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Understanding regime support in new democracies: does politics really matter more than economics?

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Understanding Regime Support in New Democracies

Does Politics Really Matter More Than Economics?

Jan Delhey, Verena Tobsch

September 2000

Abteilung „Sozialstruktur und
Sozialberichterstattung“
im Forschungsschwerpunkt III

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Abstract

It is essential that the new democracies of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe enjoy the full support of their citizenry. Among social scientists there is an ongoing debate about which conditions ensure mass support. Is *political output,* like individual freedom, or *economic output,* like citizens' financial situation, a more potent force in generating approval for the newly established democratic institutions? In this paper we explore the question "what matters more: politics or economics?" by means of various survey data. A macro-analysis of many countries reveals that political support is correlated with democratic development, but also – and more strongly – with economic and social conditions. A micro-analysis of two countries reveals that while in East Germany the perception of guaranteed liberties contributes most to satisfaction with democracy, in Hungary the personal economic situation is most influential. The results do not confirm the view that politics are the most important factor for mass support in all post-communist counties. Furthermore we argue that it is fruitful to take into account other domains of regime performance like social security, social justice and protection.

Für die neuen Demokratien in Mittel- und Osteuropa ist es wichtig, die Unterstützung der Bevölkerung zu haben. Doch welche gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen Politikzufriedenheit am stärksten fördern, darüber gibt es anhaltende Debatten. Sind die politischen Erträge der Transformation, wie Freiheiten und Demokratie, ausschlaggebend? Oder ist es die wirtschaftliche Situation? Mit Hilfe verschiedener Umfragedaten geben wir in diesem Arbeitspapier eine Antwort auf die Frage "Was zählt mehr: Politik oder Ökonomie?" Eine Makro-Analyse mit vielen Ländern zeigt, daß die Bewertung des neuen politischen Systems mit der demokratischen Entwicklung eines Landes zusammenhängt – doch für die wirtschaftliche und soziale Situation ergeben sich noch stärkere Zusammenhänge. In einer Mikro-Analyse mit zwei Ländern wird gezeigt, daß in Ostdeutschland die Demokratiezufriedenheit vor allem davon abhängt, ob Freiheiten und Bürgerrechte als realisiert gelten. In Ungarn dagegen bestimmt hauptsächlich die persönliche wirtschaftliche Lage die Bewertung. Die Ergebnisse bestätigen nicht, daß in postsozialistischen Gesellschaften die Politik generell mehr zählt als die Ökonomie. Weiterhin sollten bei der Untersuchung postkommunistischer Regime zusätzliche Output-Dimensionen wie soziale Sicherung, soziale Gerechtigkeit und öffentliche Sicherheit berücksichtigt werden.

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1 Public support and consolidation of democracy

Ten years after the collapse of the Eastern bloc, some Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) have managed the transition from state socialism to democracy and market economy successfully, whereas others have not. In political theory, a successful transformation consists of two steps: an initial stage of transition from authoritarian to democratic rule, and a stage of consolidation of the new system. Among researchers there is a widespread consensus that liberalization and democratization are the essential elements of transition. The definition of consolidation is much more controversial. Plasser/Ulram/Waldrauch (1997) discussed several concepts of consolidation. For our purpose, we would like to follow their conclusion. Consolidation can be seen as (1) the stabilization and effective functioning of the basic principles of the new system; and (2) as the process of adaptation of behavior and attitudes that promotes such a stabilization and effective functioning (ibid.: 28). Democratic rules should be accepted "as the only game in town" (Linz 1990).

In this paper, we concentrate on mass support and legitimacy in several post-communist countries. Przeworski (1991) or Di Palma (1990) do not believe that attitudes are decisive for consolidation. Rather, they focus on behavior and the presence or absence of an alternative. "What matters for the stability of any regime is not the legitimacy of this particular system of domination but the presence or absence of preferable alternatives" (Przeworski 1986: 51). Others regard attitudes and mass support as *a* (Merkel 1996) or *the* (Diamond 1994) key variable in the consolidation process. Diamond defines consolidation as a "process by which democracy becomes so broadly and profoundly legitimate among its citizens that it is very unlikely to break down" (ibid.: 15). In our view, legitimacy should be regarded as *a* key variable. It is a necessary, but not a sufficient precondition for a successful transformation. Without mass legitimacy it is very unlikely that the rules of the new system become rooted in society; and without pro-democratic elites widespread support of democracy among the population may not be sufficient to build up a stable democracy. Stressing the importance of legitimacy means arguing against theories that only regard elites as crucial actors in the transformation process. Both citizens and elites are important actors.

The best-known conceptual framework for analyzing legitimacy is the one Easton (1975) developed. Easton distinguishes among three *objects* of support: (1) political community, (2) political regime and (3) the authorities responsible for governing. Furthermore, he distinguishes between two different *modes* of support. Specific support is output- and short-term oriented, whereas diffuse support is based on long-term value commitment, which is more or less independent of the actual performance of the system. In our analysis, we will concentrate on *specific support for the new regime*.

With reference to Pridham's (1995) distinction between positive and negative consolidation, one can also differentiate between positive and negative legitimacy. Positive legitimacy means support for the system as it is. Negative support means support for the new system in

so far it is regarded simply as being better than the former one or any other alternative: "Democracy as the lesser evil" (Rose/Mishler 1996). In this case Valenzuela (1992) speaks of "inverse legitimacy".

If legitimacy plays a significant role, two important questions arise: Under which conditions do people support the new system? What are the sources of legitimacy? One possible source is mentioned above: inverse legitimacy. Because many East Europeans had been completely dissatisfied with the communist system, the new system might have acquired support in advance simply because it was something different (cf. Rose 1992). The revolutions of 1989/1990 confirmed the inability of state socialism to fulfil two basic needs: the need for freedom and participation on the one hand and for material well-being on the other. As time goes by, however, this source of negative legitimacy might dry up. The new system must achieve positive legitimacy.

According to rational choice theory, the post-communist system will be evaluated in terms of performance, "what it is and what it does" (Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 143). It will be evaluated in terms of political output (civil rights, liberties etc.) as well as in terms of economic output (individual living conditions, development of national economy etc.). There is little doubt that East Europeans hoped to gain both political freedom and economic prosperity from their revolutions.

But what is more decisive: political output or economic output? This is not a purely academic question. The major challenge for the CEEC was and still is the problem of carrying out political and economic reforms almost simultaneously. In most countries there has been a rapid improvement in political conditions, but economies nose-dived during transformational recession, imposing high social costs on large segments of the population. Although we have the evidence that most of the New Democracies have survived these critical years of economic decline, we still do not know what impact this had on mass support for the new political regime. Already in 1959, Lipset argued that "the better the economic situation, the higher the level of support for the democratic system". In the same vein, Przeworski (1991: 32) and Meyer (1993: 5) see the ability of a system to improve material welfare as decisive for compliance and participation. Rose (1995), on the contrary, goes to battle for political output. In his view, freedom from state interference is a "fundamental value by which people discriminate between political regimes" (ibid.: 467/468). Thus, he regards freedom as the major source of legitimacy.

With our own empirical analysis we attempt to go deeper into the question "what matters more: politics or economics?" by means of the New Democracies Barometer, the German Welfare Survey and the Euromodule. Our results do not confirm that politics are the most important factor for mass support. Furthermore we want to argue that it is fruitful to take into account the social performance of the new system. Our analysis is conducted at two levels. The first takes a macro approach by explaining differences in average support *between* countries by political, economic, and social indicators. The second takes a micro approach. Here we deal with the variance of specific support *within* countries and explain these within-

country-differences in comparative perspective. At this step we break up the somewhat artificial dichotomy between politics and economics by adding other issues that might serve as important output criteria for evaluating the performance of a system: protection, social security and justice.

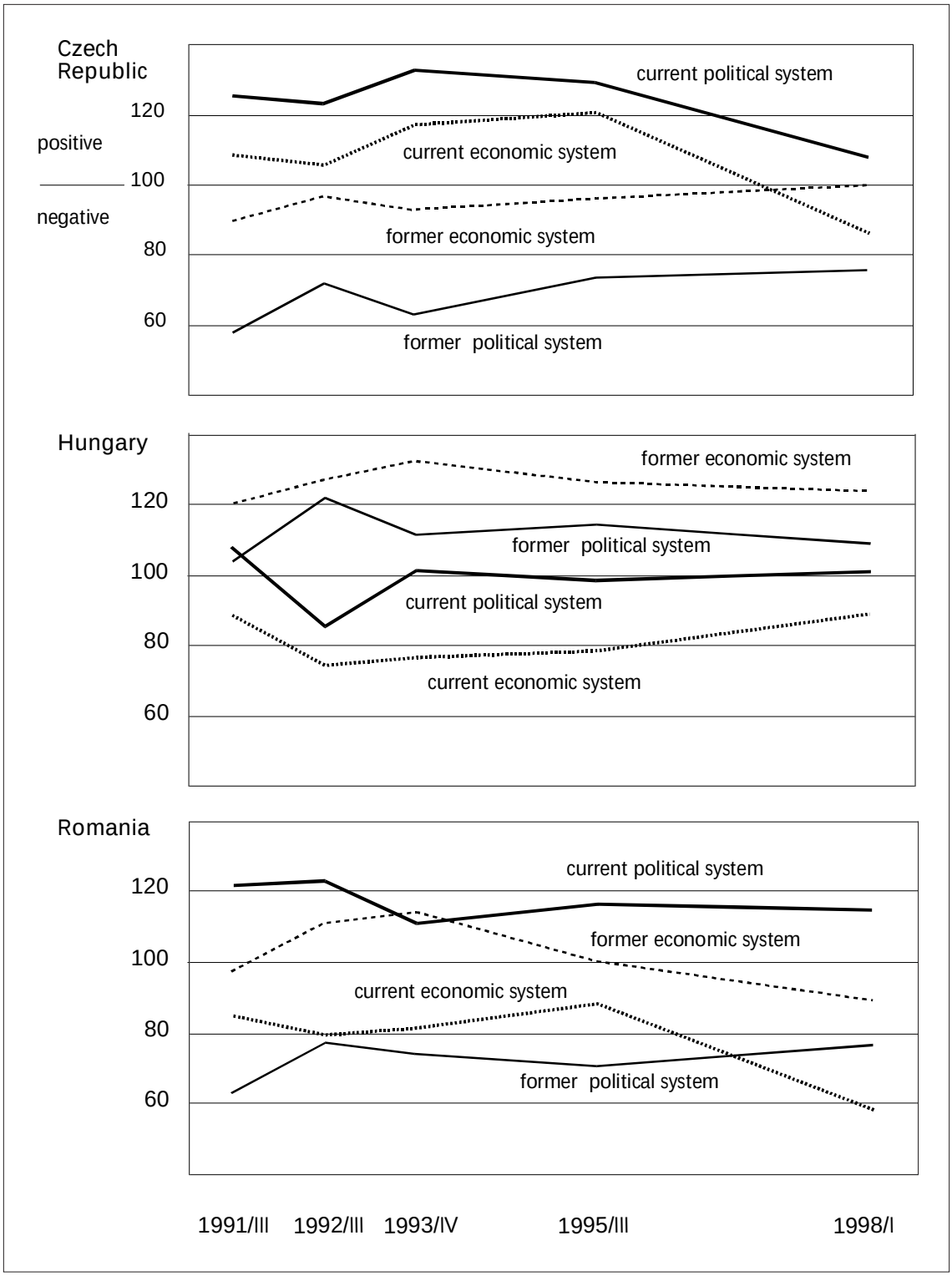
2 Explaining differences between countries

We start with the average level of approval of the new regimes by using the five waves of the New Democracies Barometer (NDB) and similar surveys conducted in East Germany and Russia.[1] Thus, twelve countries are included in our analysis: Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. Respondents were asked to use a scale from to –100 (worst) to +100 (best) in order to evaluate how the government performs.[2] They were asked to rank the "former communist system" as well as the "current system of governing with free elections and many parties". Similar questions were asked concerning the way the economy functions. The questions referred to the "former socialist economic system" and to "the current economic system". Giving these wordings, it is obvious that *specific* support rather than diffuse support is measured.

2.1 Mapping support in Central and Eastern Europe

In cross-national comparison, the evaluations of Central and East Europeans show remarkable differences (see figure 1). In the Czech Republic for instance, the current political system is rated on average much better than the communist one, and the current economic system is also rated better than the former planned economy. Only in 1998 satisfaction with the current system declined, due to an unexpected economic crisis and political instability (Haerpfer/ Wallace 1998, Juchler 1998). Hungary is an example for a country with low mass support. In each survey both the current political and the current economic system is rated lower than its socialist predecessor. This lasting negative mood is remarkable, since, like the Czech Republic, Hungary belongs to the group of successful countries insofar as objective criteria of system transformation are concerned. Only in the very beginning, in 1991, did the approval

Figure 1: System evaluation in three countries (national averages)



Data: 1991-1998 New Democracies Barometer, own calculation

Table 1: A typology of countries according to average support (in brackets: year of survey)

Economic System		
better now	economic success/ political failure	double success East Germany (93,94,95,96) Czech Republic (91,92,93,95) Poland (95,98) Slovenia (93,95)
worse now	double failure Hungary (92,93,95,98) Ukraine (92,93,95,98) Belarus (92,93,95,98) Russia (93,94,95,96,98) Croatia (98)	political success/ economic failure Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia (91,92,93,95,98) Croatia (92,93,95) Slovenia (91,92,98) Czech Republic (98) Hungary (91) Poland (91,92,93)
	worse now	better now
	Political System	

Data: 1991-1998 New Democracies Barometer, own calculation

of the new political system reach that of the former political system. Romania stands for a third pattern with – on average - a positive evaluation of the current political system (better than the communist political system), but a negative evaluation of the current economic system (worse than the planned economy).

With a two-by-two-matrix of mass support we get a clear classification of all observed countries (see table 1). In addition, we can see changes over time in specific support. By slightly simplifying the picture, we have a cluster of four countries where transformation is seen as a double success: the Czech Republic, Poland, East-Germany, and Slovenia. Double success means that on average citizens rate both the new political *and* the new economic system higher than the socialist counterparts. In Hungary, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine we get the opposite picture: transformation is seen as a double failure. According to mass opinion, both the political *and* the economic system have turned to the worse, compared to the socialist

past. This negative stance is especially interesting, because with the exception of Belarus there have been substantial gains in political freedom and civil rights throughout the region. In Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria and Slovakia, citizens evaluate the changes since 1989 on average as a political success, but as an economic failure. This reflects the fact that the political liberalization people longed for had been accompanied in most countries by serious macro-economic problems. It is not surprising that one cell of the matrix remains empty; in none of the CEEC do people perceive a positive development of the economy while at the same time perceiving a negative development of the political system.

The stability of the countries' position in our matrix is remarkable. From 1991/92 to 1995, nine out of twelve countries remained stable. And from 1991/92 to 1998, eight out of twelve countries remained stable. In cross-sectional perspective this means mass opinion about the outcomes of the transformation process has not fluctuate very much over time, as far as the national average is concerned. Among the countries "moving" more often is Slovenia. Average support of the Slovenian population has increased from political success/economic failure (1991, 1992) to double success (1994, 1995), and recently retreated to political success/economic failure (1998). In general, the last NDB of 1998 revealed declining support in many countries. Only Poland and East Germany (last data from 1996) remained left as a double success, whereas the group of double failures has grown to five countries, enlarged by Croatia.

To some degree the cross-national heterogeneity in mass support corresponds to the heterogeneity of transformational pathways. Some countries have been very successful in establishing a pluralistic democracy and some kind of market economy, whereas in others this was and still remains a path of trial and tribulation. In Poland, economic output is now 20 percent *higher* than in 1989, whereas in the Ukraine it is about 60 percent *lower* (cf. Unicef 1999, Gregory 1999). In Hungary the rules of democracy are well established, whereas in Belarus the Lukashenka regime is heavily authoritarian (cf. Juchler 1997, Lorenz 1999). Lazic and Sekelj (1998) distinguish between three clusters of countries according to their chances for a successful reform: countries of "probable transformation" (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary), intermediate countries of "potential transformation" (Romania, Bulgaria) and anomic countries with an "uncertain transformation" (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus).

2.2 Does politics matter more at the macro-level?

Empirical information about the progress of political and economic reforms are provided by organizations like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) or other think tanks (cf. EBRD 1999, UNICEF 1999). Two of their assessments (for 1995) are combined in the first diagram of figure 2: the rating of economic reform progress and of political reform progress. There is a clear positive correlation between the two.

> *"The countries most advanced in economic reform are also the countries most advanced in the consolidation of democracy" (EBRD 1999: 113).*

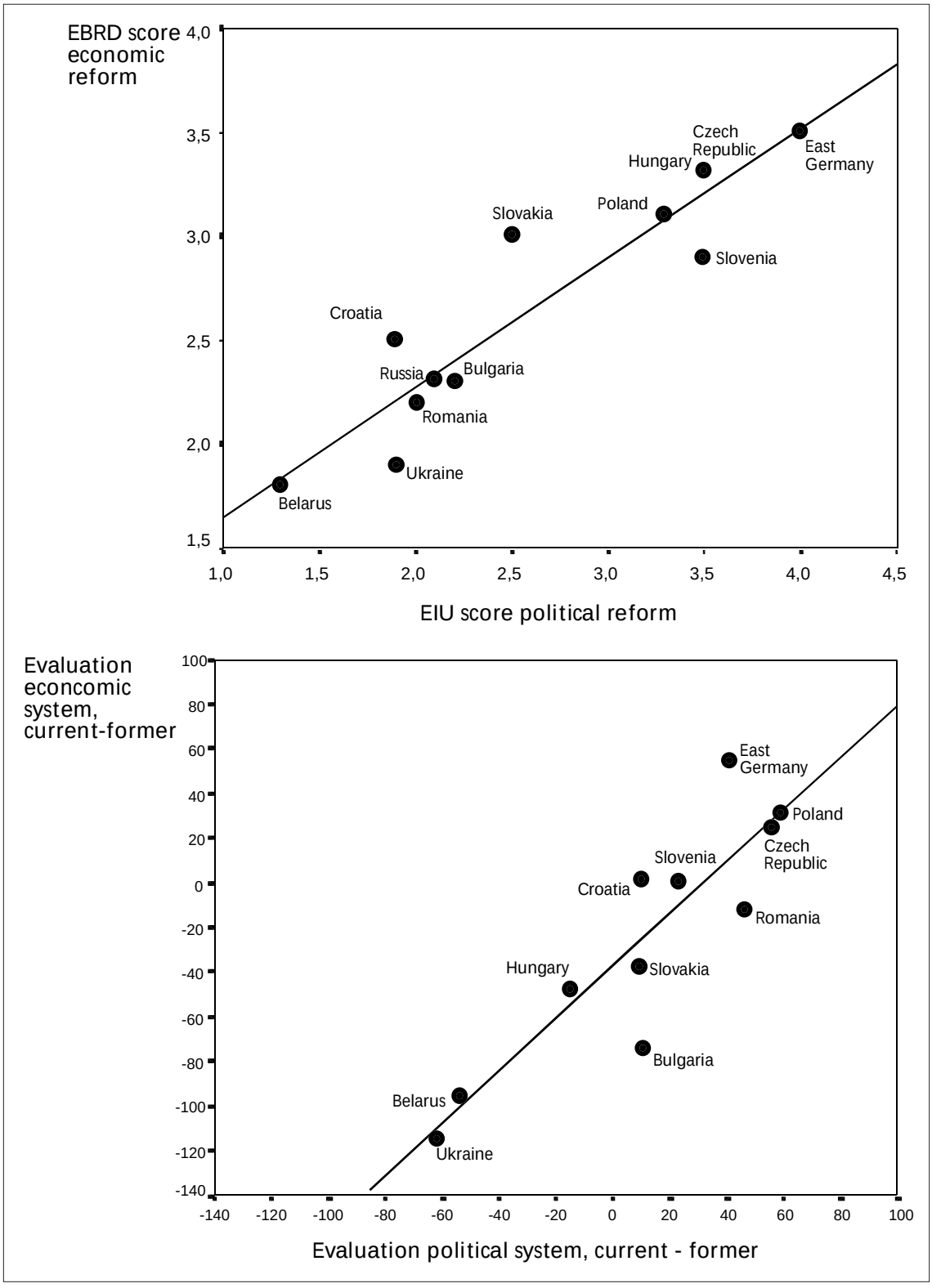
Both processes seem to be mutually reinforcing rather than conflicting. The second diagram of figure 2 combines the average ratings of the current political and economic system – each in relation to the former. The ratings were calculated using data from the NDB surveys. As with progress in institutional reform, specific support for the two systems is strongly correlated. The countries with the highest approval of the new political system are also the countries with the highest approval of the new economic system. If put on top of each other there is a striking similarity of the two pictures. The countries most advanced in the transformation process are also the countries with the strongest specific support. That means that mass opinion can be regarded as a fairly reliable measure of whether developments in transition countries take the right or wrong direction. Only in the case of Hungary and Romania is there a considerable gap between "real" reform progress and the mood of the population (cf. Seifert/Rose 1994 for the explanation of this gap).

Which national characteristics have the strongest impact on specific support? In order to get an idea about how the cross-national differences in satisfaction can be explained best, we computed bivariate correlations between the average mass support and several political, economic, and social indicators on an aggregate level of countries for 1995 and 1998 (see table 2). With life expectancy also the social dimension of transition is included, which is usually neglected in research on legitimacy. As the dependent variables we used the difference between the ratings of the current and the former political regime, as well as the current and the former economic system. Thus, we measure satisfaction with the current systems *in relation* to their socialist counterparts.

Because of the strong relationship between politics and economics demonstrated above, one has to consider both sides: political support and economic support. For political support, we expect to find the strongest correlations with political indicators, while for economic support we expect to find the strongest correlations with economic indicators.

The bivariate correlations are shown in tables 3 and 4. The relationships between approval of the economic system and all of the economic indicators are statistically significant. The better the economy performs, the higher the average support. The change in life expectancy

Figure 2: The objective and subjective relationship between politics and economics



Data: 1995 New Democracies Barometer, own calculation

Table 2: Indicators for bivariate correlations with mass support

POLITICAL INDICATORS
FREEDOM Freedom House rating, combined averages for political rights and civil liberties, measured on a 1-to-7 scale. "1" represents the highest degree of freedom and "7" the lowest. Countries whose combined averages for political rights and civil liberties fall between 1.0 and 2.5 are designated "free"; between 3.0 and 5.5 "partly free"; and between 5.5 and 7.0 "not free" (source: Freedom House Reports, various volumes, and website).
FREEDOM/1989 Freedom House rating compared to the 1989 rating.
POLITICAL REFORM INDEX: In an EIU (The Economist Intelligence Unit) poll of thirty analysts on Eastern Europe associated with the Economist Group, the respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 4 (best) the extent to which Eastern European countries currently measure up to average EU standards in the development of political institutions (source: Transition 7/8, 1996: 9).
PRESIDENTIAL POWER Presidential power over cabinet, measured according to criteria in Shugart and Carey 1992. For 1998, a slightly modified version of the scale is used (power of political executives, according to EBRD Transition Report 1999: 104).
NUMBER PARTIES IN EXECUTIVE Number of parties represented in government, a measure for the fragmentation of the political system (source: EBRD Transition Report 1999: 104.
CONSTITUTIONAL TYPE Dummy variable, parliamentary or semi-presidential system (according to classification in Juchler 1997).
ECONOMIC INDICATORS
GDP The gross national product per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parities, indicates the average level of prosperity. It represents the total final output of goods and services produced by an economy during a given period (source: Fischer Weltalmanach 1999, F.A.Z., 23.11.1998).
GDP/1989 Level of GDP, with base year 1989 = 100 (source: Matutinovic 1998, UNICEF Regional Monitoring Report 1999).
REAL WAGES / 1989 Level of real wages, with base year 1989 = 100. A proxy for the quantity of goods and services a money wage can buy, the real wage represents the money wage adjusted for inflation (source: UNICEF Regional Monitoring Report 1999).
ECONOMIC REFORM INDEX The EBRD rates on a scale of 1 to 4 (best) progress across countries in a number of areas of reform: large- and small-scale privatization, enterprise restructuring, price liberalization, competition, liberalization of trade and foreign exchange system, and banking and other financial reform. These scores can be summed into a synthetic indicator of overall economic reform progress (source: Transition 4,1995: 3; Transition 7/8, 1996: 9, EBRD Transition Report 1999).
SOCIAL INDICATORS
LIFE EXPECTANCY Male life expectancy at birth (in years). A widely used measure of the general level of mortality, this is the theoretical number of years a newborn will live if the age-specific mortality rates in the year of birth are taken as constant. The life expectancy is a good measure for the overall living conditions (source: UNICEF Regional Monitoring Report 1999).
LIFE EXPECTANCY/1989 Change in life expectancy compared to 1989.

Table 3: Correlations between macro-variables and evaluation of the new economic system

Indicator	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho
	1995	1995	1998	1998
Politics				
Freedom	-	-	-.58*	-.83**
Freedom/1989	-	-	-	-
Executive power	-	-	-	-
Number parties in executive	.60*	-	-	-
Constitutional type	-	-	-	-
Political reform index	.73**	.64*	Not available	Not available
Economics				
GDP	.73**	.72**	.65*	.73**
GDP/1989	.76**	.66*	.82**	.69*
Real wages/1989	.75**	.79**	-	.66*
Economic reform progress	.77**	.76**	.65*	.75**
Social indicators				
Life expectancy	.81**	.82**	.78**	.78**
Life expectancy/1989	.84**	.84**	.76**	.70*

Level of significance: * 95%, ** 99%; - = not significant
Data: 1995, 1998 New Democracies Barometer, own calculation

Table 4: Correlations between macro-variables and evaluation of the new political system

Indicator	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho
	1995	1995	1998	1998
Politics				
Freedom	-	-	-	-.69*
Freedom/1989	-	-	-	.67*
Executive power	-.63*	-	-	-
Number parties in executive	.77**	.65*	-	.62*
Constitutional type	-	-	-	-
Political reform index	.61	-	not available	not available
Economics				
GDP	-	-	-	-
GDP/1989	.84**	.76**	.75*	.58*
Real wages/1989	-	-	-	-
Economic reform progress	.65*	-	-	-
Social indicators				
Life expectancy	.82**	.71**	.66*	.59*
Life expectancy/1989	.84**	.68**	.64*	.58*

Level of significance: * 95%, ** 99%; - = not significant
Data: 1995, 1998 New Democracies Barometer, own calculation

during post-socialism, however, has the strongest correlation. Thus, social developments seem to be a very important factor in producing support for the new system. Economic performance and institutions work their effect on the population through the social conditions they produce. Taking the political variables into consideration, *only few* of the relationships have statistical significance.

Now we turn to the support for the new political system (table 4). Surprisingly, most political variables fail to explain cross-national differences. In 1995, the number of parties in executive has the strongest correlation. The more parties having a share in government, the larger the part of the population that feels represented by the government, which thereby improves satisfaction. Neither freedom nor gains in freedom can explain cross national differences in 1995. The change in economic output and the two indicators of life expectancy show much higher bivariate correlations with public opinion. In 1998, the picture remains largely the same. For the political indicators, only some rank correlations become statistically significant. The change in economic output and the two social indicators remain important, albeit the coefficients are somewhat lower in 1998.

To sum up, political support as well as support of the new economic system is correlated with at least one indicator of each group (politics, economics, social indicators). It is not surprising that all sections mentioned have an impact on both the political and the economic support because it shows the coherence of political, economic and social consequences of transition. Nevertheless the low correlation between political indicators and political support in comparison to the high correlation between socioeconomic indicators and political support is an unexpected result. For the economic support the picture meets our expectations: economic and social developments have an higher impact than political ones.

3 Explaining differences within countries

In order to answer the question of what really matters more, one has to concentrate on micro-level analysis. Therefore, in this section we will use the NDB for identifying the pattern of support within countries. In addition, we will use multivariate methods by means of the Euromodule and the German Welfare Survey in order to identify the relative importance of the determinants of political support.

3.1 Different opinions about system change

In the above section we classified transition countries according to average support. But within countries, people might think very differently about the transformation process (cf. Rose/Mishler 1996). Thus we now will look at different types of supporters in each country and the distribution of these types by means of NDB data from 1995 and 1998. For this purpose we use the same questions concerning system evaluation (as it is today and as it was in the socialist era). The following matrix shows all possible combinations between the *relative* support for the current economic and the *relative* support for the current political system (relative to the former system). Because we are now looking at individuals, we may have the case that for some respondents nearly nothing has changed compared to the socialist past. Therefore the matrix is expanded to a 3-by-3-matrix (table 5).

In order to reduce complexity, we combined some fields to produce five categories of support: (1) people who see political and economic progress (double success); (2) people perceiving a step backwards in both systems (double failure); (3) people who see an improvement in one system but no change in the other (partial success); (4) people who see a deterioration in one system but no change in the other (partial failure); and (5) people who see either no change in both systems or those who see an improvement in one system but a deterioration in the other (no change)[3] These types can be ranked in accordance to their overall system support as follows: double success (highest support), partial success, no change, partial failure, and double failure.

How are these five types distributed in each country? Will we find a vast majority of double-success-votes in countries that have managed transition very well, or is the picture mixed even there? There is no *consensus* in any of the countries when people take stock of transformation (see figure 3). In 1995 this is most obvious in Romania, Slovenia, and Croatia. A relative majority (one third of the population) in these countries discerns no significant

Table 5: Taking stock of transformation: possible combinations

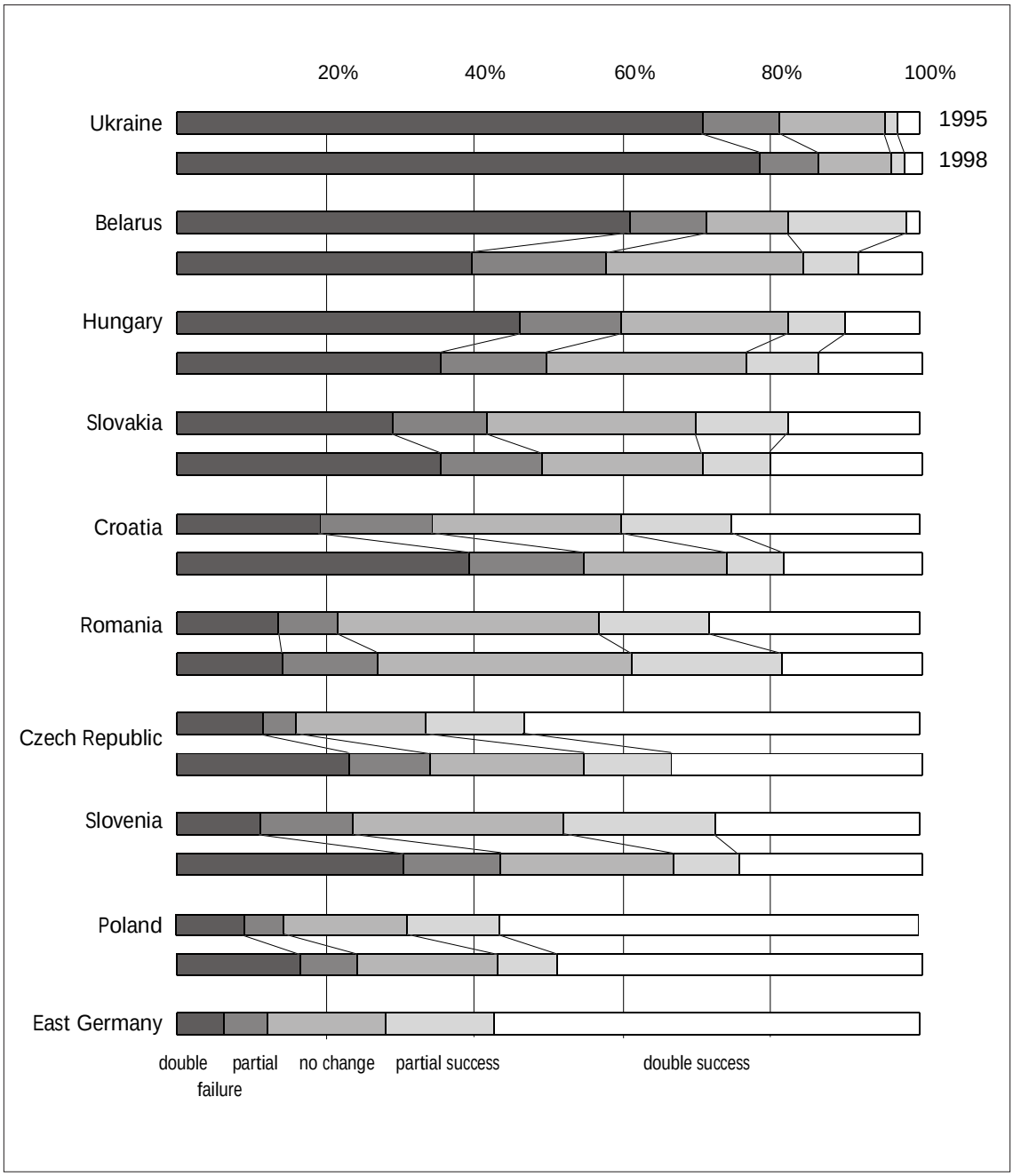
Economic System			
better now	no change (success and failure)	partial success	double success
no change*	partial failure	no change	partial success
worse now	double failure	partial failure	no change (success and failure)
	worse now	no change*	better now
	Political System		

* no change means that the difference is between +/- 10 on a scale ranging from –200 (former system was absolutely better) to +200 (current system is absolutely better)

changes but the segment of the population seeing a double success has nearly the same size. In Slovakia and Bulgaria we also find two large groups, double failure and no change, each representing around one-third of the population.

In the other countries there is a *dominant way of thinking*, either double success or double failure. But one can find all types of support in these countries, too. In East Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic, around two-thirds of the population are satisfied with system change, while around one third is dissatisfied or neutral. The new independent states formerly belonging to the Soviet Union, have by far the smallest group of citizens with a very positive evaluation (double success), and the largest group with a very negative stance. In Hungary, too, negative evaluations are predominant; only one fifth of the population perceives at least a partial success.

Figure 3: Evaluation of New Democracies in Eastern Europe - 1995 and 1998



Data: 1995 and 1998 New Democracies Barometer, own calculation

For most of the countries we find a less encouraging picture in 1998. With the exception of Belarus, Bulgaria, and Hungary, the share of people dissatisfied with transition (partial failure or double failure) has grown, most dramatically in Slovenia and Croatia. In these two countries, the proportion saying that transition was a double failure has doubled from 1995 to 1998. As in 1995, the strongest – negative – consensus can be found in the Ukraine. In Belarus, contrary to the overall development of declining support in the CEEC, the group regarding transition as a double failure has shrunk sharply, but is still large. In Bulgaria the main shift is that the group of joint success has doubled up to a share of one quarter of the population.

Taking these findings together, one can detect a dominant way of thinking in some countries, but a mixture of support in all countries. People who are positively affected by the transition (the "winners") may support the changes whereas the "losers" may not (Juchler 1994: 280, Plasser/Ulram/Waldrauch 1997).[4] Both extreme opinions are inversely distributed, i.e. in countries where the group of winners is large the group of losers is small and vice versa. From 1995 to 1998 evaluations changed in the direction of a less encouraging picture. This might be due to the social consequences of transition that people might not have taken into account in the first years of the process. In order to go deeper into this question, in the next section we will discuss the results of two recent publications showing that on the micro-level, politics matters more than economics; and we will analyze the determinants of political support using more recent data from Hungary and East Germany.

3.2 What matters more for the citizens?

In a few articles the question of what determines mass support in post-communist countries has been answered empirically by using survey data. We discuss two recent articles. Both compare the influence of political and economic output.

By means of the Central and Eastern Eurobarometer (CEEB) 1995, Hofferbert/Klingemann (1999) found that both economic and political output are positively related to satisfaction with democracy. Both anticipation of an improvement in the household's financial situation in the near future and a high level of satisfaction with the human rights conditions in a country leads to a higher level of satisfaction with democracy. But human rights conditions seem to be a more potent force for democratic legitimacy:

> *"In all countries but Albania, views on human rights are stronger predictors of democratic satisfaction than are economic assessments. Respect [of the system, J.D./V.T.] for individual human rights is about twice as important for the gen-*

eration of support for democracy than are personal economic expectations" (ibid.: 170).

Their explanation is that the main shortcoming of the old regimes was the absence of freedom and democratic rights. The revolutions had been for freedom, not for groceries. As a result of these experiences, democratic rights are of utmost importance for current support. Although Hofferbert/Klingemann's figures speak for themselves, one has to bear in mind that each output dimension is measured by just one indicator.

With the New Democracies Barometer 1993 and by using more than just two independent variables, Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer (1998) came to the same conclusion as Hofferbert/ Klingemann: both economics and politics influence support, but politics matters more.

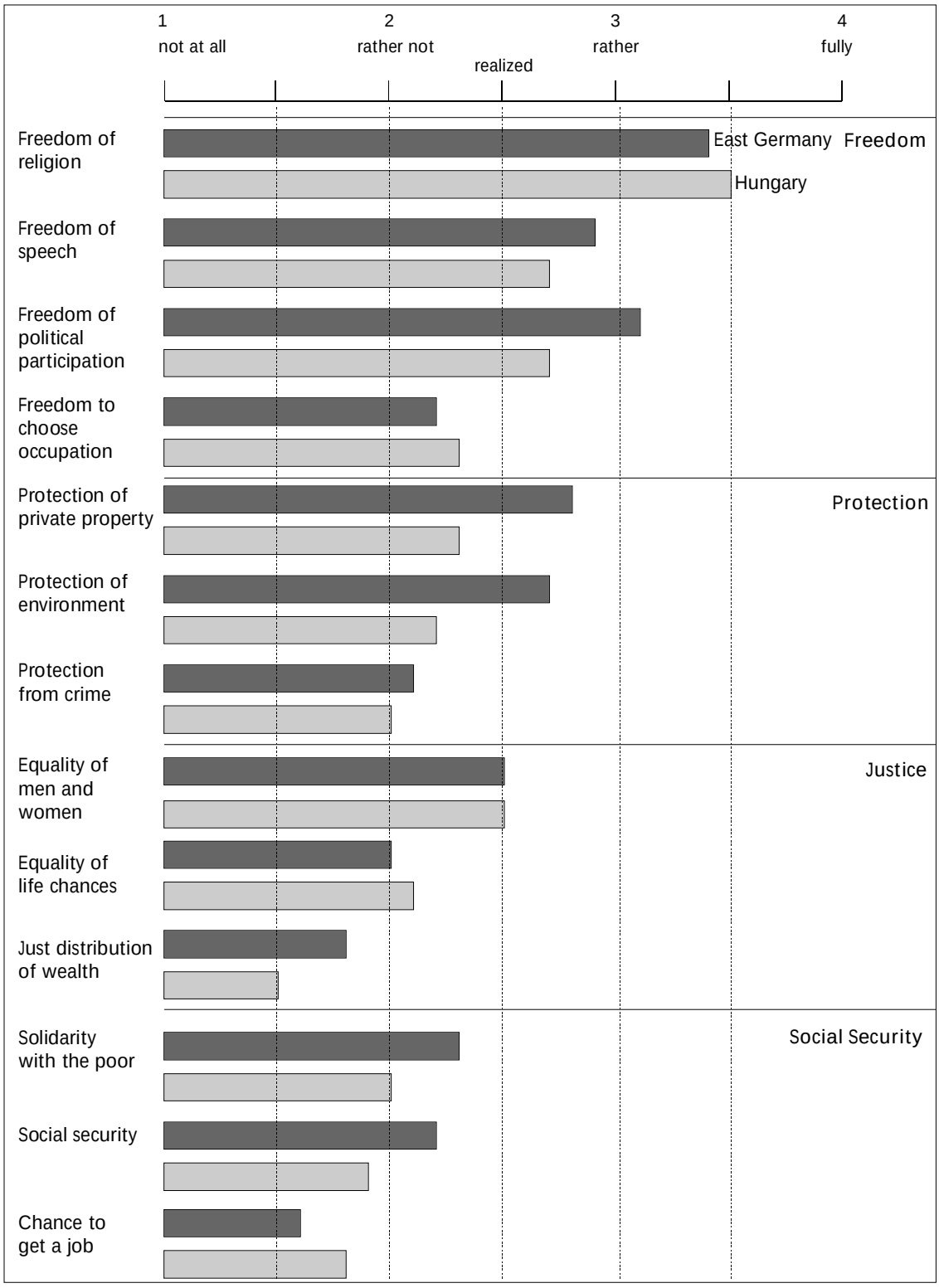
"When a full set of economic influences are combined with a full set of measures of political attitudes, this shows that while some economic attitudes exercise some influence on regime support politics matters more" (ibid.: 178).

Our main critical remark is that computations are not done for the countries separately, but for a fictive country, the NDB-mean, consisting of nine CEECs. Furthermore, in their interpretation they did not mention that the sociotropic evaluation of the current economic system is by far the most important single variable determining support for the new political regime.

In our opinion the major shortcoming of this research is that the dimensions of regime performance measured by the NDB or the CEEB are rather limited. Political output and economic output are included, but several other important dimensions are neglected. According to the World Bank (1997), modern democratic states must provide certain basic services for its citizens. Listed among these services are political liberties, macroeconomic stability, the rule of law, an adequate social safety net, protection of the environment and national defence. Philosophers like Rawls (1975) stress the importance of equal opportunities and social justice. For Rawls justice is the primary virtue of social institutions. Feminists argue that a major criterion for evaluating a system are equal opportunities for men and women.

All these dimensions refer to the quality of a given society in a broader sense and are related to the quality of life of its population. During transition, quality of society has improved along some dimensions, but deteriorated along others (cf. Illner 1998, Matutinovic 1998). On the one hand, the disappearance of rationing and shortages and enlarged opportunities for political participation and private initiative have improved the daily life of many people. On the other hand, throughout the region there has been growing unemployment and poverty and an increase in income inequality. In many countries, crime rates have risen, and the state has proven unable to provide a sufficient social safety net (Milanovic 1995, Gregory 1999b, Speder/Schulz/Habich 1996). The most worrying fact is the declining life expectancy in some societies, mainly in the former Soviet countries. All these aspects might affect satisfaction with democracy.

Figure 4: Perceived realization of public goods: East Germany and Hungary compared (mean scores)



Data: 1998 German Welfare Survey, 1999 Hungarian Euromodule, own calculation

Figure 4 shows for two post-communist countries, Hungary and East Germany, how regime performance is evaluated in a variety of aspects, with data stemming from the Hungarian Euromodule 1999 and the German Welfare Survey 1998. People were asked whether they think that a number of public goods or desired features of society have been achieved in their country. Based on theoretical considerations the items can be grouped into four clusters: items referring to liberties and democratic rights, to protection, to justice, and to social security. This is confirmed by factor analysis to a large extent. Respondents had four options to choose their answer: fully realized, rather realized, rather not realized, and not at all realized. For the purpose of presentation we take the mean scores of the 13 items as an indicator of the degree of perceived realization.

The basic pattern is largely the same in both countries. People are most satisfied with the realization of liberties, followed by protection, justice, and social security. A vast majority regards freedom of religion, of speech, and of political participation as being achieved, but only a minority does so with regard to the just distribution of wealth, protection from crime, social security, and the chance to get a job. The answers show that democratic rights (the political output of post-communist transition in a narrow sense) are seen as more or less guaranteed, whereas the regime performance in other dimensions, especially in the domain of social goods, is evaluated less positively. In these policy areas, the state socialist regimes had claimed to be superior to the capitalist countries. The social consequences of transition has led to widespread feelings of social insecurity and injustice within the population (cf. Delhey 2000), and there might be some nostalgia for the paternalistic security and the egalitarian society of the socialist era.

Another general pattern is that East Germans evaluate the German society a bit better than the Hungarians evaluate their society. For example, East Germans are more satisfied with protection of private property, protection of the environment and with social security issues (albeit not wholly satisfied). This is mainly due to the fact that in the special case of the East German transition a ready made state and huge financial resources have been transferred from West Germany, mitigating the vehemence of social changes (Zapf/Habich 1996). For Hungary, no such "external" assistance has been available. However, the high unemployment in East Germany has led to the impression that chances to get a job are very limited, and thus the freedom to choose an occupation is perceived as mostly unachieved.

By means of OLS regression we explore the impact of these "public goods" on specific support for today's democratic regimes in Germany and Hungary. The respondents' overall satisfaction with democratic institutions in their country, measured on a scale from 0 ('completely dissatisfied') to 10 ('completely satisfied'), serves as the dependent variable. As in the NDB, East Germans show a higher degree of satisfaction than the Hungarians do (mean score of 5.5 in East Germany, 4.6 in Hungary). Independent variables are the above mentioned items referring to "public goods": freedom, security, justice, and protection. Additionally the individual economic situation is included measured as (1) satisfaction with actual standard of living and (2) future expectations concerning living conditions in five years.

Table 6: Explaining satisfaction with democratic institutions

	East Germany		Hungary	
	b	t	b	t
FREEDOM				
... of religion	0.126	1.192	0.125	1.223
... of speech	0.287**	3.463	0.119	1.430
... of political participation	0.462**	4.681	0.346**	4.535
... to choose occupation	0.206*	2.500	-0.078	-1.009
PROTECTION				
... of private property	-0.073	-0.755	0.247*	2.372
... of environment	0.140	1.262	0.068	0.648
... from crime	0.019	0.200	-0.049	-0.456
JUSTICE				
Equality of men and women	0.023	0.255	-0.101	-1.208
Equality of life chances	-0.064	-0.617	0.099	1.118
Just distribution of wealth	0.402**	3.674	0.258*	2.274
SOCIAL SECURITY				
Solidarity with the poor	0.101	0.949	0.098	0.968
Social security	0.158	1.434	0.157	1.350
Chance to get a job	0.014	0.151	0.326**	3.185
ECONOMIC SITUATION				
Satisfaction with standard of living	0.159**	4.264	0.173**	5.147
Future living conditions	0.131**	3.209	0.141**	4.020
Age	0.005	1.327	-0.004	-1.072
Education	-0.020	-0.257	0.035	0.888
Gender	-0.080	-0.661	0.217	1.717
Adj. R^2	0.249	0.241		
N of cases	847	977		

* = significant at .05 level, ** = significant at .01 level.

Scales: Satisfaction with democratic institutions: 0 = completely dissatisfied, 10 = completely satisfied.
Freedom, Protection, Justice, Social Security items: 1 = not realized at all, 4 = fully realized.
Satisfaction with standard of living: 0 = completely dissatisfied, 10 = completely satisfied.
Future expectations of living conditions: 0 = worst, 10 = best.
Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male.
Education (Germany): 1 = no educational degree, 4 = university degree.
Education (Hungary): 1 = no educational degree, 8 = university degree.

Data: 1998 German Welfare Survey, 1999 Hungarian Euromodule, own calculation

With these two variables, we include the material benefit gained from the new political system (economic output) into our model. We also control for age, gender, and education. The results are given in table 6.

For East Germany we find indeed that freedom has a strong impact on satisfaction with political institutions. Three out of four items of this dimension have a high potential influence, right at the front freedom of political participation. From the issues related to justice, we found that only the perception of a just distribution of wealth influences overall satisfaction with politics. Neither the realization of protection nor the achieved social security seem to

influence mass support. Concerning the economic situation, both satisfaction with standard of living as well as future living conditions are decisive. Thus, the more freedom is perceived to be guaranteed, the better the individual economic situation, and the more a just distribution of wealth is achieved, the more East Germans are satisfied with German democratic institutions.

By and large one gets the same picture for Hungary. However, contrary to East Germany, the protection of private property and the chance to get a job are of importance. Concerning freedom, only freedom of political participation has significant influence. In Hungary, specific support correlates with at least one indicator of *all* performance domains taken into consideration. We have strong evidence that the Hungarians consider more than just freedom and the economic situation for their evaluation of the political system.

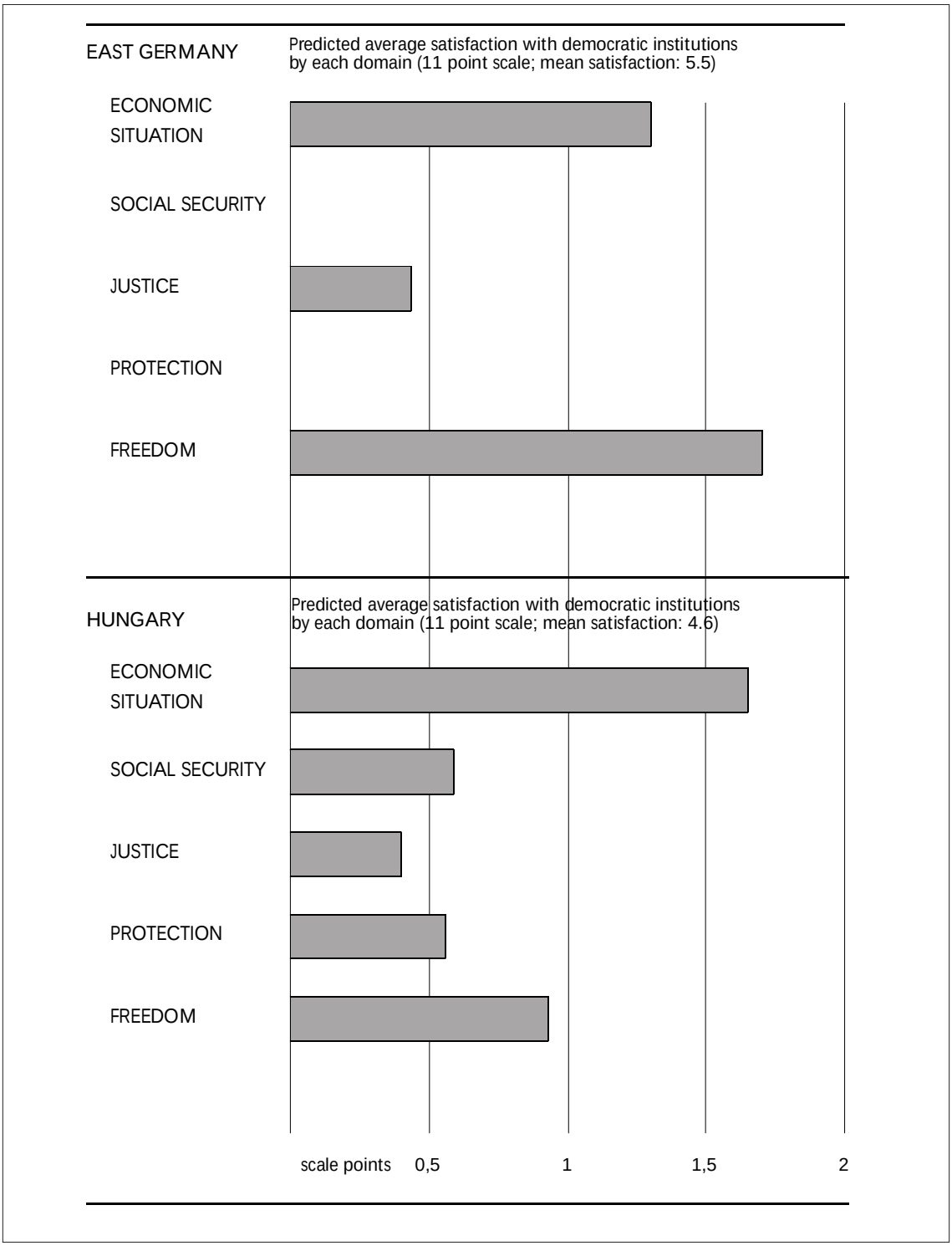
Regression coefficients give us only the *potential* influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. It is not possible to conclude what matters more because of the different scales used for the right side variables. Therefore we calculated the *actual* influence of each determinant, known as the *level-importance* statistics (Achen 1983). This measure is simply the multiplication of the mean of each independent variable by its unstandardized coefficient (b_i). The product is the net contribution to the level of the dependent variable. From figure 5 we learn how much actual influence each factor excerted by adding up the actual influence of all significant items to a total score for each performance domain.

For predicting specific support for the political system in East Germany, the perceived guarantee of liberties and civil rights (freedom) is most important, followed by the individual economic situation. Another, but less important predictor is the just distribution of wealth. Thus, for East Germany our findings confirm the results of Rose/Haerpfer/Mishler (1998) and Hofferbert/Klingemann (1999): Politics and economics matter, but political output matters more.

For Hungary our findings did not bear out the hypothesis. The economic situation is by far the most important predictor for satisfaction with democracy, twice as important as the perceived guarantee of freedom. Social security, protection and justice are also of importance, albeit not prominent. Thus, for Hungary our answer to the question "what matters more: economics or politics?" is twofold: First, economics matter more than freedom, at least after ten years of transition. Second, there are other domains of regime performance like social security, protection, and justice, that are also significant sources of mass support. These dimensions should not be neglected when studying legitimacy in the CEEC. The results raise two questions: (1) Why do East Germany and Hungary differ? And (2) Why do our results for Hungary differ from those cited above.

(1) Why do East Germany and Hungary differ? In part, the answer is already given above. By and large, the living conditions in Hungary are much lower than in East Germany. This means first of all a lower standard of living, but also a less developed social safety net, widespread poverty, a larger gap between the rich and the poor, and higher crime rates.

Figure 5: Actual influence of performance domains for predicting satisfaction with democracy



Data: 1998 German Welfare Survey, 1999 Hungarian Euromodule, own calculation

Whereas this argument refers to the present, a second argument refers to the past: the nature of the socialist regimes. The relatively "liberal" character of the Hungarian socialist regime may provide an additional explanation why freedom is of lower relative importance in Hungary than in East Germany, where the SED-regime had been highly repressive (for variants of socialist regimes, see Brie 1996). In terms of liberties, the East Germans has gained "more" from transformation than the Hungarians. This argument may be supported by the fact, that in 1995 in Hungary and Slovenia, the two countries which experienced the most liberal socialist regimes, human right conditions are only a slightly better predictor for satisfaction with democracy than economic conditions, whereas in other CEEC the difference is bigger (Hofferbert/Klingemann 1999).

(2) Why do our findings for Hungary differ from those cited above? One answer could be: measurement. In the surveys, political and economic output are operationalized differently. Moreover, our data gave us the unique opportunity to include several other dimensions of regime performance which are neglected in the NDB and CEEB. However, we believe that the main answer is: the passage of time. As many scholars have supposed, gains in freedom will have a lower impact on mass support after a few years. People may get used to the newly achieved freedom and discover other problems, e.g. social problems. The losers of post-communist transition may raise the question of how to make use of liberties if social security and an appropriate level of living are not guaranteed. Obviously, at the end of the nineties the times of "glorious political 'battle' for democracy" (Bernik 1994: 168) are over, and the times of "muddling through" have begun. "In the new situation, even the great goals [of 1989, J.D./ V.T.] ... have lost a lot of their previous shine" (ibid.), and people focus more on down-to-earth-problems. Obviously the Hungarians are very much engaged with down-to-earth-problems.

From our two-country-comparison one can derive the following conclusions: (1) As time goes by, freedom loses some of its power for generating mass support in transitional regimes, whereas other aspects of regime performance become more important. (2) This process is influenced by past and present experiences: by the character of the communist regime in a given country (past) and the amount of social and economic problems during transition (present). The more "liberal" the former communist system and the higher the social costs of transformation, the more is specific support for the new system influenced by "hard" economic and social output criteria, and less so by civil liberties.

The answer to the question, what matters more, leads directly to the political question, what should be done? Ten years after the breakdown of communist regimes, improving the welfare of broad strata is the major challenge of East European political leaders:

> *"The societies in transition must eventually become societies of mass consumption. In order for this to occur they will need the safety net of the welfare state to be expanded. If this does not happen, transformation will have been a failure" (Zapf 1997: 43, own translation).*

The improvement of individual welfare – not only for a small minority, but for the population as a whole – is an unsolved problem in many transition countries. As long as many people are confronted with social insecurity and the fear of not getting by, consolidation of democracy – the process of adaptation of behavior and attitudes promoting the stabilization and the effective functioning of the new system – will remain unfinished.

4 Summary

After ten years of transition in Central and Eastern Europe the question of public support and consolidation of democracy is still very important. Specific support for the political regime (Easton 1975) is a key variable in the consolidation process. From an objective view there is a strong relationship between political and economic progress in CEE. There is also a strong relationship between political and economic support. Cross-national differences in support can be well explained by macro indicators. Surprisingly, support for the political regime is more strongly related to social and economic indicators than it is to political indicators. But there are different evaluations within countries, too. In each country there are people who feel very dissatisfied with the current economic and political system compared with the socialist past, as well as people who are very satisfied. From 1995 to 1998 support has declined in most CEEC. This might be due to nostalgia for socialist paternalism, but this might also show that people see their situation more clearly. After achieving freedom they became used to it and started to concentrate more on economic and social consequences of transition. For East Germany we have strong evidence that freedom still is the most important source of regime support. However, for Hungary we have strong evidence that the individual economic situation is the most important predictor for support. The improvement of individual welfare is a decisive but yet unfinished task for politicians in order to achieve a consolidated democracy.

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Notes

1 For East Germany we used the surveys OEKOEPOL 1993, and SOWIBUS 1994, 1995, and 1996. For Russia we used the New Russia Barometer.

2 We have recoded the scale, now ranging from 0 (worst) to 200 (best), with 100 as the neutral point.

3 We have to mention that the group of people who see no changes mostly consists of those who see political progress in combination with economic failure.

4 For the sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics of winners and losers in Hungary and East Germany, see Habich/Speder 1998, Bird/Frick/Wagner 1998.

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