
Post-Communist Democracy: The Impact of the European Union

David R. Cameron¹

Abstract: The extent to which post-communist European and Eurasian countries have instituted democratic politics varies widely. The countries possessing the generally accepted attributes of a democratic polity are without exception members of the European Union and most of the countries that have moved in that direction in recent years are prospective members. This article examines the association between membership in the EU and the development of a democratic polity. It suggests the aspiration to membership and awareness of the EU's political condition for membership contributed, along with attributes related to spatial location, political antecedents, transitional politics, and economic ties, to the development of a democratic polity.

In the early days after the demise of the communist regimes of central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, most scholars assumed that most if not all of the countries would undergo a transitional process that would, in time, result in the creation of a stable democratic polity. The timing and speed of the transitions would no doubt vary. But all were presumed to be moving toward that end-state. More than 15 years later, we know that assumption was wrong. The countries of post-communist Europe and Eurasia not only vary widely in the extent to which they have instituted democratic politics but appear to be on divergent paths (Diamond and Plattner, 2002). Some have created polities that are no less democratic than those of their western European neighbors and others are moving in that direction. But others soon lapsed into new variants of authoritarianism and still others—most notably, Russia—have moved in

¹Professor of Political Science and Director of the Program on European Union Studies, Yale University. Earlier versions were presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, September 2006, and the Tenth Biennial International Conference of the European Union Studies Association, Montreal, May 2007. I wish to thank Mark Beissinger, George Breslauer, Wade Jacoby, Juliet Johnson, Peter Rutland, Oxana Shevel, and Milada Vachudova for their comments and suggestions.

that direction in recent years.² As a result, a deep and widening fault line has appeared within the post-communist world between the countries that are democratic or moving in that direction and those that are non-democratic or moving in that direction.³

The fault line appears to separate countries that are current or prospective members of the European Union from those that are not. The post-communist countries that share the generally-accepted attributes of a democratic polity—widely-distributed and securely-guaranteed political rights and civil liberties, including the unabridged right to oppose the government, a free media, free and fair elections, competitive parties that alternate in government and opposition, a strong and independent legislature, and a government that is representative of and ultimately accountable to the citizens⁴—are, without exception, countries that are members of the European Union. And the countries that have moved in that direction in recent years are, with perhaps one notable exception, prospective members of the EU. In contrast, the countries that are not democratic and have moved away from democracy in recent years are, without exception, those for which EU membership is not a plausible option in the near future, if ever.

The fact that all of the countries that have democratic polities or are moving toward democracy are current or prospective members of the EU, that only those which are current members have democratic polities, and that all those that have non-democratic polities or are moving in that direction are not prospective members raises an obvious question: Does the close association between current or prospective membership in the EU and democratization across the post-communist world reflect a causal relationship? If so, does it reflect the EU's insistence that acceding states be democratic? That is, did states that aspired to EU membership become democratic in order to satisfy that political condition? Or does the close association reflect a more complex causal relationship? For example, was the aspiration to EU membership only one of several other factors that caused the countries to become democratic, in which case the close association between membership and democracy masks the impact of those other factors? Or was the aspiration to membership itself the result of other factors that caused the countries to become democratic—in which case the apparent relationship between membership and democracy would be spurious?

It is of course very difficult to answer such questions with any certitude. Ultimately, the answers depend not only on understanding why some countries aspire to EU membership and why some are able to create a democratic polity but on the timing and sequence of the collective

²On the Russian experience, see Fish (2005).

³For a discussion, see Way and Levitsky (2007).

⁴For a discussion of the attributes of a democratic polity, see, among many, Dahl (1998). For a discussion of the applicability of democratization theory to the post-communist countries, see Anderson et al. (2001).

aspirations to enter the EU and to create a democratic polity. We know surprisingly little about the timing and sequence of those aspirations across the post-communist world. Nevertheless, it is possible to ascertain when the aspiration to EU membership manifested itself in policy, the extent to which it may have contributed to the creation of a democratic polity, and the extent to which it may have itself resulted from the same factors that caused some countries to aspire to, and eventually create, a democratic polity. In so doing, we can shed some light on the perplexing question of why some post-communist countries created a democratic polity and others did not.

In the first section of the article, I present several measures, based on data reported by Freedom House (2007a, 2007b), of the extent to which democratic politics have been implanted in 28 post-communist countries. The data suggest there may be a causal relationship between prospective and current membership in the EU and the extent and duration of democratic politics. In the second section, I consider that relationship and present cross-sectional data suggesting that early aspirations to membership, as reflected in the early development of formal membership-oriented relations with the EU, may have contributed to the development of a democratic polity in some of the countries. In the third section, longitudinal data for one of the measures provide support for that view by suggesting that much of the democratization occurred prior to the countries' applications for membership and, indeed, even prior to their completion of the pre-application negotiations that looked toward eventual membership. But if, as seems likely, early aspirations to EU membership contributed to the democratization of some post-communist countries, the question arises as to why those countries aspired to membership and whether those aspirations preceded or followed aspirations to create a democratic polity. In the fourth section, I present data that suggest the aspiration to membership was closely associated with a variety of highly interrelated factors involving geography, the historical antecedents of the post-communist regimes, their transitional politics, and their trade and economic ties. The exceptionally high co-variation among those factors across the post-communist countries makes it impossible to sort out their relative explanatory power. But taken together, they do seem to have contributed to both the aspiration to EU membership and development of a democratic polity. In the concluding section, I consider the prospects for the eventual democratization of countries that lie on the non-democratic side of the fault line that divides the post-communist world.

MEASURING THE EXTENT AND DURATION OF POST-COMMUNIST DEMOCRACY

How might one compare the extent and duration of democracy across the post-communist world? Perhaps the most frequently used measures of democracy and autocracy are those created and reported by the Polity IV

Project (Center for International Development and Conflict Management, 2006)—specifically, its measures of institutionalized democracy and institutionalized autocracy. The measures have several virtues: (1) they are reported for a large number of countries throughout the world; (2) they cover a substantial period of time; and (3) they have been refined over several decades. On the other hand, they assign considerable weight to attributes of the executive branch—specifically, the competition and openness of executive recruitment and constraints on the chief executive—and little weight to other attributes usually assumed to be part of what defines a democratic polity, such as the rule of law, political rights, and civil liberties. As a result, they tend to exaggerate the extent of change when attributes of the executive branch change and understate the extent of change when other attributes of the polity change.⁵ And presumably because they reflect the fundamental institutional attributes of a polity, they seldom change, even if much else about the polity does change. To cite but one example, the United States receives the same value on the Democracy and Polity measures every year between 1871 and 2004. Similarly, among the post-communist polities, the democracy scores for Hungary, Slovenia, and the three Baltic states are unchanged after 1991.

For these reasons, we have used other measures of the extent and duration of democracy in the post-communist countries. One is a composite based on measures reported annually by Freedom House (2007a) of the extent to which political rights and civil liberties are widely distributed and securely guaranteed.⁶ Despite the obvious shortcomings of the measures—their reliance on subjective judgments that may not be comparable across countries, their failure to measure the institutional attributes of a polity, the opaque criteria by which countries are scored, the use of seven-point scales that reduce the possible variability across time and space—they are nevertheless useful, if only because they are produced by a single organization, apply the same criteria across time and space, have been reported annually for more than 30 years, and have been used extensively by scholars concerned with political change in post-communist Europe. In comparison with the Polity measures, they do not give disproportionate weight to attributes of the executive branch. And they tend to vary across time to a greater extent than do the Polity scores, thereby increasing the number of instances in which the extent of democracy changed.

For the last decade, Freedom House (2007b) has also reported in its annual *Nations in Transit* publication a composite measure of the extent of democracy in the post-communist countries. All of the countries are ranked on a seven-point scale with regard to the following categories:

- *Electoral Process*: free and fair elections of the national executive and

⁵For discussion of the anomalous Polity IV coding of Russia, see Zimmerman (2007).

⁶Freedom House reports values on two seven-point scales (1 being the highest, 7 the lowest), one pertaining to political rights and the other to civil liberties.

legislature; the development of multiparty systems; popular participation, alternation in office; etc.

- *Civil Society*: growth of nongovernmental organizations, their capacity and financial sustainability, and the environment in which they function; development of free trade unions; role of interest groups in policymaking; freedom of the education system, etc.
- *Independent Media*: legal protection for press freedom and the current state of press freedom; protection for investigative journalism; libel laws; harassment of journalists, editorial independence, internet access for citizens, etc.
- *National Governance*: stability of the governmental system; transparency; ability of legislative bodies to carry out investigative and law-making functions; civil service reform and freedom of civil service from political interference.
- *Local Governance*: decentralization of power; responsibilities, election, management of local government bodies.
- *Constitutional, Legislative, and Judicial Framework*: constitutional framework for protecting human rights; independence and impartiality in interpretation of the constitution; equality before the law; criminal code reform; appointment, training, and independence of judges, etc.
- *Corruption*: implementation of anti-corruption initiatives; absence of excessive bureaucratic regulatory controls that create opportunities for corruption; laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest; audit and investigative rules; protection for whistleblowers, anti-corruption activists, etc.

Figure 1 presents the values for 28 post-communist countries in 2006 on the Freedom House measure of the extent to which political rights and civil liberties are widely distributed and securely possessed and the composite measure of democracy.⁷ There is a very strong association ($r = .98$) across the 28 countries between the extent to which securely guaranteed rights and liberties exist and the extent of democracy as measured by the composite index.⁸

The array of countries in Figure 1 suggests two distinct clusters and a third, more varied, grouping of countries. The cluster at the upper right-hand corner of the figure includes the eight states that joined the EU

⁷For purposes of presentation, we have added the values on the two scales for rights and liberties and subtracted the sum from 14, which yields a maximum score of 12 and a minimum score of 0. Likewise, we have inverted the *Nations in Transit* (NIT) measure of democracy, which ranges from a high of 1 to a low of 7, by subtracting the score from 7.

⁸Conceivably, the high correlation may derive in part from the fact that both measures are based on the subjective judgments of country experts. On the other hand, the NIT index of democracy is based on several dozen attributes.

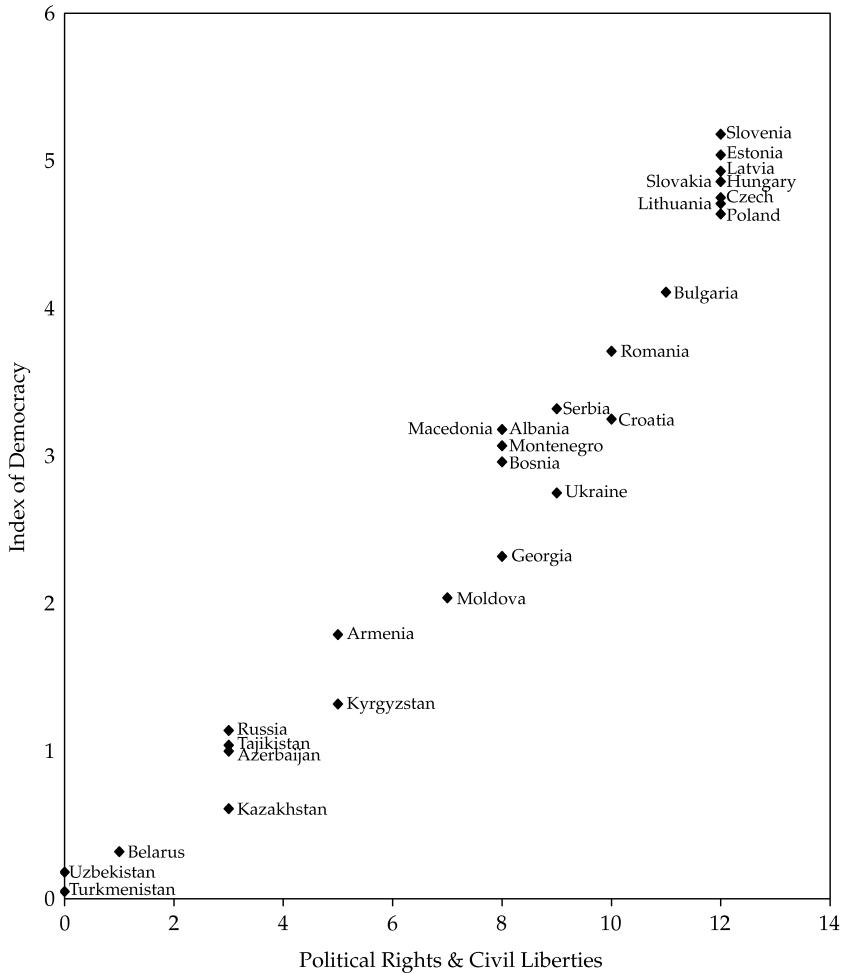


Fig. 1. Political rights and civil liberties and democracy in 28 post-communist countries, 2006. *Source:* Freedom House, 2007a, 2007b.

in 2004 and are unambiguously democratic.⁹ The second cluster, near the origin of the figure, includes seven of the non-Baltic successor states of the Soviet Union—Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, and four of the five central

⁹Freedom House categorizes countries as “free,” in terms of political rights and civil liberties, if their combined (and inverted) score on the two measures is 9 or above. Countries with a score of 3 or less are “not free.” The rest are “partly free.” Countries with inverted scores on the democracy index of 4.01 or more are “consolidated democracies,” those with scores of 3.01 to 4 are “semi-consolidated democracies,” those with scores of 1.01 to 2 are “semi-consolidated authoritarian regimes,” and those with scores of 1 or less are “consolidated authoritarian regimes.”

Asian states—all of which are unambiguously non-democratic and either overtly authoritarian or, to use the Russian oxymoron, “managed democracies.”¹⁰ The third grouping, which ranges from Bulgaria to Kyrgyzstan, includes the countries of southeastern Europe as well as Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia. A few, such as Bulgaria and Romania, which joined the EU in 2007, are fairly close to the cluster of democratic states in the upper right-hand corner of the figure. But others, such as Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, are close to the non-democratic cluster.

Figure 2 repeats the array in Figure 1 but adds to it the values on both measures for each country in 1999, the earliest year for which the composite index of democracy is defined as it is for 2006.¹¹ The line for each country indicates the extent and direction of change between 1999 and 2006. The array suggests that not all post-communist countries moved toward greater democracy after 1999. The eight post-communist states that entered the EU in 2004 experienced some degree of convergence with respect to the extent of democracy, and all received the highest possible score in 2006 on the measure of political rights and civil liberties. And several of the countries in southeastern Europe—most notably, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Albania—experienced dramatic increases in both the extent of democracy and the extent of political rights and civil liberties. But several countries—Russia, Armenia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Uzbekistan—experienced significant *decreases* in the extent of democracy and of political rights and civil liberties. The array suggests that, rather than there being a single process moving all of the post-communist countries toward democracy, the post-communist countries are separated by a widening fault line between those which are gravitating toward democracy, and have entered or aspire to membership in the EU, and those which are gravitating toward the non-democratic pole.

EU MEMBERSHIP AND POST-COMMUNIST DEMOCRACY

The fact that the eight countries clustered together at the democratic pole in Figures 1 and 2 entered the EU in 2004, that among the others the two closest to that group entered in 2007, and that four countries that are participating in the EU’s Stabilization and Association Process for the Western Balkans, which is preparing them for eventual membership, experienced the largest increases in democracy after 1999 suggests the pursuit of EU membership may have influenced the democratization process.

Over the past 15 years, scholars have put forward a large number of explanations why some post-communist countries established democratic polities while others did not—the countries’ spatial location (Kopstein and

¹⁰On the use and misuse of adjectives in defining countries as democracies, see Collier and Livitsky (1997).

¹¹For years prior to 1999, the *Nations in Transit* index did not include a measure of corruption.

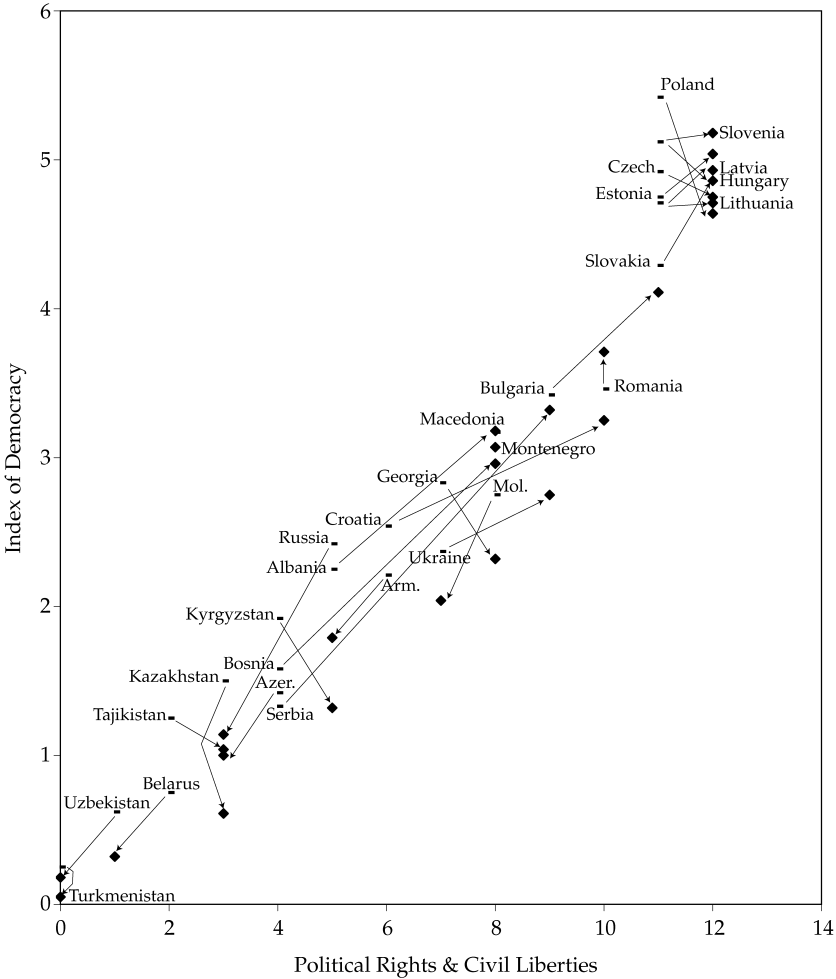


Fig. 2. Change in political rights and civil liberties and democracy in 28 post-communist countries, 1999 to 2006. Source: Freedom House, 2007a, 2007b.

Reilly, 2000), the legacies of pre-communist and communist rule (Kitschelt et al., 1999), the nature of the ruling Communist Party and the strength of the opposition at the time of the initial transitional elections (Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Vachudova, 2005), the outcomes of the first transitional elections (Fish, 1998), the political institutions of the post-communist polities (Easter, 1997; Elster, Offe, and Preuss, 1998; Frye, 1997), and the nature of the post-communist party systems, partisan alignments, and

patterns of competition and opposition (Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Kitschelt et al., 1999; Vachudova, 2005).

All of these must of course be taken into account in any explanation of the nature, direction, and extent of political change among the post-communist countries. But it is surprising the extent to which the possible impact on democratization of the aspiration to, and pursuit of, membership in the European Community and Union has been neglected.¹² This is particularly surprising since the Community had made it known, long before the termination of the communist regimes, that establishment of a democratic polity was a necessary precondition for membership. The accessions of Greece, Spain, and Portugal in the 1980s made it clear that the EC regarded itself as a community of democratic states committed to preserving democracy in states that had been, until recently, authoritarian. The preamble of the Single European Act (European Community, 1986) declared that the member states were "determined to work together to promote democracy on the basis of the fundamental rights recognized in the constitutions and laws of the member states" and that it was "incumbent upon Europe ... to display the principles of democracy and compliance with the law and with human rights to which they are attached." And Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union (European Community, 1992), negotiated in 1990–91, declared, "The Union is founded on the principle of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the Member States."

Recently studies by Schimmelfennig (2003, 2005, 2007), Jacoby (2004), Pop-Eleches (2007), and Vachudova (2005) have done much to rectify the failure of earlier studies to consider the possible impact on the democratization of post-communist Europe of the aspiration for and pursuit of membership in the EU. Yet even these studies may understate the impact of the EU on that process, if only because they concentrate largely on the period after the European Council meeting in Copenhagen in June 1993, at which the EC leaders identified the criteria by which future applications for membership would be evaluated.¹³ Schimmelfennig (2003, pp. 80, 90), for example, suggests that although the EC and EU had sought to enlarge by "externalizing" its values and norms, there was little need to overtly engage in such activity with respect to the post-communist states because they already identified with the Western community, regarded its norms as legitimate, and were committed to institutionalizing them. As he put it

¹²The Treaty on European Union created a Union consisting of the European Community and two intergovernmental "pillars," one dealing with foreign and security policy, the other with justice and home affairs. Germany, the last state to ratify the treaty, did so in late 1993, after which the Union came into being.

¹³The criteria are: the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; the existence of a functioning market economy and capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union; and the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic, and monetary union. See European Community (1993).

in a later article (Schimmelfennig, 2005, p. 842), the adoption of those norms and values reflected not the Community's influence via "externalization" but, rather, "domestically-driven norm conformance or 'self-socialization'" by the post-communist elites.

This argument ignores the possibility that the EC influenced the process of democratization prior to 1993 and did so without any overt effort to "externalize" its norms and values and socialize the post-communist elites. To assume that strategic calculations related to accession did not induce the post-communist elites in states aspiring to membership to adopt or comply with the EC's values and norms in the period before Copenhagen because such calculations could not be made prior to its articulation of the accession criteria at that summit ignores the fact, noted earlier, that the political conditions for membership were very well known long before Copenhagen. Schimmelfennig (2003, p. 85) does note the presence in the SEA and TEU of an implicit political criterion for membership. But he appears to exclude the possibility that, in the absence of overt activity by the EU, those statements could have shaped strategic calculations in the period before Copenhagen.

Unlike Schimmelfennig, Vachudova (2005, pp. 65) recognizes that the EC and EU exercised some influence on the post-communist states in their early years. But until 1995, she argues, it was "passive" leverage rather than "active" leverage—that is, leverage that occurred "merely by virtue of its existence and its usual conduct ... [including] the political and economic benefits of membership, the costs of exclusion, and the way the EU treats nonmember states."¹⁴ Thus, whether countries pursued a liberal path marked by early political and economic reform and adherence to EC norms, as in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, or an illiberal path marked by erratic reforms and backsliding from EU norms, as in Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania, depended not on EC/EU influence but, rather, on the quality of political competition in the country at the moment of regime change—in particular, the presence or absence of an opposition strong enough to take power after 1989 and a reform-oriented Communist Party. Because its leverage prior to 1995 was limited to "the attraction or magnetism of EU membership, absent any deliberate policies toward prospective members ... the EU and other international actors had a negligible impact on the course of political change in ECE states." As a result, she argues (p. 4), "the EU's passive leverage merely reinforced liberal strategies of reform in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic while failing to avert, end, or significantly diminish rent-seeking strategies for winning and exercising power in Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia."

Vachudova is surely correct that the EU exerted a magnetic attraction for much of post-communist Europe prior to 1995. And she is surely correct

¹⁴Vachudova (2005, pp. 123–124) suggests the shift from "passive" to "active" leverage began with the European Commission's publication in 1995 of its White Paper setting out for the first time the EU's pre-accession strategy.

that, after the Commission developed the pre-accession strategy, the EU had a variety of instruments with which it could exercise "active leverage" in the aspiring states. But the articulation and elaboration, in the SEA and TEU and at Copenhagen, of the political conditions required for membership surely influenced the conduct of elites and the process of political change in the post-communist states before 1995. By making it very clear that membership required democracy and that a failure to institute and maintain a democratic polity would result in non-membership, the Community and Union defined the range of possible politics in the post-communist era—at least for the states that aspired to membership. As Slovakia in the mid-1990s and Serbia more recently demonstrated, that does not mean that elites in every instance complied and maintained a democratic polity in order to assure membership. But it does mean that all understood what was at stake if they did not.

Given the information available, it is exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, to demonstrate that the EU's political condition for membership influenced the process of post-communist democratization. The existence of that condition was widely known after the accessions of the 1980s, the SEA, and the TEU. But it would have influenced behavior only if a country that was not already committed to instituting a democratic polity aspired to membership. The post-communist countries that aspired to membership may have come to that view at different times, just as they may have committed themselves to creating a democratic polity at different times. To demonstrate a causal relationship one would have to know when they first aspired to membership and whether that aspiration influenced decisions pertaining to the organization of the polity. And, unfortunately, very little is known either about when the aspiring states came to that view or about what, if anything, they did with respect to the organization of the polity once they aspired to membership.

Notwithstanding that difficulty, we can at least ascertain whether the EU's political condition of membership may have influenced the democratization of the post-communist states that aspired to membership by examining the relationship between the extent and duration of democratic politics in those states, on the one hand, and the times at which the states established formal relationships with the EC and EU pertaining to membership, on the other. Those formal relationships, beginning with the signing of Europe or SAP agreements, do not, of course, reflect the moment at which the aspiration for membership, and presumed influence of political conditionality, first occurred. Indeed, the signing of the agreements reflected the conclusion of a lengthy process that itself was the product of that aspiration. Nevertheless, for lack of information about the timing of that aspiration, we must use measures of the timing of those formal relations.

As early as 1990, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia opened negotiations with the European Community of association agreements that envisioned eventual membership in the EC. The negotiations were concluded in 1991 and the Europe Agreements, as they were called, were

signed in December of that year. As Sachs (1993, pp. 4, 105) notes, they were a "stepping stone to full membership" in the EC. Indeed, he says, membership was "the ultimate prize for Poland—the goal that is providing a considerable amount of the motive force of the entire reform effort." Europe Agreements were subsequently concluded between the EC and Romania and Bulgaria in early 1993, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in 1995, and Slovenia in 1996.¹⁵ Between March 1994 and June 1996, the 10 post-communist governments applied for membership in the EU. Accession negotiations began with five in March 1998 and with the other five in February 2000. Eight of the 10—all but Bulgaria and Romania—entered the EU on May 1, 2004. Bulgaria and Romania entered on January 1, 2007.¹⁶

At a meeting in Zagreb in 2000 with representatives of the governments of the region, the EU initiated the Stabilization and Association Process for the Western Balkans. Designed to stabilize the war-ravaged region and assist in its economic development, the SAP holds out the prospect of future membership in the EU. Stability and Association Agreements would be negotiated with the EU once a country had attained a sufficient degree of stability. Those agreements would prepare the country for its future accession by introducing the rules and regulations of the Union in various areas. After the agreements were signed, the country could apply for membership. Croatia and Macedonia signed agreements in 2001 and applied for membership in 2003 and 2004, respectively. Croatia began accession negotiations and Macedonia received candidate status in late 2005. Albania signed an agreement in 2006, Montenegro signed an agreement in 2007, and Bosnia and Serbia began negotiations for agreements in late 2005 (although those involving Serbia were subsequently halted because of its refusal to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia).

Table 1 presents measures of the co-variation across the 28 countries between three measures of the extent and duration of democratic politics and three measures of the timing and intensity of formal relations with the EU.¹⁷ The three measures of democratic politics are: (1) the combined measure of political rights and civil liberties in 2006 presented in Figures 1

¹⁵Czechoslovakia signed a Europe Agreement in December 1991. After the "Velvet Divorce" that created the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic, the two countries signed new Europe Agreements in October 1993.

¹⁶The dates on which Europe or SAP agreements were signed and applications for membership filed are reported in European Commission (2001) and European Commission (2006).

¹⁷The statistics in Table 1 and later tables are Pearson product-moment correlations. Such correlations range from 0 to ± 1.0 . A correlation coefficient, r , does not reveal, as a regression coefficient, b , does, the change in one variable associated with a unit change in another. However, since $r = b (s_x/s_y)$, where s_x and s_y are the standard deviations of the two variables, the only difference between the two is the difference in their variances. If the variances and standard deviations are identical, the two coefficients are identical. For that reason, and because correlation coefficients are much easier to compare than regression coefficients, which vary with the units in which the variables are measured, Table 1 and later tables present correlation coefficients.

Table 1. Membership-Oriented Ties with the European Union and the Extent and Duration of Democracy in 28 Post-Communist Countries^{a,b}

	Political rights and civil liberties 2006	Index of democracy 2006	Number of years democratic 1990–2006
Years elapsed since Europe/SAA Agreement	.78 (.80)	.83 (.71)	.95 (.83)
Years elapsed since EU application	.79 (.89)	.84 (.83)	.96 (.89)
Years elapsed since EU accession	.72 (.90)	.79 (.96)	.94 (.88)

^a*Sources:* For the measures of rights and liberties and democracy, Freedom House (2007a, 2007b). For the dates of formal relations with the EU, European Commission (2001, 2006).

^bEntries are Pearson product-moment correlations. $N = 28$. The parentheses contain correlations for the 13 countries with non-zero values on the EU measures.

and 2; (2) the composite index of democracy in 2006 presented in those figures; and (3) the number of years since 1990 in which the country was democratic, as evidenced by a value of 10 or more on the measure of political rights and civil liberties. The latter ranges from 17, the maximum, for Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic, to 15 for Slovenia, 14 for Lithuania, 12 for Slovakia, Estonia, and Latvia, 9 for Bulgaria and Romania, 6 for Croatia, and 0 for the rest. The three measures of the extent and duration of formal relations with the EC and EU are: (1) the number of years that have elapsed since the country signed a Europe Agreement or Stabilization and Association Agreement; (2) the number of years that have elapsed since the country filed a formal application for membership; (3) the number of years that have elapsed since the country became a member.

The measures of co-variation in Table 1 are exceptionally strong. They indicate that the extent to which a country was democratic in 2006, the extent to which its citizens enjoyed widespread and securely-guaranteed political rights and civil liberties in 2006, and the number of years it has been democratic since 1990 are very closely associated with the number of years that have elapsed since it signed a Europe Agreement or SAA, applied for membership, and entered the EU. Especially relevant is the exceptionally high degree of co-variation between the number of years a country has been democratic since 1990 and the number of years since it signed a Europe Agreement or SAA ($r = .95$), applied for membership ($r = .96$), and entered the EU ($r = .94$).

Since it could be argued that these measures of co-variation are inflated because 15 of the 28 countries had no formal membership-oriented rela-

tions with the EU and hence were assigned values of zero on the measures, Table 1 includes, in parentheses, the correlation coefficients among the measures for just the 13 countries that have non-zero values on one or more of the measures of EU relations. The correlations are equally strong, indicating that even within the smaller group there is an exceptionally strong statistical relationship between the duration of formal membership-oriented ties with the EU and the extent and duration of democracy.

ASPIRATIONS FOR EU MEMBERSHIP AND THE TIMING OF DEMOCRATIZATION

The exceptionally strong statistical association across the post-communist countries between the extent and duration of formal membership-oriented relations with the EU and the extent and duration of democratic politics suggests there may be a causal relationship between the pursuit of EU membership and the development of a democratic polity. However, it is perilous to draw any inferences, causal or otherwise, from such measures of cross-sectional co-variation. In order to assess whether such a relationship may exist, it is necessary to examine data that describe the extent of democracy throughout the period from the late 1980s onward. Such data would allow one to ascertain, in a way that cross-sectional data do not, when democratization took place and whether it occurred, for example, prior to or after the countries applied for membership and perhaps in anticipation of, or as a consequence of, particular actions by the EU.

Unfortunately, Freedom House has reported its composite measure of democracy only since the late 1990s. However, as noted above, it has reported annual scores for countries on the measures of political rights and civil liberties for the past 30 years, and, as Figures 1 and 2 illustrated, the combined measure of political rights and civil liberties is very closely associated across the 28 post-communist countries with the composite measure of democracy. As a result, we can use the measure of rights and liberties as a surrogate for a more elaborate—but unavailable—annual measure of the extent of post-communist democracy. Figures 3–7 present the annual values for the composite measure of rights and liberties for most of the post-communist countries from 1988 through 2006.

Figure 3 presents the average value of the composite measure each year for the member states of the EU, the eight countries that joined the EU in 2004, the two that joined in 2007, and the five countries of the Western Balkans. Not surprisingly, the average for all of the member states of the EU lies very close to the maximum upper limit of 12 throughout the period. What is especially intriguing, in light of the arguments of Schimmelfennig and Vachudova, however, is the timing of the changes in rights and liberties that occurred in the post-communist states that are now members of the EU. The average value for the eight that joined the EU in 2004 increased very substantially in 1990, continued to increase in 1991 and 1992, increased by smaller amounts in 1993–95, and increased very slightly thereafter. Most

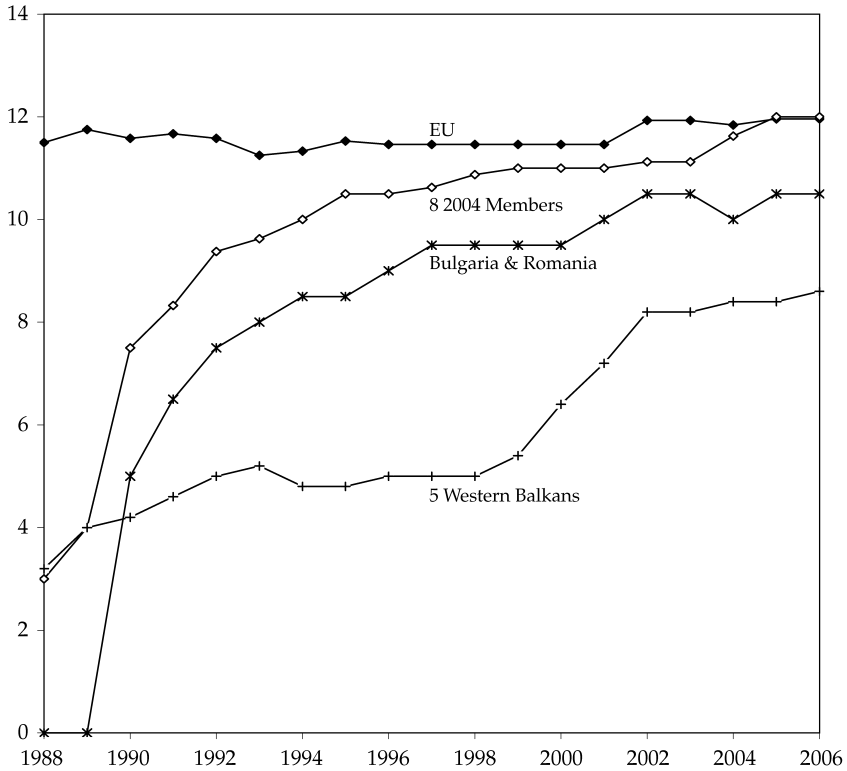


Fig. 3. Political rights and civil liberties in the European Union and Southeastern Europe, 1988–2006. Source: *Freedom House*, 2007a.

of the democratization in those eight occurred prior to 1993. Bulgaria and Romania began from the lowest possible value in 1988–89 but increased dramatically in 1990, by lesser amounts in the early and mid-1990s, leveled off in the late 1990s, then increased slightly in 2001–02 and 2005. Likewise, most of the democratization in those countries occurred prior to 1993. In all of those countries, the most substantial changes occurred before the official applications for membership and, indeed, prior to the signing of the Europe Agreements. Figure 3 also indicates that the extent of rights and liberties in the five Western Balkan states remained at very low levels and changed very little throughout the 1990s when, of course, several of them were at war with each other. The average value for those five countries increased substantially in the four years after 1998 but, interestingly, most of that change occurred before the adoption of the SAP in late 2000 and signing of the first SAP agreements by Croatia and Macedonia in 2002.

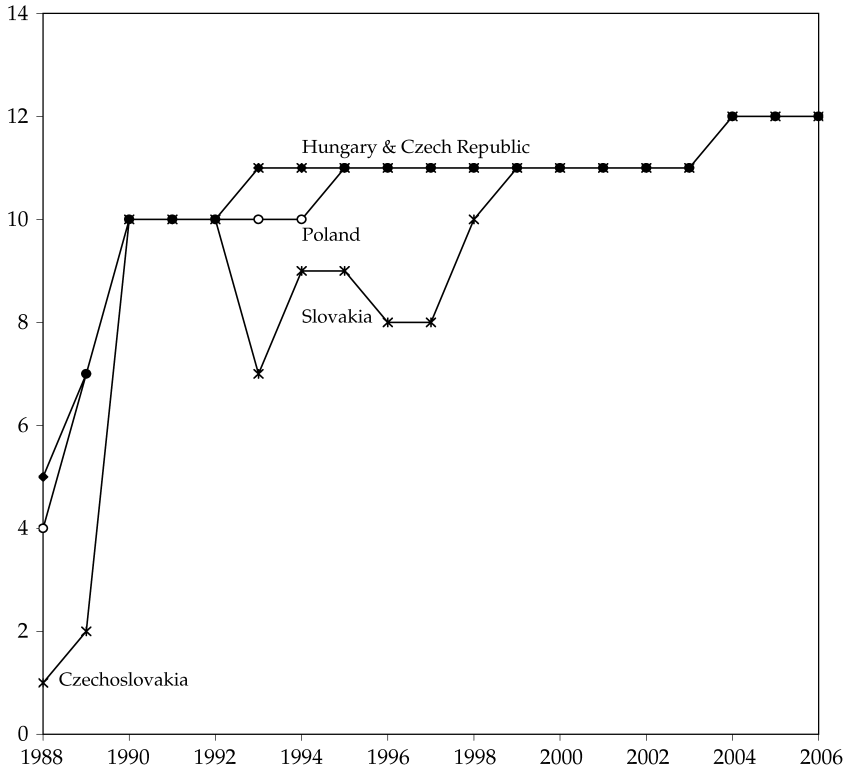


Fig. 4. Political rights and civil liberties in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, 1988–2006. *Source:* Freedom House, 2007a.

Figure 4 presents the measures of the extent of political rights and civil liberties in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia in 1988–92, and the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993 and thereafter. The array highlights the fact that these countries moved to democracy very rapidly and very early. Indeed, by the end of 1990 they had moved most of the way to where they are today, in terms of rights and liberties. That fact is, of course, important if one is concerned with assessing the impact of the EC and EU on the democratization process; any explanation of why those countries moved to democracy should be temporally consistent with the pattern presented in Figure 4. The only significant deviation from the pattern of early and extensive democratization involves Slovakia in 1993–98, which, as Vachudova (2005), Schimmelfennig (2003), and others have noted, reflects the substantial erosion in rights and liberties that occurred when Vladimir Mečiar and his mislabeled Movement for a Democratic Slovakia controlled the government.¹⁸

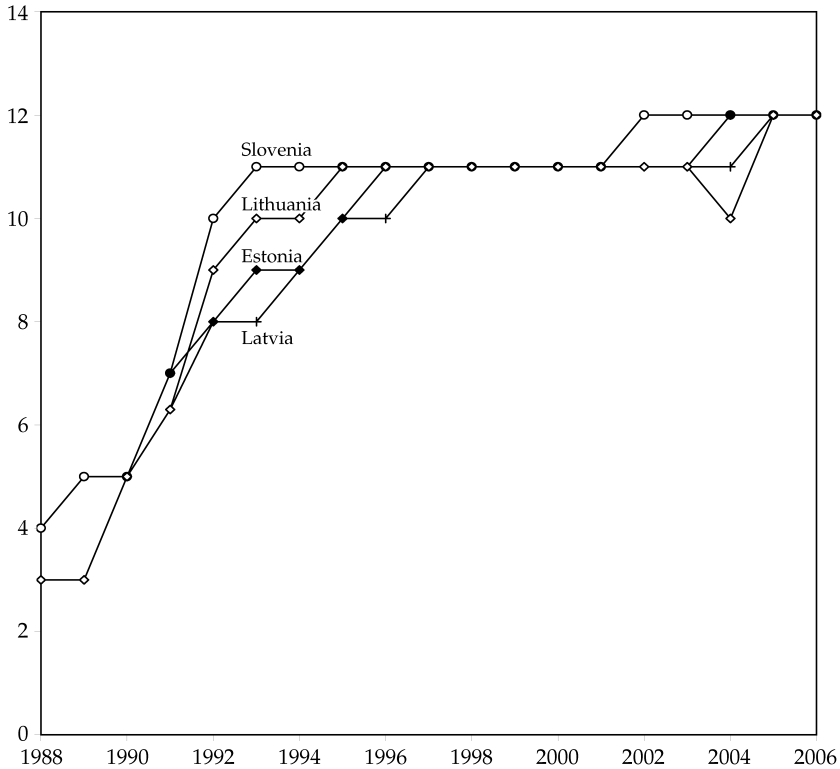


Fig. 5. Political rights and civil liberties in Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, 1988–2006. *Source:* Freedom House, 2007a.

Figure 5 presents the measures of the extent of political rights and civil liberties in Slovenia and the three Baltic states. Starting from a similar position in 1990, the four countries experienced dramatic increases in the extension and security of rights and liberties after they became independent in 1991. The increase was especially dramatic in Slovenia and Lithuania, while it was somewhat slower in Estonia and Latvia as both countries resisted extending citizenship to their substantial Russian-speaking populations.¹⁹ Slovenia attained a value of 11 in 1993, the same year Hungary

¹⁹Mečiar was prime minister of the Slovak Republic of Czechoslovakia from June 1990 until April 1991 when he lost a vote of confidence. He returned to office after the elections of June 1992, negotiated the 1993 break-up of the country with his Czech counterpart Václav Klaus, was prime minister of Slovakia until he lost another vote of confidence in early 1994, returned to office after the elections of October 1994, and remained in office until 1998. See Vachudova (2005, pp. 43–47 and 156–159) and Schimmelfennig (2005, pp. 845–849).

and the Czech Republic attained that value (and two years before Poland attained that value). Lithuania attained that value in 1995, Estonia in 1996, and Latvia in 1997.²⁰ In all four countries, virtually all of the increase in rights and liberties occurred in the first half of the 1990s, prior to the signing of Europe Agreements and applications for membership in 1995 and 1996.

Figure 6 presents the measures of the extent of political rights and civil liberties for five Western Balkan states. (Obviously, data for Montenegro, which declared its independence in June 2006, are unavailable.) Compared with the previous figures, the array displays a great deal of fluctuation in the values in the early 1990s and again after the wars of the 1990s. Bosnia and Serbia experienced a substantial deterioration in rights and liberties in 1991–93—hostilities between the two commenced, of course, immediately after Bosnia's declaration of independence in 1992—and remained at low levels until the late 1990s. Croatia likewise remained frozen at a relatively low level throughout the Tudjman era. Albania and Macedonia had the highest values in the early 1990s, but Albania experienced a long decline until 2001 while Macedonia experienced considerable fluctuation throughout the 1990s.

The most noteworthy trends in Figure 6 are those pertaining to Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia after the wars of the 1990s. Those three, and to a lesser extent Albania, experienced large increases in the extent to which political rights and civil liberties were widely distributed and securely protected after 1998–99. Indeed, as noted earlier, those four countries experienced the largest increases among the 28 states in the period after 1999. Notwithstanding the lack of any increase in rights and liberties after 2002 except in Bosnia and the fact that all of the countries remain below the level registered by the states that are members of the EU, over the past half-dozen years the democratization of post-communist Europe has meant, above all, the democratization of the Western Balkans.

Figure 7 presents the values on the combined measure of political rights and civil liberties for the 12 non-Baltic former members of the USSR

¹⁹Both initially extended citizenship to those who held it prior to June 1940 and their descendants, thereby excluding those who were not of Estonian or Latvian nationality (e.g., Russians, Ukrainians). In both, the acquisition of citizenship was restricted. For example, in 1992 Estonia reapplied its citizenship law of 1938, which defined citizenship in terms of blood relationship. Under pressure from the EU, both introduced new citizenship laws that were less restrictive with respect to naturalization, but the laws remain controversial since they require knowledge of the national language and passage of a language examination (e.g., Feakins and Bialasewicz. 2006). Approximately 30 percent of the Estonian population and 40 percent of the Latvian population are themselves or are descendants of persons who immigrated from other Soviet republics prior to August 1991, and the proportions that are Russian speakers are similar. Although estimates are hard to come by, roughly 20 percent of the population of each country does not have citizenship.

²⁰Lithuania in 2004 experienced the only decrease registered in any of the four countries in any year after 1988. The drop reflected concerns about the autonomy of Lithuania's political leadership after the impeachment of President Rolandas Paksas in April 2004. He was impeached after it became known that he arranged for a campaign contributor who held Russian citizenship to receive a Lithuanian passport.

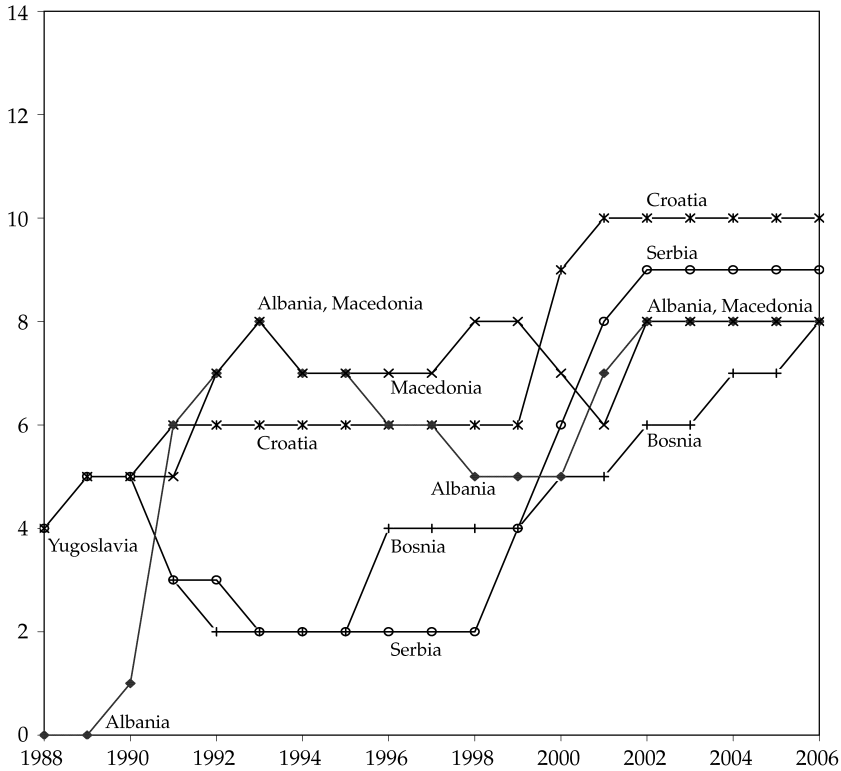


Fig. 6. Political rights and civil liberties in the Western Balkans, 1988–2006. *Source:* Freedom House, 2007a.

and, within that grouping, Russia, Ukraine, and the five states of central Asia. The data suggest that, when taken as a group, there has been very little democratization in the 12 countries that were part of the Soviet Union prior to 1940. Indeed, the average value for the 12 peaked in 1991, when — until December 25—the USSR still existed! After the USSR ceased to exist, the extent of democratization, meager as it was, dropped off markedly in 1993 and has remained largely unchanged since then.²¹ Relative to the others, Russia and Ukraine experienced a considerable degree of democratization in the last two years of the Gorbachev era. But subsequently, the

²¹1993 was, of course, marked by President Boris Yel'tsin's attack on the Russian White House, home of its parliament, and the adoption of a constitution that greatly increased the powers of the president. Surprisingly, Freedom House did not reduce the values for Russia for the measures of political rights and civil liberties in that year or the next several years.

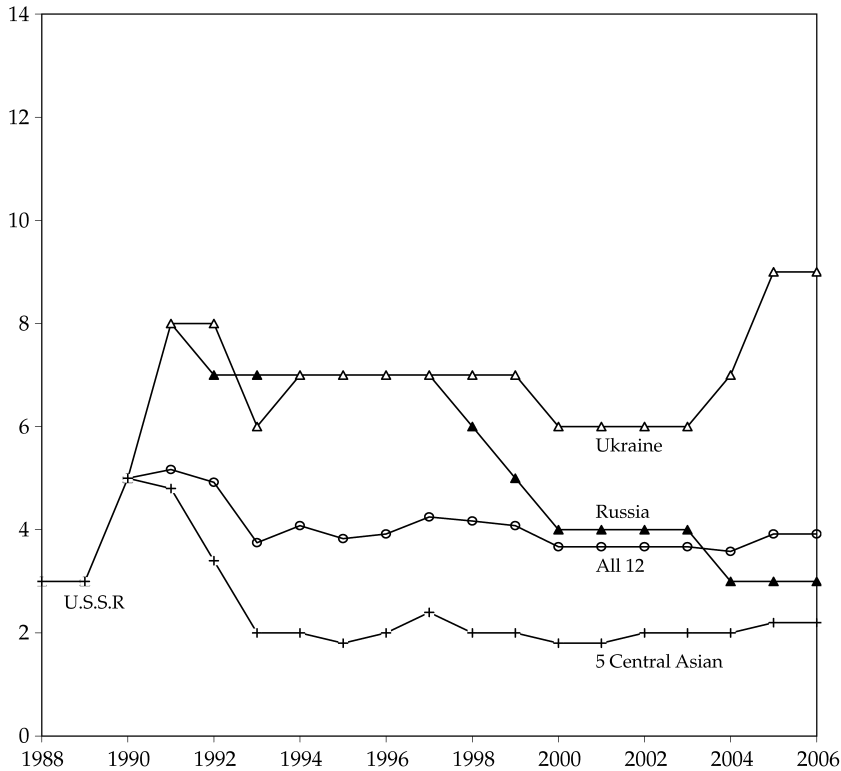


Fig. 7. Political rights and civil liberties in the non-Baltic states of the former Soviet Union, 1988–2006. *Source:* Freedom House, 2007a.

extent of democracy—as measured by the extent and security of political rights and civil liberties—diminished markedly. As Figure 2 suggested, the reversal of the early trend toward greater democracy has been most dramatic in Russia, where the extent and security of rights and liberties decreased in Boris Yel'tsin's second term as president, in 1998–99, and in both of Vladimir Putin's terms as president, in 2000 and 2004.²² The only exception to this dismal pattern is the dramatic increase that occurred in Ukraine in 2004 and 2005—no doubt both a cause and a consequence of its Orange Revolution.²³

²²For a discussion of developments in Russia that is consistent with the data in Figure 7, see Fish (2005).

²³On the Orange Revolution, see Åslund and McFaul (2006) and Wilson (2005).

WHY SOME COUNTRIES ASPIRED TO EU MEMBERSHIP AND CREATED DEMOCRATIC POLITIES

The cross-sectional correlations in Table 1 and the longitudinal data in Figures 3–7 suggest that the aspiration to membership in the EU and presumed awareness of the political conditions for membership may have influenced the development of democratic politics in some of the post-communist countries. But it would be foolish to suppose the aspiration to EU membership could alone explain something as complex as the creation of a democratic polity. The development of post-communist democracy may have been influenced by a variety of other factors as well. Moreover, those other factors may have influenced not only the development of democratic politics in some countries but also caused them to aspire to EU membership. The aspiration to membership might well retain some independent effect on the development of a democratic polity after those other factors are taken into account. On the other hand, it might retain no such effect, meaning the relationship between it and the development of a democratic polity is spurious.

What are those other factors that might have influenced not only the aspiration to EU membership but the development of a democratic polity? One is geographic location—specifically, the proximity to, or distance from, the EU. Spatial location is, of course, just a surrogate for other unspecified variables. But proximity to the EU may have influenced the early development of membership-oriented relations with it, and of democratic politics, because elites and publics in the neighboring post-communist countries identified with Europe to a greater degree than did those in more distant countries, accepted to a greater degree the values and norms of the EU as their own, and understood earlier the political conditionality of membership.²⁴ And, of course, proximity may have influenced the early development of membership-oriented relations and democratic politics because the EC itself pursued a strategy of enlargement, which, beginning with the negotiation of Europe Agreements with Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland in 1990–91, sought to incorporate its immediate neighbors first.

The early development of aspirations to EU membership, and of democratic politics, may have been influenced also by the countries' political antecedents. For example, some—most notably Czechoslovakia, but others as well—had substantial experience with democratic politics before the communist regime was established. Although impossible to demonstrate, that experience may have left some residue in the collective memory of the countries. Likewise, in some—most notably, those in central and eastern Europe—the communist regime was established relatively late, after World War II, while in others—most notably, the former non-Baltic

²⁴For a discussion of the “neighborhood effects” of spatial location, see Kopstein and Reilly (2000).

republics of the Soviet Union—it was established prior to 1940. The later installation and shorter lifespan of some of the communist regimes may have influenced the propensity and ability of their elites to aspire to and achieve EU membership and democracy. Likewise, in some of the countries the transition to post-communism was prompted by widespread national mobilizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s that delegitimized the communist regime, while in others the communist regime ended without any widespread mobilization and delegitimation.²⁵ In some, the communist elite fragmented and reformers won the first transitional elections, took office, and retained power, while in others the communists won the first elections and remained in power.²⁶ And finally, some of the countries developed relatively intensive trade and investment ties in the post-communist era with countries that were members of the EU while others did not.

Table 2 presents measures of the co-variation between the three measures of formal membership-oriented relations with the EU, on the one hand, and measures of geographic proximity to the EU, historical antecedents of the post-communist states, their transitional politics, and their trade and economic ties. Proximity is measured by the distance in air miles between a national capital and Brussels and between it and the nearest pre-2004 EU capital as well as by a four-point scale of proximity to Western Europe.²⁷ Included among the measures of historical antecedents are the extent to which the country experienced democratic politics in the twentieth century prior to the advent of the communist regime; the longevity of the communist regime; whether the country was formerly a republic of the USSR; whether it was a republic prior to 1940; and a measure of the type of communist regime.²⁸ Included among the measures of the transitional politics are the extent of national mobilization in 1989–91, a measure of the extent to which the communist elite was fragmented or consolidated in the transitional period, a measure of the mode of transition, a measure of the quality and outcome of the first election in the transitional period, and the

²⁵See, for example, Brown (1991), Carrère d'Encausse (1993), and Beissinger (2002).

²⁶See, for example, Easter (1997), Fish (1998), Grzymala-Busse (2002), and Vachudova (2005).

²⁷To reflect proximity, the signs of the coefficients for the measures of distance have been reversed in Table 2. The four-point scale assigns a value of 4 to Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia; 3 to the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Romania, and the other four Western Balkan states; 2 to Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine; and 1 to the rest.

²⁸The measure of democratic history assigns a value of 3 to countries that were democratic for a brief period after World War II, 2 to those that were democratic after World War I until the mid-to-late-1920s or early-to-mid-1930s, 1 to those that briefly were democratic after World War I, and 0 to the rest. The measure of the longevity of communist rule is the year in which a communist regime was established, since the later the regime was established the shorter its duration. The measure of former membership in the USSR is 1 for former members and 0 otherwise. The measure of regime-type is taken from Kitschelt et al. (1999, p. 39) and distinguishes between bureaucratic-authoritarian, national-accommodative, and patrimonial regimes.

Table 2. Membership-Oriented Ties with the EU: Geography, History, Transitions, and Economics^{a,b}

	Years elapsed since Europe/SAA agreements	Years elapsed since applied for EU membership	Years elapsed since EU accession
Geography			
Proximity to Brussels	.58	.56	.51
Proximity to EU	.57	.56	.49
Proximity to the West	.76	.73	.66
Historical antecedents			
Pre-communist democratic experience	.79	.77	.73
Year communist rule established	.73	.69	.55
Member, former USSR	-.49	-.42	-.24
Member, former USSR prior to 1940	-.71	-.70	-.58
Communist regime type	.62	.61	.70
Transitional politics			
National mobilization, 1989–91	.78	.81	.86
Fragmented communist elite	.79	.81	.85
Mode of transition	.64	.61	.64
Results of 1st election	.72	.71	.70
Seats, non-communist in 1st election	.59	.61	.65
Trade and investment			
Cumulative FDI/cap., 1989–2005	.74	.73	.75
Percentage of all exports to EU, 1999	.70	.69	.66
Percentage of all exports to EU, 2005	.65	.63	.61
Percentage GDP, trade with non-transition economies, 2005	.74	.72	.70

^a*Sources:* For the dates of formal relations with the EU, European Commission (2001, 2006). For the measures of proximity, historical antecedents, transitional politics, and trade and investment, see footnotes 27–30, respectively.

^b*N* = 28 except as follows: *N* = 25 for results of first transitional elections and seats won by non-communists (Bosnia, Serbia, and Montenegro omitted); *N* = 27 for measures of exports to the EU and trade with non-transitional economies (Montenegro omitted).

proportion of seats won by non-communist parties in the first transitional election.²⁹ Included among the measures of the trade and economic ties are the cumulative amount of foreign direct investment per capita from 1989 through 2005, the proportion of all exports that went to member states of the EU in 1999 and 2005, and the proportion of GDP represented by trade with non-transition economies in 2005.³⁰

The data in Table 2 indicate that, not surprisingly, the countries that developed formal membership-oriented relations with the EU relatively early and eventually became members were the ones located closest to Brussels, the pre-2004 EU, and Western Europe. Perhaps more interesting, they were also the countries that had some prior experience with democratic politics before the communist regime came into being, had relatively short-lived communist regimes, and were not republics in the USSR prior to 1940. In addition, they were the countries that experienced large-scale national mobilizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a fragmentation of the communist elite in the last years of the regime and first transitional years, and transitional elections in which reformers won and took power. And they were the countries that developed relatively intensive economic ties in the post-communist era with the EU and the West.

Table 3 presents the measures of co-variation between the several measures of the extent and duration of democratic politics and the various measures of geographic proximity, historical antecedents, transitional politics, and economic ties. The countries that became democracies and have been democratic for the longest time were the countries located nearest Brussels, the pre-2004 EU, and the West, the countries that had some prior experience with democratic politics and were not part of the Soviet Union prior to 1940, the countries in which the communist regime was established relatively late, in which there were large-scale national mobilizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in which the communist elite fragmented in the transitional period, and in which reformers won the first transitional elections, the countries that subsequently developed the most intensive trade and investment ties with countries in the EU and the West—the countries that, for all those reasons, developed early aspirations to membership and formal membership-oriented relations with the EC and EU.

The data in Tables 2 and 3 make it clear that any explanation of the extent and early development of democratic politics in post-communist Europe is complex and multi-faceted and involves a number of attributes, all of which are closely associated with each other. The high degree of co-variation across the countries of those attributes means the extent and duration of democratic politics is, in statistical terms, overdetermined.³¹ As a result, we cannot use conventional statistical methods, such as multivariate regression analysis, to ascertain the extent to which the early develop-

²⁹The measure of national mobilization is a five-point scale based on contemporary accounts of events in 1989–91. The measure of elite fragmentation/consolidation is reported in Easter (1997). The measure of the mode of transition, ranging from implosion to negotiation to pre-emptive reform to regime continuity, is reported by Kitschelt et al. (1999, p. 39). The measure of the quality and outcome of the first transitional election is reported in Fish (1998). The non-communist vote is reported in European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1999, p. 108).

³⁰The measure of FDI is reported in European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2006, pp. 38–39). The measures of exports going to the EU are calculated from data reported in International Monetary Fund (2006). The measure of trade with non-transition economies is calculated from data in European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2006).

Table 3. Post-Communist Democracy: Geography, History, Transitions, and Economics^{a,b}

	Political rights and civil liberties 2006	Index of democracy 2006	Number of years democratic 1990–2006
Geography			
Proximity to Brussels	.77	.79	.57
Proximity to EU	.76	.78	.54
Proximity to the West	.83	.87	.75
Historical antecedents			
Pre-communist democratic experience	.82	.87	.78
Year in which communist rule established	.83	.86	.66
Member, former USSR	–.58	–.60	–.40
Member, former USSR prior to 1940	–.82	–.87	–.66
Communist regime type	.62	.65	.76
Transitional politics			
National mobilization, 1989–91	.81	.83	.87
Fragmented communist elite	.77	.81	.83
Mode of transition	.73	.73	.64
Results of 1st election	.82	.84	.73
Non-communist seats in 1st election	.75	.76	.64
Trade and investment			
Cumulative FDI/cap., 1989–2005	.64	.67	.78
Percentage of all exports to EU, 1999	.80	.85	.70
Percentage of all exports to EU, 2005	.67	.75	.63
Percentage GDP, trade with non-transition economies, 2005	.59	.64	.74

^a*Sources:* For the measures of rights and liberties and democracy, Freedom House (2007a, 2007b). For the measures of proximity, historical antecedents, transitional politics, and trade and investment, see footnotes 27–30, respectively.

^bFor *N*'s, see Table 2.

ment of formal membership ties with the EU—our surrogate measure of the aspiration to membership and willingness to organize the polity so as to satisfy the political conditions of membership—was causally associated with the early and extensive development of democratic politics. Nor can we ascertain whether the early development of membership ties or, for that matter, any other attribute was more or less influential in shaping the development of the country's polity. What we can say is that the early development of formal membership-oriented ties with the EU was one of a cluster of attributes that, taken together, may have contributed to the democratization of some of the post-communist countries. And while we can't demonstrate that the aspiration to membership played an especially important role in that process, it nevertheless is the case that, as Table 1 indicated, the duration of democratic politics since 1990 is more strongly associated with the early development of formal ties with the EU than with any of the attributes included in Tables 2 and 3.

MUST THE NON-DEMOCRACIES REMAIN NON-DEMOCRATIC?

The data in Table 1 suggested that whether a country moved toward, and eventually created, a democratic polity depended on whether it aspired to membership in the EU and, toward that end, developed formal membership-oriented relations with it relatively early in the post-communist era. The data in Tables 2 and 3 suggested the development of such relations, and of such a polity, depended on the presence of a number of mutually-reinforcing attributes—for example, proximity to the EU and Western Europe, prior experience with democratic politics, a relatively short-lived communist regime, non-membership in the former Soviet Union prior to 1940, a significant national mobilization against the communist regime in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a fragmented communist elite in the last years of the regime, transitional elections that produced a reform-oriented government and a large representation of non-communist parties, and extensive trade and investment ties with the EU and the West. Countries with those attributes were highly likely to aspire to EU membership, develop membership-oriented relations with the EU, and aspire to, and eventually create, a democratic polity. Countries without those

³¹For example, the countries that had prior experience with democratic politics were those in which the communist regime was established relatively late ($r = .93$) and which were not Soviet republics prior to 1940 ($r = -.92$). Likewise, the countries that experienced large national mobilizations against the communist regime were those in which the communist elite was fragmented ($r = .87$). And those in which the elite was fragmented were also the countries in which reformers won the first transitional elections and came to power ($r = .82$). The exceptionally high degree of multicollinearity means that multivariate regression analysis will produce biased estimates that overstate the influence of one of the independent variables (the one most closely associated with the dependent variable) and understate that of the other variables. The dependent variable is "overdetermined" in that it can be explained, in statistical terms, with several—in this case, many—independent variables.

attributes were highly unlikely to aspire to, and attain, either EU membership or a democratic polity.

If the creation of a democratic polity in some of the countries was, in a sense, overdetermined by their possession of so many of the highly interrelated attributes that appear to have been conducive to the development of such a polity, the question of course arises whether the failure to create a democratic polity is also overdetermined. That is, does the absence of most if not all of those attributes in countries that are now unambiguously non-democratic consign them to remain non-democratic for the foreseeable future? At first glance, the answer would appear to be yes, because they will forever lack many of those attributes. Although the EU's eastern enlargement has brought it closer to most of the non-democracies, they cannot change their spatial location and many still remain distant from the EU and the West. They cannot alter their historical experience. Nor can they change the politics they experienced in the transition to the post-communist era. The fact that most of the countries that lack the attributes that appear to have been conducive to the development of a democratic polity gravitated toward the origin of Figure 2 in recent years would seem to confirm that prediction.³²

As bleak as the prospects for a democratic future in those countries may be, some countries that lack many of the attributes that appear to have been conducive to development of a democratic polity have nevertheless become more democratic in recent years. Most notably, after the "color revolutions" in Georgia (Rose), Ukraine (Orange), and Kyrgyzstan (Tulip) in 2003–05, those countries became more democratic in terms of one or both of the measures presented in Figures 1 and 2.³³ Figure 2 in fact understates the extent of democratization in those countries because, in all three, the extent of democracy deteriorated between 1999 and the advent of the "revolutions." After the "revolutions," all three had higher values on the composite measure of political rights and civil liberties. For Georgia the measure increased from 6 to 8 in 2004–05, for Kyrgyzstan it increased from 3 to 5 in 2005, and for Ukraine it increased from 6 to 9 in 2004–05. The Tulip Revolution had no discernible impact on the extent of democracy, as measured by the *Nations in Transit* index. But the value for Georgia increased by 0.28 in 2005–06 and that for Ukraine by 0.67 in 2004–05.

Those "revolutions" may well have been, as Hale (2005) argues, the most recent manifestation of a recurring cycle of elite defection and contestation as autocratic presidents who were limited to two terms and approaching the end of their second term rigged the results of either a

³²Consistent with that gravitation and prediction, Barma, Ratner, and Weber (2007) note the growing global economic power of countries such as China and Russia that are not democratic, do not aspire to evolve into Western-styled liberal democracies, and adopt a stance of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other authoritarian states. The trend is epitomized, they say, by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which, in addition to China and Russia, includes Kazakhstan and three other post-Soviet central Asian states.

³³On the color revolutions, see Hale (2005).

parliamentary election preceding the next presidential election (Georgia in 2003, Kyrgyzstan in 2005) or the next presidential election itself (Ukraine in 2004).³⁴ Nevertheless, in Ukraine at least, the “revolution” did result in a substantial degree of democratization.³⁵

But regardless of whether the “color revolutions” resulted in an enduring and substantial, or only transitory and limited, increase in democratization, their common origins in the politics surrounding the succession of highly autocratic presidents, and the fact that the autocrats’ successors in all three countries agreed to reduce the power of the president, suggest a possible means by which even countries that are unambiguously non-democratic may, in time, move toward democracy.³⁶ Those countries may not be able to change their location or their history. But they can change their institutions, and there is strong reason to think that certain institutional arrangements—most notably, the existence of a weak executive in a parliamentary system of government—are more conducive than others—most notably, a strong presidential system—to the development of a democratic polity.³⁷

Table 4 presents measures of the co-variation across 25 post-communist countries between the extent and duration of post-communist democracy, on one hand, and five aspects of their institutional arrangements, on the other.³⁸ The five are: (1) Easter’s (1997) measure of whether the country had a parliamentary or presidential system of government; (2) Fish’s (2006) measure of the power of the parliament; (3) the EBRD’s (1999) measures of the extent of executive power; (4) the frequency of coalition governments;

³⁴Of course, not all countries with autocratic presidents experience such cycles of elite defection, contestation, and public upheaval. Some autocrats simply eliminate the term limits. In Belarus, President Lukashenko, who was elected to a five-year term in 1994, called a referendum in 1996 that extended his term two years, to 2001. After being reelected in 2001, another referendum in 2004 eliminated the two-term limit and he was reelected again in 2006. In Kazakhstan, President Nazarbayev, who was elected in 1991 to a five-year term, called a referendum in 1995 that eliminated the 1996 election and extended his term to 2000. A few months later, another referendum approved a new constitution that retained the earlier constitution’s two-term limit. In 1998 a constitutional amendment eliminated the age limit for the office and extended the term to seven years. Nazarbayev was reelected in 1999 and again in 2005. In 2007, a constitutional amendment excluded him from the two-term limit.

³⁵This is not to say, of course, that the democratization achieved in 2004–05 will inevitably lead to further democratization in the future or, for that matter, that the democratization attained thus far cannot be reversed by opponents of the Orange Revolution.

³⁶In Ukraine, the dispute about the presidential election was resolved in late 2004 in part through an agreement, subsequently formalized and incorporated in the constitution, to reduce the powers of the president and increase those of the parliament. As Hale (2005) notes, the successors to Shevardnadze and Akayev in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan also pledged to reduce the president’s powers but in fact did not do so. President Bakiyev in Kyrgyzstan agreed to turn over some of his powers to the prime minister but did so only on an informal basis. And once in office, President Saakashvili increased the powers of his already-powerful office.

³⁷See Fish (2006).

³⁸On post-communist political institutional arrangements, see, among many, Diamond and Plattner (1996), Easter (1997), Elster, Offe, and Preuss (1998), and Frye (1997).

Table 4. Post-Communist Political Institutions and the Extent and Duration of Democracy^{a,b}

	Political rights and civil liberties 2006	Index of democracy 2006	Number of years democratic 1990–2006
Parliamentary system	.72	.79	.74
Strong parliament	.89	.88	.62
Frequent coalition government	.84	.85	.68
Strong executive	–.88	–.90	–.68
Long tenure of government	–.69	–.69	–.60

^aSources: For the measures of rights and liberties and democracy, Freedom House (2007a, 2007b). For the measures of political institutions, see footnote 39.

^bN = 25 (Bosnia, Serbia, and Montenegro omitted).

and (5) the average tenure in office of government.³⁹ The data in Table 4 indicate that, regardless of how closely they were associated with the spatial location of the countries, their historical antecedents, transitional politics, economic ties, and membership ties with the EU, the extent and duration of democracy as of 2006 were also very closely associated with the political institutional arrangements put in place early in the post-communist era. Countries in which democracy is most firmly implanted and that have been democracies for the longest time tend to be parliamentary rather than presidential systems ($r = .72$ to $.79$),⁴⁰ tend to have parliaments that are strong rather than weak ($r = .62$ to $.89$), tend to experience frequent coalition governments and minority governments rather than one-party rule ($r = .68$ to $.85$), tend to have political executives who are constitutionally weak rather than strong ($r = -.68$ to $-.90$), and tend to have governments that hold office for relatively brief periods rather than for long periods ($r = -.60$ to $-.69$). Conversely, the non-democracies tend to have presidential systems, strong political executives, weak parliaments, and governments formed by a single party that remain in office for long periods of time.

The data in Table 4 contain an intriguing answer to the question of whether the countries that are now unambiguously non-democratic can

³⁹Easter (1997), Fish (2006), and the EBRD (1999) do not report data for Serbia, Bosnia, and of course Montenegro. Obviously, the measures antedate the important changes in political institutions in Croatia after Tudjman's death and in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution.

⁴⁰This, of course, is consistent with the argument of Juan J. Linz in many works, including "The Perils of Presidentialism" (1996a, pp. 124–142) and "The Virtues of Parliamentarism," (1996b, pp. 154–161).

become more democratic, despite their lack of most if not all of the attributes conducive to the development of a democratic polity, and perhaps even transform themselves some day into democratic polities. It is by no means inevitable or likely that such a transformation will take place. Nevertheless, the data in Table 4 suggest that institutional change may provide a possible avenue toward democracy—indeed, perhaps the only one still open. They suggest that, as Fish (2006, p. 18) puts it, “the strength of the national legislature may be a—or even *the*—institutional key to democratization.” Changes that weaken the powers of the president and political executive and enhance those of the parliament, and perhaps even transform the polity from a presidential to a parliamentary system, may contribute to the development of a democratic polity. Precisely such a change indeed took place in Croatia after Tudjman’s death in 1999 and in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution, and in both the change was accompanied by a substantial increase in political rights and civil liberties and in the extent of democracy. It is by no means an easy task to implement such a change and the circumstances in which such a change can be made may occur infrequently—or not at all. But if the circumstances do occur, and if such changes are made, they may result in a more democratic polity—even in countries that lack many of the attributes that appear to be conducive to the development of such a polity.

CONCLUSION

The countries of post-communist Europe and Eurasia vary widely in the extent to which they have established a democratic polity over the past 15 years. Some have established a polity characterized by widely-distributed and securely-guaranteed political rights and civil liberties, a free media, free and fair elections, competitive parties that alternate in government and opposition, a functioning civil society, a transparent and “clean” public administration and regulatory process, an impartial judicial system and rule of law, and a government that represents and is periodically accountable to the citizens. But others have not. This article has considered why some post-communist countries but not others developed a democratic polity. It has considered, in particular, whether the development of a democratic polity may have been causally related to a country’s prospective or current membership in the European Union.

After developing measures of the extent and duration of democratic politics in 28 post-communist countries and noting the extent to which existence of a democratic polity co-varies with prospective or current membership in the European Union, the article suggested that the European Community and Union’s political condition for membership—the existence of a democratic polity—was well-known even before the demise of the communist regimes and that post-communist elites who aspired to EU membership may have been influenced, in their organization of the polity, by their awareness of that condition. Lacking reliable data on the timing of the development of aspirations to membership, the article used

as surrogate measures data on the timing of formal membership-oriented relations with the EC and EU. The exceptionally strong cross-sectional association between the early development of such relations and the extent and duration of democratic politics suggested that the aspiration to membership in some of the countries may have contributed to their democratization. That suggestion was supported by longitudinal data for one of the measures that indicated that much of the democratization occurred not only prior to the countries' membership or applications for membership but even prior to the completion of the pre-application agreements that looked toward eventual membership.

However, the causal explanation for something as complex as the development of a democratic polity is inevitably far more complicated. The aspiration to EU membership might have contributed to the development of a democratic polity but might have been only one of a number of contributing factors. Moreover, the aspiration to membership may itself have been influenced by those other factors and may have been preceded by an aspiration to create a democratic polity. The article presented data that suggested the aspiration to membership, as measured by the timing of the development of formal membership-oriented relations, was indeed closely associated with a variety of highly-interrelated factors involving spatial location, political antecedents, transitional politics, and economic ties, all of which were also closely associated across the post-communist countries with the extent and duration of democratic politics. The exceptionally high degree of co-variation of all of these factors across the post-communist world suggested that the development of a democratic polity was, in statistical terms, overdetermined—meaning that one can not ascertain with any confidence the relative explanatory power of those factors. But it does appear that those factors, taken together, may have caused some countries to aspire both to join the EU and to create a democratic polity.

The article concluded with a discussion of the likely future of the countries that are unambiguously non-democratic. Eschewing a conclusion that they are inevitably consigned to a non-democratic future because they lack many of the attributes that, thus far, appear to have been conducive to the development of a democratic polity, the article suggested that institutional change represents a possible avenue toward a greater degree of democracy. In particular, it suggested that a diminution of presidential and executive power and expansion of parliamentary power may contribute to democratization, even in countries that do not possess many of the attributes conducive to the development of a democratic polity.

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