topic for discussions. The hard fact is that the previous generations of socialists didn't suggest any consistent prototype of functioning socialist society. The options for critical comparisons of non-socialist countries with the realities of socialism in the Soviet Union were not discussed in details and not really wanted. The question if other scenarios for development of the Soviet Union under the conditions of the permanent threat of foreign intervention couldn't be answered consistently too. The repeated asking for answer

reaches the area of historical speculations. Responsible historians do not recognize imaginary variants of history *post festum*, whatever the attractiveness of historical speculations might be.

The model of state dominated society and societal changes designed and applied in the Soviet Union during the 1930s had the potential to accelerate the technological and social innovations. It was not just matter of ideology and politics that this model of forced modernization became the prototype for the strategy of socialism-leaning modernizing states in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The model was followed by efficient state-capitalist modernizers in South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore as well (Genov, 1993). In both rather different cases the strategy brought about fast industrialization, urbanization and increase of the educational level of large groups of the population. Another common feature in both types of state dominated modernization is that it became possible under the conditions of authoritarian or directly dictatorial governments. They consistently stressed the priority of the collective societal interest over the interest of each of the individuals participating in the process. The disrespect towards the needs and interests of the individuals reached the ruthless disrespect to the lives of millions.

If the accelerated modernization in both the socialist and capitalist historical types of administrative enforcement could be possible without the strong respect to the collective rationality and disrespect to the individual liberties, rationality and lives – this is highly intriguing topic for maximally objective comparative studies. However, the argument that dictatorships lead to successful modernization of underdeveloped societies is not persuasive. A lot of European and Latin American dictatorships before and after the Second World War did not bring about such outcomes. If the Soviet Union would be able to successfully resist the offensive of the very well-equipped, trained, experienced and motivated German army and then to win the War without its authoritarian political control – this is also a topic for continuing debates. The historical fact is that the victory came about at the price of tremendous loses of human lives and material assets. The end of the War marked the end of the first stage in the experiments with the state socialism in Eastern Europe (Edele, 2018).

The second stage of the efforts to put social interactions in whole societies under socialist administrative control started immediately after the WWII. At that time the expression “Eastern Europe” appeared as a geopolitical construct referring to a huge territory from the western border of the Soviet occupation zone in Germany till Ural and from the Baltic to the Adriatic see. This territory has been dominated by variants of the Soviet model of economic and social organization for more than four decades and was widely understood as a global region.

Due to economic, political and cultural reasons part of the Eastern European population perceived this development as historical calamity. But for another segment of the Eastern Europeans who were tired from two world wars, the Great Depression and from nationalist dictatorships after the WWI the post-World War II radical socialist reshuffling of their societies was the promise for new life chances and better life. The dramatic events during the war and the difficult post-war reconstruction have provoked mass desires, expectations and readiness to be active in order to change the circumstances marked by ruthless chasing of profits, by widespread economic and political inequality, by egoism, hypocrisy, injustice, aggression and wars. For millions of Eastern Europeans the vision of a new humane social order became the prospective orientation of the individual decisions and actions. Millions greeted the appearance of the socialist Second World and supported its development. The support declined in the course of time due to the growing understanding about the deficiencies of the socialist economic, political and cultural organization of Eastern European societies.

The label “European Second World” was not symbolic alone. It had clear organizational parameters under the conditions of the Cold War. The centralized political system, planned economy and state ideology were common for all Eastern European societies. They were functional equivalents of a submission demanding religious sect. The region was recognized and respected in the international affairs since it was integrated by the powerful organizations of the Warsaw Treaty Organization and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Eastern Europe was recognized as a world region in diplomatic and statistical sense. At the international economic, political and cultural events the tentative parity of the representation of Eastern and Western Europe was a diplomatic rule.

These conventions and institutions lost every meaning so fast as nobody would have imagined before the turn in 1989. As outcome of destructive internal and cross-boundary

interactions the economic, political and military integration of the Eastern European societies dissolved. The Cold War ended with the defeat of real socialism in Europe. The causes of this development are numerous. During the first decades of the socialist transformation the centralized state socialist government of economy and all other action spheres laid the stress on the fast industrialization. Due to the limited domestic investments and to the lack of access to the world markets of advanced technologies, the industrialization was carried out at a generally low level of technological sophistication but fostered the social and economic development nevertheless. The spread of low quality work places and the scarcity of high tech work places brought about modest but secure rise of the incomes for millions. The extensive development helped to stabilize the economy and politics in the region although it remained the poorer semi-periphery or periphery to the core of the continent as it has been for centuries.

The unavoidable re-orientation of the Eastern European national economies towards intensive technological and economic development came as a profound challenge. Requirements for accelerated technological and organizational innovations, fast increase of the productivity of work, fierce competition the globalizing markets dominated the historical situation. The political leaders and the societies at large in the region perceived the tasks as unresolvable. The obstacles came mostly from the dominating and constraining impacts of politics on the nationalized economy and culture. Exactly in the way Weber expected the development, the socialist organization of economic life did not provide the involved actors with efficient incentives for technological and organizational innovations. The violently imposed political super-integration of the Eastern European societies did not allow the overdue functional differentiations *of* and *in* action spheres. Politics remained dominated by ideas and practices which hindered cultural plurality, competition of innovative political programs and personal initiative and responsibility. Before the beginning of the profound changes in 1989 Eastern Europe was agonizing in economic stagnation and in a deepening ideological and political crisis.

The inefficient interactions *in* and *between* the societies of the European real socialism caused organizational deficits together with deficits of integrating trust in each individual Eastern European society and between them. However, the most visible manifestation of the inefficiency of the socialist economic and social organization was the omnipresent deficit of goods and services. The specific organizational culture and the practices of the society dominating the region in political and military terms gave its contribution to the rising ideological and organizational entropy there. The Soviet society had tradition of forceful integration and was oriented towards resolving societal tensions and conflicts by threatening with violence or by applying violence. This became obvious in the Soviet reaction to the reform ideas and practices during the short-lived Prague Spring. Instead of understanding the processes which signaled the need for deep reforms in the turn from extensive to intensive social and economic development, the leaders of the Soviet Union put on ice the reforms in Czechoslovakia, in their own country as well as in the whole region. However, the well-educated young Eastern Europeans could not identify themselves with the stagnating state, economy, politics and culture in the region. They could not live with promises for bright future any more but asked for satisfaction with the conditions of life and work in their life "here and now". At the end of the eighties the time for immediate reforms in the region was already overdue. The parody of reforms during the Soviet *perestroika* gave a strong impetus to processes of ideological and organizational dissolution of the Eastern European geostrategic region. Actually, the dissolution has started already with the accumulation of deep disappointment from the discrepancies between the official ideology and the varieties of sobering practices.

In the course of the decades after WWII the idea and the practice of socialist internationalism became increasingly a rare topic of mass propaganda in Eastern Europe. As seen from another point of view, the organizational inefficiency of the state socialist economy had been regularly confirmed by international comparisons. The disciplining potential of the organizational center in Moscow declined step by step before the *perestroika* and rapidly after it started. To the contrary, nationalist ideas and organizational practices received stronger and stronger public support. Nationalism nourished by traditional anti-socialist and anti-Russian attitudes caused fatal disintegration in the domestic and international politics of the Eastern European societies. The monolithic interpretation of the concept of Eastern Europe by the characteristic "socialist" was undermined. The old geopolitical construct of "Central Europe" became re-vitalized in order to historically, legally and culturally underline the deviation from the seemingly monolithic socialist

ideology and politics. The stress on the specifics of the Baltic States followed in the most natural way. There were historical, cultural and geopolitical arguments in favor of all these new or newly interpreted ideological and political constructs.

In fact, the Soviet model of societal structures, functions and development was never as monolithic as it used to be presented by the propaganda. The collectivization of agriculture was one of the key components of the model. In reality, already in the 1950s Poland and Yugoslavia terminated the efforts to implement the collectivization of agriculture. This was a signal for future deviations. Yugoslavia moved in the direction of economic, political and cultural liberalization combined with opening to Western influences. Most intensive and effective were the deviations in Poland, where the mass movement *Solidarność* and its suppression triggered the dissolution of the socialist social order. Together with the dramatic failure of the Soviet *perestroika* the processes in Poland gave the decisive impetus to the disappearance of the European real socialism both nationally and internationally. The fall of the Berlin wall underlined the profound historical relevance of the failure of the “Second World” in Europe (Genov, 2016).

After thirty years of substantial reforms in Eastern Europe there is a clear tendency to forget the contribution of external (international) interactions to the decline and disappearance of the European real socialism. The attitudes and actions of the non-socialist environment towards Eastern Europe rarely were constructive but usually hostile or directly aggressive. The reasons for this state of the international interactions were multiple, in each individual case consisting of combinations of causes and reasons with variety of consequences. Under the conditions of the Cold War the strategies for weakening the enemy were carried out with the whole arsenal of tools of hybrid wars. For Eastern Europe the final effect of the confrontation was foreseeable. The region had been technologically and economically underdeveloped for centuries. The Soviet Union was devastated by the Second World War and the country's economy was inefficiently managed. The region existentially needed transfer of cutting edge technologies in order to reduce the underdevelopment and become competitive at the international markets.

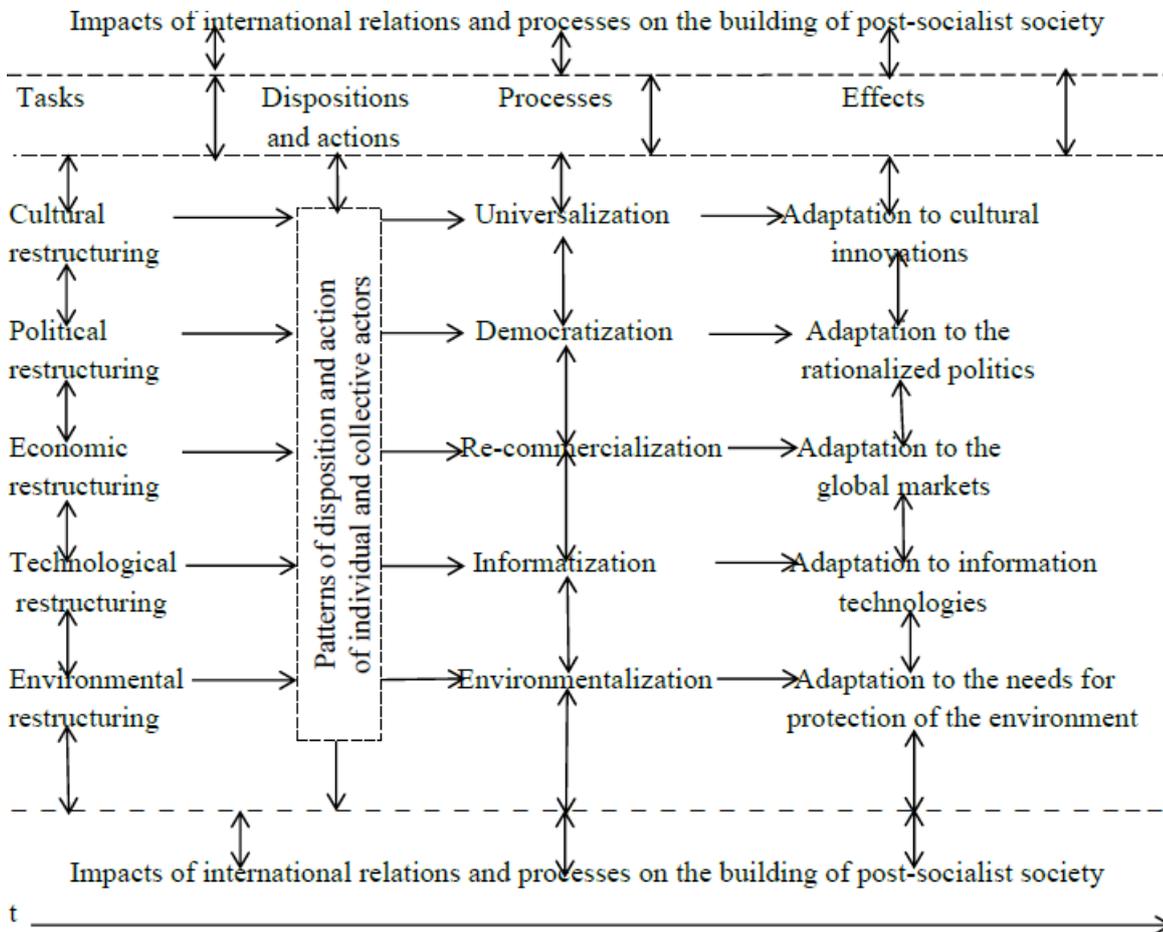
However, the policies of the technologically advanced countries were guided by the idea not to allow the competitors access to the economic, political, ideological and military top level scientific and technological achievements. The activities of the Coordination Committee for Multilateral Control of the Export (COCOM) was by far not restricted to control on the transfer of technologies, know-how or valuable raw materials for production of armaments. The control practically covered every transfer of advanced technologies from Western Europe, North America and Eastern Asia to the Eastern European region. Given the rather limited capacities for internal accumulation and the often ineffective R&D systems in the countries of the region the international constraints on the technological transfer reproduced technological underdevelopment and consequently low international competitiveness of their exports (Førland, 2010). The high level of military expenses and the non-rational social policies could only lead the Eastern European economies towards exhaustion and unavoidable political crash. The critical move in this direction was provoked by the program for star wars announced by President Ronald Reagan. The national economies of the Eastern European societies and particularly the economy of the Soviet Union did not have the potential to manage the challenge of the new arms race any more.

#### **The post-socialist mantra and the variety of social interactions**

The disruptive interactions inside the socialist countries in Eastern Europe as well as the tensions-ridden interactions with the non-socialist environment caused the dissolution of the socialist societal organization of economy, politics and culture. Simultaneously the international integrating organizations of the socialist Second World in Europe disappeared as well. Each Eastern European society moved forward according to its specific trajectory of profound reforms. In many cases the trajectories were pre-determined by foreign powers in the rapidly changing geopolitical constellations on the European continent and worldwide. Part of the former Eastern European societies became members of the European Union and NATO. Others tried their specific variants of supranational integration in the Euroasian Economic Council or preferred geopolitical neutrality.

After the failure of the state socialist experiment another colossal social experiment started in the former Eastern Europe with the mantra of purposeful building up market economy, democratic politics and pluralist culture. As it has been always in history, “even after it was replaced by transitional democracies and neoliberal capitalist economic systems, socialism and its legacies

continued to influence everyday life and cultural production in hybrid ways...” (Elača, Lugarić, 2018: 5). The all-embracing new experiment developed exactly like the project for socialist societal change. Quite similarly, the implementation of the project revealed numerous unclear items in its contents, strategy and tactics with variations, deviations and changes of the aims, means and the speed of the social differentiation and integration. The large variety of efforts to manage the situation of reforms brought about inconclusive results. The direction and processes of the interactions are schematically presented in Figure 2:



**Fig. 2.** Making history: Interactions in building post-socialist society  
Source: the author

Given the sobering experience it is some kind of an irony of history that most Eastern European societies have to cope with serious problems after thirty years of post-socialist reforms. Advancements in economy and recurring regional and global economic crises, challenges due to political uncertainties and cultural and military confrontations belong to the everyday agenda in the region. Now it is obvious, that the end of the conflicts in human history which was proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama in 1989 (1992) did not come about. His interpretation of the “making history” process was and remains nothing else than an ideological illusion. His prognostication turned out to be false prophecy. The processes and events on the territory of the former Eastern Europe currently signal about forthcoming social turbulences and much less about the triumph of the eternal piece so much cherished by Immanuel Kant. Uncertainties still mark the Eastern European reforms since they are full of controversial processes accompanying the search for creative and productive adaptation of the societies from the region to the rapidly changing domestic and international conditions. This conflict-ridden historical situation (Appel, Orenstein, 2018) poses massive challenges to the explanatory and prognostic capacities of sociology.

Discussions on the current developments in the area of political governance in Eastern European societies raise questions which were unbelievable some ten or fifteen years ago.

The annual Varieties of Democracy Report of 2019 reveals systematic problems in the development of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe. According to the authors of the Report prepared on the basis of solid empirical information it reveals the symptoms of a third wave of autocratization in world politics. Calculations of the authors reach to the conclusion that due to (a) government manipulations of media, civil society, laws and elections, (b) rise of the toxic political polarization and (c) spread of disinformation by misusing advances of digitalization the liberal democratic countries in the world have declined from 44 in 2014 to 39 in 2018. The Eastern European countries Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Serbia are identified as particularly prone to autocratic policies (V-DEM, 2019: 9, 15)

### 3. Conclusion

The historical distance of thirty years of accumulating rich cognitive and practical experience in the studies on two profound changes of societies in the Central and Eastern European region resulted in huge cognitive and practical outcomes. Nevertheless, the detailed studies need some time in order to be analytically processed and used as background of creative visions about future developments. It is now indisputably clear that the experiment with the real socialism belongs to the grand normative foresights in history. Today we know for sure that the popular understanding of this experiment as an aberration from the normal path of universal history is at least superficial. Nobody can be sure about what in social history is normal and what not, truly stable and future bound or not. What seems to be highly improbable today might surprise as deviation from the well-established patterns of thinking, behavior and organization. And vice versa, the potential beneficiaries of a large investment today could appear as winners in the mainstream economy, politics and culture. But the same individuals and groups might turn out to be deviants from the historic mainstream of tomorrow.

Another popular argument reads that the socialist change of the Central and Eastern European societies has been the effect of a strong dose of ideological opium taken by idealist local intellectuals. In reality, the founding fathers of the Central and Eastern European “people’s democracies” were mixtures of true idealists and practical people who have never had ideological or political illusions but had high ambitions to take and use power. Both types of leaders of Eastern European societies have joined the stream of changes which had to give practical relevance of a dream due to the favorable interaction of historical forces.

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