
Democratic Transition in Eastern Europe

Parliamentarism and Presidentialism in Eastern Europe

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Summary

In the first part of the text, the author lists standard theoretical arguments used in the debates about parliamentarism and presidentialism and points up the ways of their contextualisations and instrumentalisations in Eastern Europe as a transitional region of unconsolidated democracies. In the second part she deals with the approaches and difficulties in the classification of empirical constitutional systems in Eastern Europe. In the third part she highlights several sources of real and potential institutional and political conflicts which are caused by certain constitutional designs in some countries.

1. Problems of “constitutional choice”: on the advantages and disadvantages of parliamentarism and presidentialism

One of the central issues in the creation of democratic political institutions in postcommunist countries of Eastern Europe has been the choice of the constitutional system of government. Arend Lijphart (1991, 1992a) thinks that the new democracies are confronted with two key “constitutional choices”: that of the electoral system and that of the type of the relationship between the legislature and the executive. The choice among “the grand alternatives” in these institutional areas defines the general model of democracy: if the majority electoral system is chosen and the presidential form of government, the majoritarian or competitive model of democracy will ensue; if, on the other hand, the proportional electoral system and the parliamentary type of government are institutionalized, the consociational or consensual model of democracy will emerge. Without unduly downsizing the importance of the electoral system, Lijphart thinks that opting for the parliamentary or the presidential system of government represents “probably the most significant institutional difference” among the contemporary democracies (1992, 1). Matthew S. Shugart (1993) also claims that the choice between parliamentarism and presidentialism is the central constitutional issue of new democracies.¹

¹For the description of the models of parliamentary and presidential systems of government, see the classic analysis by Douglas V. Verney (1992).

The theories have mostly revolved around the question which institutional system is “better” for the new democracies and the advantages and disadvantages of both have been enumerated. By and large, these discussions have used standard arguments which are, more or less, geographically, historically and politically contextualized.

The advantages of parliamentarism are, basically, threefold:

- a more inclusive system of government, which enables all major social groups (including important ethnic minorities which exist in most east-European countries) to take part in government;

- a more flexible system of government which enables a smooth transition of governments and a speedier acclimatization to the political and social challenges which the unconsolidated democracies and undeveloped market economies of postcommunist countries are faced with;

- a more suitable system of government for the countries in democratic transition, since it broadens the space for the development of a number of democratic institutions and procedures, such as parliamentary opposition, political coalitions, negotiations, compromises, consensus, and alike.

The advocates of parliamentarism, on the other hand, have focused more on the criticism of presidentialism than on the praise of parliamentarism. Such a negative strategy of argumentation should lead to the conclusion that parliamentarism avoids, or at least tones down, the institutional and political problems which the new democracies are confronted with if they institutionalize the presidential type of government. The critique of presidentialism (the same criticisms apply to the earlier transitional processes, particularly those in Latin America; Thibaut/Skach, 1994) can be summed up as follows:

- presidentialism is a paradigmatic example of an exclusive system of government in which “winner takes it all” and thus effectually excludes from government big social groups and ethnic minorities, which jeopardizes the stability of new democracies;

- presidentialism enhances political polarization, weakens the role of political parties (particularly political opposition²) and the parliament in general in recruiting the ruling elite and thus thwarts the creation of stable coalitions;

²Juan J. Linz claims that in a presidential system of government, parliamentary opposition is literally jeopardized. “...The conviction that he is in the possession of an independent authority and the people’s mandate, will probably fill a president with a sense of power and mission, even when the majority by which he has been elected is minimal. Due to such notions of his position and role, he will likely view the inevitable opposition to his political programme with a more disagreeable and hateful eye than a prime minister...” (1992, 123).

- it establishes the unipersonal executive structure which weakens the deliberative and compromise-oriented processes of decision-making;
- it stands in the way of creating different majorities in the legislature and the executive, the so-called divided government, which can cause the paralysis of the process of political decision-making and trigger a conflict between the government and the opposition. In such circumstances, political protagonists are more in favour of authoritarian mechanisms of conflict-solution, which do not exclude the arbitrary intervention of the military in civilian politics;
- on the whole, it is a rigid and inflexible institutional arrangement which finds it difficult to come up with the true answers to the political and social crises in the country and adapts to changing circumstances with difficulty;
- it steps up personalization and clientelism in politics, as well as servility and servitude of individuals, and thus contributes to the survival of the authoritarian style of government and the servile political culture, typical of communist regimes.

However, the advocates of presidential systems claim that the critique of presidentialism is largely a matter of principles and is out of context and does not take into account the historical and political state of affairs in which it might be functional and desirable. Such a state, they claim, exists in the new, posttotalitarian and postauthoritarian democracies, for which presidentialism is suitable for numerous reasons. The presidential system thus:

- guarantees the stability of the executive government, extremely important in the circumstances of unconsolidated democracy;³
- establishes the direct responsibility of the government to the voters regarding the choice of policies, and makes political relationships in general more graspable and transparent to individuals unfamiliar with democratic political mechanisms;
- establishes in the function of the president of the state the institution of “arbiter”, since parties are unprofiled and unstructured. The nature of political parties diminishes the credibility of their coalition-making and ruling potentials, so dear to the advocates of parliamentary systems.

³The generally accepted argument that presidentialism guarantees a stronger and more stable executive government than parliamentarism is disproved by Scott Mainwaring who says that presidentialism is based on the division and the balance of power, but that this balance frequently results in certain inflexibility of government which may bring about the collapse of the entire democratic system (1992, 112, 113).

In their argumentation strategy, the partisans of presidentialism have used both real and potential flaws of parliamentarism, the most conspicuous being:

- the establishment of weak and unstable governments, which contributes to an increase in the uncertainty and instability of new democracies;
- the lack of a clear system of responsibilities, i.e. the dispersion of political liability on a great number of political institutions and protagonists;⁴
- abetting fractionalization of already unstructured and unprofiled parties in the parliament which results in fractional instead of party parliamentarism.⁵

2. Institutional preferences and institutional choice

Theoretical considerations are usually not decisive in choosing a certain institutional option. The choice is, above all, influenced by institutional preferences of central political protagonists; the preferences are an expression of their political interests, goals and values. In order to explain how certain institutional solutions in Eastern Europe came into being, it is necessary to answer two questions:

- who were the main protagonists of the process of democratic transition;
- which were their institutional preferences.

The starting point of more recent analyses of democratic transition in Eastern Europe is the fact that the most prominent role in the initial phases of political liberalization and democratization of communist regimes was played by two categories of political protagonists: the old communist and the new anticommunist elite. Based on the balance of power between them, various models of democratic transition developed. They can be roughly divided into three types of political system change: directed changes, negotiated changes and capitulation. Without delving further into

⁴Unlike the dispersion of political responsibility, within the presidential system, responsibility, like power, is clearly concentrated in the institution of the president. In order to prevent such presidential power from deteriorating into authoritarian political tendencies, presidential power might be curbed through one of the following four constitutional mechanisms: 1. banning reelection, 2. limiting the number of mandates, 3. imposing a lapse of a certain period of time prior to reelection, and 4. banning the members of president's family to run for presidency. These measures come within the category of the so-called "purposeful violation of democratic principles".

⁵The concept of "fractional parliamentarism" is historically most often linked with the Weimar Republic and its institutional system, which included a proportional electoral system and a semipresidential type of government (see Kluxen, 1983, 233).

a more detailed description of these models,⁶ for the time being it will suffice to say that in the directed model of democratic transition, the dominant role was played by the old elite, in the negotiated transition the clout of the old and the new elite was balanced, while in the case of capitulation the new political elite had the upper hand.

An analysis of political preferences of the old and the new political elites is not a straightforward task. First, neither of these two groups of main political protagonists came up with a set of consistent thinking about the new institutional and political system. Comprehensive visions of democratic models which include certain political institutions can be ascribed to them only provisionally. The analysis of concrete examples will show that the national elites within both groups of political protagonists were in favour of institutional eclecticism, i.e. a mixture of institutional arrangements which are otherwise strictly separated in the theoretical democratic models. However, there is no denying that there were certain regularities in the way central protagonists opted for certain institutional solutions. Second, individual protagonists changed their institutional preferences in the course of the process of democratic transition, the consequence of the change in their political status and, accordingly, their interests, goals and perceptions. While in stable and consolidated democracies the main political protagonists accept the basic institutions and challenge them only in extreme cases, in new and unconsolidated democracies, protagonists are much more prone to “put at disposal” the basic institutions, procedures and rules of political life, i.e. change them if dissatisfied with their effects. In this, they do not usually change their relationship towards the entire institutional set, but solely towards some of its parts. If we assume that institutional sets are rather homogeneous wholes consisting of certain institutional solutions, then a change of some of its parts impairs the whole and endangers the functioning of the entire arrangement. A typical example of the hiatus created by a partial alteration of institutional preferences is the open or latent institutional conflict, a result of the combination of the proportional electoral system and the presidential form of government in the same institutional system.

The original institutional preferences of central political protagonists can be traced back to their opinions prior to the first free elections, the first step in the institutionalization of pluralist democracy. Most analysts think that the views of major protagonists - the dominant communist party and the political opposition - went separate ways regarding the two constitutional choices: the electoral system and the type of government. The ruling communist party, as a rule, preferred the majority electoral system and the presidential type of government, while the noncommunist opposition opted for the proportional electoral system and the parliamentary republic. Since

⁶For details of the patterns of democratic transition in Eastern Europe see in Kasapović, 1996.

these two solutions are closely linked with a number of other institutional arrangements and relations - party system, parliamentary structure, etc. - it is considered that this disagreement was, as a matter of fact, a sort of a polarization regarding democracy models in general. Thus the dominant party favoured the majority democracy, and the opposition pluralist or consociational democracy (see Colomer, 1995; Janda, 1992; Lijphart, 1991, 1992; Markus, 1994).

Three hypotheses ensue from the preceding arguments:

- the directed model of democratic transition gave rise to the presidential or “strong” semipresidential system of government;
- the negotiated system institutionalized the combined parliamentary-presidential systems of government;
- the capitulation of the old regimes inaugurated parliamentary systems of government.

Furthermore, by the end of 1996 in most east European countries there occurred the change of political elites;⁷ consequently, it should be expected that the new political elites have institutionalized the parliamentary system of government and that it became the prevalent constitutional model in the region. However, the following Table proves the contrary.

The classification is not based on the categorial dichotomy parliamentarism-presidentialism, but takes into account the intermediary types of government. Such an approach is necessary in studying political regimes in postcommunist countries of Eastern Europe, which abound with the “in-between types”. They are generally considered characteristic for transitional countries and most frequently occur in the periods of crises of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. They are mostly regarded transitional and temporary, being linked with crises of the existing political institutions and disappear with the consolidation of the new democratic regimes. On the other hand, the champions of the intermediary forms of government claim that they are better fitted for a more permanent survival, since they have the advantages of both “pure” types of government but without their disadvantages. A particularly successful combination of the advantages of “pure” parliamentarism and “pure” presidentialism in the parliamentary-presidential systems of government is, for example, the combination of direct presidential elections and the stability of the executive government on the one hand and the flexibility of the parliamentary government and prime minister, on the other.

⁷By the end of 1996, the old communist elites, i.e. successor leftist parties in which they were organisationally rallied, remained in power solely in Serbia and Montenegro. Thus these two countries did not live up to the most undemanding criterion of democratic consolidation - the peaceful change of power after the universal demise of communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

As can be seen from the table, “pure” parliamentary or, especially, “pure” presidential systems have been established in a rather small number of countries; most countries have opted for one of the transitional, semi-presidential forms.⁸ A precise analysis of the relationship between the legislative and the executive distinguishes among various intermediary types of government. On the whole, it seems that the most suitable typology for the analysis of the constitutional systems of east European countries up to now is the differentiated five-item typology by M. S. Shugart.

Table 1: Constitutional systems in Eastern Europe 1995

Country	Parliamentarism	Presidentialism	Semipresidentialism
Albania	*		
Bosnia and Herzegovina	*		
Belarus		*	
Bulgaria	*		
Czech Republic	*		
Estonia	*		
Croatia			*
Lithuania		*	
Latvia			*
Hungary	*		
Macedonia			*
Moldova			*
Poland			*
Romania			*
Russia		*	
Slovakia	*		
Slovenia	*		
Serbia			*
Ukraine			*

1. “Pure” presidential system: presidents of the state are elected in general direct elections; they are the chief executives who appoint the members of the cabinet. The paradigm of such constitutional type of government is American presidentialism, while its geographically most widespread version is the Latin American *caudillism*. Shugart thinks that the

⁸For the definition of semipresidentialism see the classic essays by Maurice Duverger (1992) and Jean Blondel (1992). Duverger defines the semipresidential system by three structural elements: 1. the general and direct presidential elections; 2. great authority of the president; 3. the dichotomy between prime minister and the cabinet and the president of the state, since the former can retain their positions solely if they enjoy parliamentary confidence (1992, 142).

“pure” presidential system in Eastern Europe has been established only in some successor-countries of the Soviet Union, such as Armenia and Kirghistan. However, Gert-Joachim Glaessner claims that it is also characteristic for Serbia and Russia (1994, 249). Stefanie Babst also thinks that Russia has the presidential form of government (1994, 296), while Michael Brie speaks of “a presidential dictatorship legitimised by direct elections” in that country (1996, 164). Stephen Holmes argues that in Russia there has emerged a sort of “semipresidentialism” in which there is no American-type division of power and the legislative and the executive powers are combined in the institution of the president of the state, who has legislative authority in the form of the right to issue decrees with legal force. Because of these powers of the president of the state, Russian democracy is sometimes graphically described as “decreocracy”. Presidents have the right of veto on parliament’s decisions, they may dissolve the parliament, while there is no possibility of a reciprocity action by the parliament, which cannot block presidential ordinances (1994, 123). Unlike him, however, Wolfgang Merkel does not classify the Russian system of government as presidential; he is of the opinion that the sole “pure” presidential type of government has been established in Belarus, “a variant of a plebiscitary legitimised presidential dictatorship” within the framework of “delegated democracy” (1996, 79).⁹

2. Primeministerial - presidential system or “primeministerial presidentialism”: presidents are elected in general direct elections and they nominate candidates for prime ministers. Presidents have the right to dissolve the parliament and call new elections and the right of vetoing parliamentary decisions. The paradigm of such type of government is France’s Fifth Republic.

Shugart claims that in Eastern Europe “primeministerial presidentialism” has been created in Romania. But Merkel thinks that this type of government can also be found (besides Romania) in Croatia, Yugoslavia, Latvia and Poland (1996, 79). Ellen Boss says that the model of France’s Fifth Republic was the model for Russia’s constitution (1996, 188, 195-196.)¹⁰

3. Presidential-parliamentary system or “presidential parliamentarism”; as before, presidents are elected in general direct elections. Presidential parliamentarism is similar to the “pure” presidential system insofar the parliament has no right of confidence vote, but presidents cannot dissolve the cabinet. Since the authority over the cabinet is not institutionally envisaged, “a conflict between the legislative and the executive is likely”

⁹The concept of “delegated democracy” is by Guillermo O’Donnell (1994).

¹⁰Fathers of Russian constitution declare that using the French model was intentional since the crisis in which France found itself in the late 1950s is completely comparable to the one in Russia in the early 1990s (Boss, 1996, 196).

(Shugart, 1993, 30). The paradigm of such type of government is Weimar Germany.¹¹

Shugart points out that such a system has been established in Russia and Ukraine. Merkel thinks the same but reminds us that in these two countries there are strong structural elements of “pure” presidentialism (1996, 79). However, Glaessner asserts that Polish and Croatian systems belong to this constitutional type (1994, 249), while Friedbert W. Rueb thinks that Croatia is the “prototype” of such constitutional structure (1993, 89).

4. The parliamentary system with a directly elected president: although president is directly elected by the voters, he/she cannot dissolve the parliament nor appoint the cabinet; the latter task is in the competence of the parliament.

Shugart says that such a system has been institutionalized in Bulgaria, Estonia and Slovenia. His opinion is supported by Alfred Stepan and Cindy Skatch (1993, 4). Glaessner, however, claims that such figurehead presidency exists in Bulgaria and Slovenia. Bulgarian politologists and lawyers, however, claim that the parliamentary republic of Bulgaria includes a number of features of the presidential system of government which has enabled the president of the state to emerge as a “factor” in the crisis of the government and the parliament (see Petkov, 1994, 116). Macedonia belongs to the circle of countries in which the figurehead presidency was established formally and legally though experts for Macedonian political structures claim that it has been de facto transformed into a true presidential regime (Hatschikjan, 1996, 133).

5. “Pure” parliamentary system: presidents are elected by the parliament, and the parliament appoints the members of the cabinet.

Shugart and Glaessner agree that such “pure” parliamentarism has been established in Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Albania. Stepan and Skatch mention only Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia (1993, 4).

¹¹Friedbert W. Rueb states that the Weimar Constitution of 1918 was “the first ever constitution which established semipresidential government...” He thinks it was responsible for the impossibility of stabilizing democracy in Germany and the collapse of the entire democratic political regime (1993, 88, 96). In the classic discussion about the political system of Weimar Germany, Karl Dietrich Bracher (1962) says that that regime was an attempt to “link the unlinkable”: the parliamentary and the presidential democracy. In such “mixing and the dualism of parliamentary and presidential democracy” (215), basic principles of democratic state of law, political responsibility and political control were trampled down. Two popularly elected bodies of authority - president of the state and the parliament - went separate ways which undermined the continuity and the stability of the government, weakened the readiness for compromise and the responsibility of the parliament and the parties. In its fundamental traits, that “virtual parliamentarism” lent itself to the emergence of a presidential dictatorship (218).

Reub thinks that “simple” parliamentary systems have been set up in Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, and Hungary, while in other countries there is a sort of “mixed” governmental systems (1993, 87-88).

The five mentioned constitutional systems in the table have been compressed into three. The parliamentary system with a directly elected president has been included within the category of parliamentary systems, while primeministerial-presidential and presidential-parliamentary systems were included into intermediary and semipresidential types of government. Such “compressing technique” is disputable due to several reasons.

First, direct popular presidential elections are considered the essential structural element of the presidential systems of government. Owing to such a type of elections, president emerges, together with the parliament, as an agent of sovereignty, which determines political legitimacy and the import of that institution. Popularly elected presidents of states thus feel invited to take up a more active role in the political lives of their respective countries from the one stipulated by the constitution and the law, as is demonstrated by the examples of Bulgaria and Macedonia. On the basis of their real political role and power, the constitutional systems of these countries could be categorized as nonparliamentary or semipresidential regimes. Nevertheless, the formal and legal criteria of classification prevail plus the fact that popularly elected presidents, unlike their counterparts in semipresidential regimes, have no constitutional powers. Second, the differences between the primeministerial-presidential and presidential-parliamentary systems are by no means so unimportant to be easily glossed over. At the same time, the analysts differ in their views on the twofold categorisation of various constitutional types.¹² That is why these two categories of constitutional systems have been included in the category of semipresidential systems to which, despite all the differences, they belong. The most significant uncategorized example is the constitutional system of Russia; on the basis of the constitutional powers of Russian presidents, it has been included in the category of presidential regimes.¹³

The starting hypotheses have proved only partly true.

The system change that was initiated - and in some countries continued - as “a directive from above”, in many countries gave rise to the creation of presidential and powerful semipresidential systems (Belarus, Croatia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine). They have

¹²Due to some general classificatory difficulties, James P. McGregor gave up on the standard typologization of the constitutional systems of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and analysed them according to 19 criteria of institutional relations among the president of the state, the parliament and the government (1996, 162).

¹³For a review of the constitutional powers of Russian president see in Westen, 1994, 822-824.

remained in power after the first change of political elites in the first or the second elections in some of these countries. That is the proof that the new political elites have not unanimously opted for parliamentarism. They may have done it publicly, but it is obvious they had hidden political preferences whose promulgation they regarded politically harmful in certain circumstances.¹⁴ Within this model of system change, parliamentarism has been institutionalized in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Latvia, and Slovenia. That, on the other hand, is the evidence that the old communist political elites did not like-mindedly prefer the presidential system of government .

The awareness that the new political elites were not uniformly and universally in favour of creating the parliamentary systems of government is partly proved by the examples of two other models of system change. After the Romanian revolution and the capitulation of the old political elite, the formally new elite set up a “strong” semipresidential system of government; but this can be explained by the fact that the new elite was really “the second cadre” of the old political elite, i.e. there was no real change of the elites. Unlike Romania, in the former Czechoslovakia, following the capitulation of the old regime, the new political elite established a true parliamentary system. Czech Republic and Slovakia split, but the system has survived in both states.

The negotiated system change has given rise to a miscellany of constitutional systems. It is a formal paradox that in the countries with the strongest anticommunist opposition, for example in Poland, a semipresidential system emerged, while in the ones with the weakest opposition (in Bulgaria, for example), a parliamentary system was created. Truth to tell, in Hungary, the old political elite opted for a sort of presidential government, while the opposition favoured parliamentary government. This resulted in the lack of an interest-based compromise, and the matter had to be resolved by means of a plebiscite, which was held in 1989 and tilted the scales in favour of parliamentarism.

On the whole, it could be said that the biggest deviations from the attributed original institutional preferences of the central protagonists of these transitional processes - particularly the new national political elites - have occurred in constitutional systems. These deviations have primarily taken the form of the opting of larger numbers of new national political elites for presidentialism or semipresidentialism; they have also manifested in the parliamentary orientation of a fraction of the old, reform-minded communist elites. The most remarkable example of such “preferential conversion” was Poland. In that country, the reformed left - together with the liberal wing of the noncommunist political elite - ardently championed a

¹⁴“Protagonists’ preferences are not explicitly stated in full or are even falsified due to tactical reasons. That is why one should distinguish between the public, outward preferences and the hidden preferences” (Prittwitz, 1994, 16).

parliamentary republic, while the political forces of the right and centre-right, particularly those rallied around the “Solidarity” movement or its offshoots, were in favour of the presidential form of government (Schade, 1995, 640). Considering that in the “negotiated Sejm” - which lasted from the semicompetitive elections of 1989 until the competitive elections of 1991 and which was organized along the lines of the preagreed division of power between the communists and the anticommunist opposition at the ratio of 65:35 - the left had the majority, the semipresidential type of government was legalized only after the change in the balance of political power after the 1990 presidential elections and the 1991 parliamentary elections. The new president, Lech Walesa, the new “rightist” majority in the Sejm, as well as the old “rightist” majority in the Senate, were acolytes of the institution of “strong presidency”.

3. Sources of potential institutional conflicts and crises

The main source of institutional conflicts and crises in the new democracies of Eastern Europe is the simultaneous institutionalization of proportional electoral models on the one hand, and the presidential and semipresidential systems of government on the other. The empirical data show that from 1990 until the end of 1996, the proportional system had slowly, but surely, emerged as the dominant institutional choice in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. While, for example, the first competitive elections in 1990 were organized proportionally in 37.5% of the existing new democracies, at the beginning of 1996 it was institutionalized in 57.9% of these countries. Furthermore, it was applied to a smaller or larger extent, within the segmented electoral systems. The proportional model has gained the upper hand at the expense of the majority system and somewhat at the expense of the combined electoral model. The direct consequence of such institutional development regarding electoral systems was the creation of multiparty parliamentary systems, which mostly implies the formation of coalition governments.

On the other hand, by the end of 1996, in most new democracies, a presidential or semipresidential system of government was institutionalized. It should be pointed out, however, that it was mostly linked with the majority (Belarus, Macedonia, Ukraine) and the combined electoral system (Croatia, Lithuania, Russia). But in several countries (Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia), the proportional electoral system and the multiparty parliamentary system with the presidential or strong semipresidential type of government were institutionally combined. The historical experience shows that the rare stable presidential democracies were linked with the existence of a two-party system or a dominant party system (Mainwaring, 1992, 113). Such systems, formally, do not exist in any east European country. In some of them we could speak of the domination of certain ideological and political blocs, but they are in no way stable political organizations. The

dominant procommunist and prorussian bloc in the Belorussian parliament relies on the majority of formally independent delegates.

Presidential governments generally run into difficulties if there is the opposition majority in the parliament. Such situation usually triggers off a conflict between the executive and the legislative government which is then sometimes resolved by the president's circumventing the parliament and the creation of parapolitical bodies which take over the parliament's competences. In the worst scenarios, a president may decide to declare the state of emergency and dissolve the parliament.

Clashes between presidents and parliaments have led to the fall of governments and political crises in several easteuropean countries. In Poland, for example, president Lech Walesa literally extorted the fall of the coalition government of prime minister Pawlak, which enjoyed the majority support in the Sejm after the 1993 elections. The conflict between the president and the cabinet officially began by disagreements over the appointment of foreign and defence ministers. After having forced the prime minister to resign, Walesa took on the legislative parliament house and threatened to dissolve it unless the national budget is passed. The parliament reciprocated by threatening the president with the abolition of presidency in the existing form and by transforming Poland into a parliamentary republic (Freundenstein, 1995). The hostilities came to an end after the candidate of the reformed leftist majority party in the Sejm came out victorious in the 1996 elections.

In Bulgaria in 1994, the president was instrumental in bringing about the fall of the so-called non-party government of Ljuben Berov, whom he had personally picked out for the job in the first place and appointed as prime minister, though he was not a member of either of the two parliamentary fractions. The consequence of the fall of that government were the third early elections in 1994. The most serious conflicts between the parliament and the president have been those in Russia. These conflicts ensued from the differences in the views on the country's structure of government and peaked around the issues connected with the Constitution. Since the negotiations between the parliament and the president about the new constitution had failed, the president dissolved the People's Congress of Deputies and the Supreme Soviet in September of 1993, called the new elections in December of the same year as well as a plebiscite on the new Russian Constitution which won 56.6% of the votes (Slater, 1994). However, the conflicts between the parliament and the president continued after the elections and the adoption of the new Constitution (Tolz, 1994) and very often affected the fate of the cabinet. The underlying reason for this discord was the fact that the president had no overwhelming party or coalition majority in the parliament. Nevertheless, such tendencies are not characteristic solely for the states with the semipresidential and presidential systems. A bitter battle between the president and the prime minister shook Slovakia, since the latter turned into a factual and very

authoritarian head of state. According to the Slovakian Constitution, the president appoints and recalls the members of the cabinet following the prime minister's suggestions. Owing to the discretionary right to block the prime minister's decisions - such as the recall of ministers without the prior agreement of the parliament - the president turned into a formal, albeit weak counterbalance to the institution of prime minister and the despotism of Vladimir Mečiar, directed against the parliament as well as against the president, whom he declared personally responsible for the destruction of "his" government. In this case, the president served as the institutional barrier against the prime minister's tyranny, who crossed swords with the president and the parliament (Stein/Orenstein, 1996, 137). Such political tendencies in Slovakia might lead to the demand for the introduction of the institution of a directly elected prime minister who would then, in fact, turn into a real head of state within the framework of "primeministerial presidentialism".

4. Conclusion

The type of the constitutional system is surely a major factor in political relations in the new east-European democracies. However, the formal, constitutional and legal institutionalization of parliamentary, presidential or semipresidential system of government does not in itself augur either a propitious or inauspicious political progress.

Each political institution operates in certain historical and political or social and cultural circumstances which determine the effects and the achievements of the institutional activity. As this text has set out to show, in Eastern Europe we distinguish between the constitutional systems *de iure* and *de facto*. This means that in a number of countries throughout this vast transitional area there is a smaller or bigger gap between the constitutional and legal and the real political functions and the nature of political institutions. That is why constitutional experts and politologists find themselves in an awkward situation when called upon to classify the constitutions of specific countries. It might be said that the best way out of this predicament would be to make separate legal-scientific and politological classifications which would clearly point out the existing problem areas.

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