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REVIEWS

A review of the book:

Political Science in Central-East Europe. Diversity and Convergence,
eds. Rainer Eisfeld, Leslie A. Pal, IPSA/AISP, Barbara Budrich Publishers
(Germany), Opladen 2010, pp. 317

by Iwona Reichardt

In 2010, Barbara Budrich Publishers (Germany) published a book titled *Political Science in Central-East Europe. Diversity and Convergence* on the development and state of political science in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. The book is a collection of 19 country reports (Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine), which, collectively, provide the much needed account on the discipline's institutionalization throughout the region. Individual chapters – written by academic professors or lecturers – include such information as the state of research, teaching, major books and journals, international cooperation, public

impact. The chapter on Polish political science was written by professor Teresa Sasinska-Klas, at the time of the publication, the President of the Polish Political Science Association.

The idea of the publication originated from the 2008 International Political Science Association (IPSA) Inter-Congress in Montreal which focused on the state of the discipline throughout the world. The momentum of conference discussions was prolonged by an initiative of the IPSA Executive Committee to prepare a book publication of country cases. This initiative was led by two internationally recognized political scientists and members of the IPSA Executive Committee – professor Rainer Eisfeld of Germany and professor Leslie A. Pal of Canada, who took the role

of the book's editors. In addition, thanks to professor Irmina Matonyte, the President of the Lithuanian Political Science and member of the IPSA Executive Committee, the talks over the problem discussed in the book took the form of a workshop organized in Vilnius in October 2009. This event, along with the initial discussions of the topic during the Montreal Congress, show that the book is more a reflection of a real-life dialogue between political scientists in the region than a mere collection of submitted papers.

Hence, the publication of the book was judged a big success. The President of IPSA, professor Leonardo Morlino, called it "a model for similar studies – a major contribution to the understanding of our discipline in the context of state power and international influences" and gave the publication the Association's recommendation.

As indicated in the subtitle – diversity and convergence – the work identifies main factors that have influenced both continuing disciplinary differences and tendencies towards standardization between countries. First, the reader's attention is drawn by different paths that Eastern European countries have taken towards democracy and how these paths are reflected in the shape of a political science within these countries. For example, as pointed out by the editors, "where autocratic elements have persisted, the institutionalization of political science has

been negatively affected." An interesting case is Belarus – as described by professor Svetlana Naumova – where the pressure of the authoritarian regime has resulted in a split within political science between two camps: that of an ideology versus independent research.

On the regional level, different forms of political transformations have led some unexpected changes within the discipline itself. The most noticeable is probably the sparking interest in system theories and constantly changing political reality, which, in turn, required an approach that is descriptive and institution-oriented. The drawback of this seemingly strong focus on the understanding of political reality and systems has been – as pointed out by professors Eisfeld and Pal – a virtual absence of any critical theory of politics or society. Undoubtedly, this characteristic of political science in Eastern and Central Europe puts it in great contrast with its counterparts in Western Europe and North America where the tradition of critical theory continues to develop and has already undergone several transformations.

The attributed reason to such state of the art in Eastern Europe is the legacy of Marxist ideology which was forced on academic discourse under the previous system. Interestingly, the reader can find out about two academic centers in the former Yugoslavia, namely the Research Center for Critical Politology at the Institute

for Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb (Croatia) which continue to develop critical theories. In the remaining countries, the general tendency of the transformation period has downplayed critical theories in favor of anti-empirical normativism and descriptive research methods.

Although the shape of a discipline, which is a human activity, created by people who practice it in their research and teaching, is mainly a result of internal, country-specific factors, the editors of the book point out a few external factors which also played a significant role in the changes that took place within the analyzed countries. The exchange of ideas between Western and Eastern scholars as well as cooperation with international development agencies (USAID, the World Bank, EU) were of crucial importance. These contacts have attributed to a growing interest in empirically-oriented political science, which, in turn, redirected the focus of the discipline towards current politics and public policy making as practiced in the countries of the region.

In addition, the editors believe, that among many contributors to such a change the work of one individual deserves special attention. The person in question is George Soros whose interventions, through the Open Society Institute (OSI) and national foundations, supported numerous research endeavors focused on

democracy and civil society building as well as introduced Western standards of social science education. Finally, the authors of country cases identify the EU educational policy, formulated in the Bologna Declaration and its implementation at the country level, as a big step pushing Eastern and Central European countries towards convergence.

The chapter about Poland is most interesting when analyzed from the perspective of predominate tendencies at the regional level. The distinguished feature of Polish political science – as compared to other countries in the region – was a relatively advanced stage of the discipline's development at the early stage of the political transformation initiated in the early 1990s. Throughout the Polish report professor Sasinska-Klas provides examples showing that – unlike in many other socialist countries – Polish political science has managed to get through the thickness of the Iron Curtain and, starting from the 1960s, has been heavily oriented towards the West. This characteristic allowed Poland's political science to enter a new era of liberal democracy with advanced theories, well-developed research methods and established contacts with the outside world. Despite this initial advantage Poland's political science still faces many challenges which require greater openness to other disciplines, strengthening the quality of research, pluralism in theories and methodologies.

Summing up, while the reading of individual units presents a more in-depth picture of the analyzed country, the message of the book is better understood when perceived as a whole. The picture of political science as a discipline in the region comprised of states transitioning from a communist system to liberal democracy depicts interesting tendencies. On the one hand, successful attempts have been made to increase the quality of research and

teaching, and re-orient political science towards contemporary affairs and policy-oriented analysis. On the other hand, the overhang of Marxist ideology, has slowed down, or in some cases it even eliminated the development of critical theories, which can have a negative effect on both academic and public debates. Consequently, the book emerges as a critical reflection on both achievements and challenges that characterize political science in our region.

A review of the book:

Syndrome of a Peacock and a Parrot. 20 years of Political Transformation in Poland
[*Syndrom pawia i papugi. 20 lat transformacji ustrojowej Polski*], ed. Marek
Sokołowski, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2010, pp. 264

by Małgorzata Kamola-Cieślik

In Poland's most recent history, year 2009 was a time to celebrate a special anniversary. Twenty years ago, events that started a political transformation in Poland took place. They were connected with the Round Table Talks, elections to the so-called Contract Sejm and the fact that Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the Prime Minister. In 2009 Poland also celebrated 70th anniversary of II World War, 10th anniversary of its admission to NATO and 5th anniversary of joining the European Union. The celebrations of these

events involved exhibitions, conferences and scientific seminars. Articles were written and television networks broadcast interviews and documentaries about the recent historical events that happened in Poland's history.

The 20th anniversary of the collapse of communism coincided with publications trying to assess the political transformation in Poland.¹ One of them was the book

¹ G.W. Kołodko, J. Tomkiewicz (eds.), *20 lat transformacji. Osiągnięcia, problemy, perspektywy*,