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CHANGES OF POLITICAL THEORIES IN THE COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract

In the countries of Middle and Eastern Europe the collapse of „real socialism” was followed by the annulment of political and ideological supervision over scientific researches. Since then the political theory has been developing in an unembarrassed way, drawing investigative patterns with the tradition of western political sciences. From this perspective, the expression „westernization” used with regard to political theory signifies the process of going away from Marxism and historical materialism. The article focuses on two essential trends of this process. The main consequence is the pluralization of theoretical bases of investigations, which signifies not only differentiation, but also the lack of predominant theory. The international program for monitoring the development since 1990, shows that new investigative trends disclose a division between the traditional and current model of politology, which demonstrates the topicality of arguments raised in western academic debates over the theoretical condition and status of political science discipline.

Key words

political theory, political sciences, european politology.

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1. Introduction

The break-up of the “Eastern bloc” and the political transformation of countries which co-created it bore a significant influence not only on the political or economic dimension of social life, but to an equal extent involved the sphere of organization of science, as well as the direction of research that was pursued. It seems that these, in turn, had a special significance in the development of disciplines, which from a standpoint of the assumptions of real socialism,

could have had a functional or dysfunctional influence on the ideological legitimization of the regime. Undoubtedly, among such disciplines a prominent place was occupied by political science, hence in a socialist reality it was to a greater or lesser extent monitored, subject to control, and sometimes exposed to the restrictions imposed by state authority. The practice had in essence applied on one hand to different forms of administrative, and material support of research referring to the theoretical perspective of Marxism, championed by authorities of that

time, on the other hand to the attempts of limiting the development of alternative theoretical streams, in that especially such that could potentially disavow or critically verify these scientific achievements.

Undoubtedly, the mechanisms of material and symbolic support of an ideologically involved political science appeared in diversified intensity, and with varying effect on the territories of particular socialist countries. H.D. Klingemann (2002), one of the coordinators of the international programme analyzing these matters, among others, specifies three groups of countries. Among those enlisted as imposing a high level of ideological control were Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. In Poland and Hungary there was rather a limited degree of ideological involvement of science in politics, and the least involved country was Slovenia. Independently, however of the degree of political interference in scientific research, the sheer fact of the existence of such practice was considered an important factor allowing the possibility of development of a modern political science and shaping the structure of research in the discipline.

It is worth emphasizing, that in reality the preconditions of research in political science of that period are much more complex. On one hand, an ideological relationship of political science does not imply a complete lack of its development, on the other hand non-political factors also had influenced its shape. As stressed by T. Klementewicz (1991), a prominent role in the development of political theory was played, among others by the practice of substituting of the sphere of methodology with vernacular consciousness. In this sense a part of the research had an „atheoretical” character, founded on a colloquial vision of the world, and an interpretation of politics resulting from it that is generically different from the conceptual implications which follow from Marxist theory.

Together with the abolition of ideological control over the direction of research in political science in these countries, unhampered development of approaches differing from historical materialism was initiated, which to a significant degree has shaped modern traditions of research in political science. International monitoring of research, which began in the nineteen nineties allows us presently to formulate generalized conclusions and observations characterizing the directions of development, as well as theoretical tendencies in the development of political science in this region. Among many interesting conclusions, it is worth pondering especially on three issues characterizing current trends in the transformation of theoretical foundations of political science research in countries of Central and

Eastern Europe, associated with „westernization” and pluralization of political theory.

2. „Westernization” as a trend of changes

It ought, however to be emphasized, that branding the processes of acquiring theoretical standards of research in politics as “westernization” has a rather conventional and somewhat subversive resonance. After all, the theory of Karl Marx, which in the countries of real socialism subsequently became the standard of “objective” insight into the processes of social development, is undoubtedly a product of Western thought. Paradoxically, through developing a scientific worldview socialist countries preserved Western norms of perception of reality, based on strong faith in the power of knowledge and reason. Currently, together with acquiring other standards of research from Western political science, they somewhat reluctantly refer to the class social theory. Meanwhile, a research perspective referring to Marxist tradition is still an important, inspiring and increasingly often explored theoretical approach in Western countries. According to D. Marsh (2002), current references to Marxist theory offer instruments of analysis of market conditions of the current social world that are very cognitively attractive. Societal realities characteristic of liberal systems, designating contradictions and economic inequalities also on the international plane, creating susceptible ground for enlivening, as well as the development of tradition in social science. Assumptions referring to historical materialism and dialectic analysis of social contradictions are still a valid subject of polemics associated with methodological foundations of contemporary political science research, pertaining to comparatistics of theoretical approaches, and also the possibility of applying functional explaining (Elster, 2003; Cohen, 2003). The meaning of this tradition is illustrated inter alia by the fact that Marxist social theory is treated as one of the main inspirations in the thought of J. Baudrillard and J.F. Lyotard, two prominent theorists of postmodernism, exerting probably the strongest influence on the transformations of contemporary social research (Benton, Craib, 2003).

What westernization of political theory means here is rather that presently, in place of a model of research based on historical materialism, what is implemented is theoretical standards, shaped and developed within the political science of Western European countries and the United States. The focus is above all on approaches alluding to the assumptions of postbehavioralism, neoinstitutionalism,

systemic analysis, the theory of rational choice and functionalism. This regularity is illustrated by a selection of reports characterizing the theoretical structure of research conducted in faculties of political science in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which evidently exhibits references to the research tradition of Western political science (tab. 1).

The phenomenon of „westernization“ of political theory in countries of the former Eastern bloc understood in this way should not however be identified with a simple transfer and an analogous representation of research streams developed in Western political science. The theoretical influences of English-speaking political science overlap with the cultural specificity and historically determined research tradition, which grant an idiosyncratic feature to interpretations of research ideas in conditions of the socio-economic transformation of Central and Eastern Europe. Characterizing this constancy J. Gunnell and D. Easton (1991) had emphasized, that even if in different countries reference and transfer of assumptions, methods, discoveries or theories from American political science takes place, it does not imply direct cloning of the attainments of this discipline in other countries. During this import many aspects are subject to significant modifications under the influence of cultural adaptation to local conditions. Hence, the nature of the international exchange of knowledge cannot be judged in isolation from its cultural varieties and modifications associated with it. One should not forget, that the exchange of ideas that inspires research approaches can be a decisive

milestone. It does not only happen unidirectionally or unilaterally from the Western tradition to other regions. Works of political scientists from particular countries can be equally successfully, however in different degree aggregated to the area of American political science or at least become an inspiration leading to an especial degree of absorption or interpretation.

Presently, however, it is difficult to negate the fact, that dominating research trends are shaped within Western research facilities, where the “mainstream” of political science discourse takes place. Although their domination does not have to be associated with qualitatively better research practice, the leading role of Western political science is ensured by at least two significant factors. The first, associated with the numerical superiority of researchers of political science, as well as the work published by them, and the second with the material potential, that constitutes a significant source of aid for the realization of bold scientific undertakings, as well as a necessary means for the dissemination and popularisation of results obtained. In this context it is demographic factors, alongside material-organizational resources, which cause contemporary global political science discourse to become dominated by representatives of English speaking countries, and in the quantitative dimension, by the continent of North America. Symptomatic in this respect is the data quoted by Ebron Kirkpatrick, who in the nineteen-seventies of the 20th century as Executive Director of APSA (American Political Science Association), famously

Tab. 1. Comparison of the theoretical basis of political research in countries of Eastern Europe and Germany

	Central and Eastern Europe (in the year 2000)	West Germany (in the year 1996)	
theoretical approach	Number of faculties, where particular approaches are pursued	Position in the ranking of importance	Percentage of respondents considering a given stream as important for the realization of their research
historical	32	2	52
systemic theory	27	3	38
functionalism	19	6	18
neo-institutionalism	18	1	54
behavioralism	16	7	16
theory of rational choice	14	5	26
hermeneutics	12	4	41
game theory	5	9	13
marxism	5	10	12
existentialism	2	12	4
phenomenology	2	8	15
cybernetics	1	10	11

Source: Klingemann (2002, p. 211).

stated: "Out of the seventeen thousand political scientists currently working, fourteen thousand live and work in the United States of America. Regardless of the overall number of publications in the field of political science, 95 percent is also published in the United States of America" (Freeman, 1991, p. 22).

Moreover, expenditures destined for conducting scientific research, especially popularisation of knowledge about political science in Western countries are incomparable with the possibilities of countries that had once experienced the command-and-quota economy. The socio-economic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe is associated with different priorities than supporting ambitious research undertakings, which are however often seen as tangential. As a consequence, not only the most important centers and research programmes, but also the main channels of distribution and resources of knowledge organizations became the domain of Western countries. Meanwhile, the influences and impact on the research orientation of the leading theoretical streams should be perceived as a consequence of easier access to channels of knowledge distribution, which, through engaging economic means are considered more prestigious and opinion-forming. During organization of research it is primarily those means, which have meaning in the process of structuring, authorization, and legitimization of research approaches that are the result of discussion, negotiation and agreement on a position. They pertain, among other things, to editorial control of publishers or research facilities over the most prestigious and influential journals, and also the possibility of their financing, advertising and marketing strategies popularising particular academic accomplishments (Almond, 1990).

Resources of global institutions such as Blackwell Publishing, Sage or Sunny Press, and also the means, which are at the disposal of these publishing behemoths assigned to promoting a publication, regardless of the epistemic value of approaches it presents, significantly contributes to the range of their influence. In consequence, the work published there acquires publicity, prestige, and recognition due to an ability to effectively combine cognitive effort with material organization of the popularizing efforts. These organizational-economic and cultural determinants of scientific discourse put political scientists from Central and Eastern Europe in a difficult situation, who naturally are faced with difficulties resulting from a need to build up proficiency in the English language. Difficulties in mastering the language, as a basic medium of communication, reduce the influence of non-English speaking political science discourses on the development of main

research traditions. These can develop or apply the peripheral surrounding of the core of particular theoretical traditions, having a modest chance of a significant voice in global discourse without an English translation.

This constancy also pertains to Western countries where the language is other than English. The remarks of J. Łoziński, a translator of German-language publications from the area of political science are especially telling in this matter. Whilst justifying why he preferred the Polish translation of a book by German political scientist K. von Beyme, he noticed a significant cultural fact. "Hence, firstly the American social sciences makes ample use of the achievements (also terminological) of German – understanding – social science, and after more or less three-quarters of a century we can observe how German political science obediently acquires ready English phrases, or even the syntax of the language of American political science. (...) As we can see they became technical terms in different language circles as well" (Łoziński, 2005, p. 11).

The processes of transforming the theoretical structure of political science research in particular countries, however, took place at different pace, depending on the degree of institutionalization of political science, as well as the communication skills and participation of research environments in international academic discourse. An important role is ascribed especially to international conferences, research associations and their domestic branches. These institutions presently constitute representative centers of knowledge, fulfilling basic functions in the processes of standardization of knowledge, scientific legitimation of new theoretical streams, and also the formation of a hierarchical structure together with research elites in academic circles. Among the most important international organizations bringing together researchers of politics the following are often listed: International Political Science Association (APSA), Central European Political Science Association (CEPSA) and The European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR). Whereby all of these international organisations seek the creation of national branches, The International Political Science Association (IPSA) can be an example, with its national branches (PTNP in Poland), within the framework of which special organs are established, which aim to concentrate on particular issues, e.g. the formed as part of IPSA in the nineteen-seventies special Committee on Conceptual and Terminological Analysis (COCTA). The main role of any structure of this type is – as emphasized by W. McKinley (2003) – the aggregation of subjective perceptions of reality on its subjective reception. As part of

these processes sanctioning of a particular order of speech and methodological discipline of investigation characteristic of a given tradition in research programmes carried out is accomplished.

3. Pluralization as a result of modernization

A substantial phenomenon connected with the processes of aggregating theoretical models of political science investigation is a tendency to pluralize political theory, which is clearly on the rise. Although in the Western research tradition periods were recorded when a particular theoretical perspective that referred to the historical-comparative, behavioral or functional paradigm of research had dominated, they had never gained supremacy as outright as the historical materialism in the countries of the former USSR. Since the early stages in the formation of political science as a separate academic discipline, the theoretical basis of research was more or less diverse and drew upon different research approaches. Temporary domination of particular theoretical streams was to a greater extent the result of "internal" rivalry in academic debate, as well as confrontation of justifications and arguments clashing within scientific discourse, rather than a result of political pressures or institutional limitations. From the nineteen seventies in Western political science what had increasingly intensified was a tendency to undermine the possibility of a complex explanation of the political sphere in a homogeneous methodological perspective in favor of accepting a wider catalogue of theoretically varied and scientifically equitable research approaches. In research practice, this implied a differentiation of methodological orientations and conceptualizations, as well as legitimization of theoretical pluralism. In circumstances of free debate conditions are created that are in favor of forming new approaches based on theoretical interpretations that are groundbreaking for a particular discipline (LeCompte, 1990). As emphasized by D. Latin (2003), political science discourse of that period was focused on great dilemmas and all types of "isms", which were supposed to be a potential epistemic alternative for research tradition up to date.

According to views of enthusiasts of this process, a wider opening to theoretical pluralism means passing from research that is unidimensional, reductionist and concentrated on a scientific methodological to a perspective that is multidimensional, directed on attempts of a more complete clarification – within the scope of a wider panorama – of research approaches and rational assessment of the explanatory usefulness of assertions. In some interpretations

this turn is also presented as a consequence of scientific „maturation“ of political science, which does not only concentrate on a simple description and explanation of political practice, but also acquires features of an autoreflexive discipline (Oren, 2006).

Meanwhile, the experience of real socialism in countries of Central and Eastern Europe had to a great extent limited open debates on the possibilities of discursive exploration of politics. Hence, it can be expected, accustomation to a particular cognitive formula as the only possibility of scientific legitimization of political science research can be significantly stronger, than in Western political science. Ultimately, however the decisive factor will be an ability to demonstrate openness to new ideas and theoretical streams, as well as critical tolerance of development of alternative research approaches. Currently, in Poland, the main research traditions are rather continuously monitored, and to a greater or lesser extent permeate to the domestic accomplishments of political scientists. These influences were, in fact, visible earlier, independently of the approach dominating in research practice, and have shaped the consciousness of the diverseness of theoretical-methodological approaches in political science. Assurance of the existence of such consciousness in the Polish tradition of political science can be obtained, for instance by contemplating the reflections of F. Ryszka, found in a textbook from 1981. This elaboration, apart from describing methods representative of the empirical approach, widely treats on the subject of systemic analysis in the cybernetic interpretation of D. Easton, functional interpretation of T. Parsons, and the communication interpretation of K. Deutsch, in addition, it mentions the application of game theory along with the decision-making approach in political science research (Ryszka, 1981).

However, until the nineteen nineties matters of issues resulting from the theoretically diversified structure of research were usually perceived at an average level of generalization and rather only aspectually mentioned along with discussing categories or political science terms. The issues of theoretical diversification of political science were raised to a significantly greater extent in later years. An overview of all of the compelling theoretical streams shaping contemporary approaches to politics research can be found in Polish-language articles and elaborations of that period (more see: Nocoń, 2010). Echoes occur here of a discussion undertaken over modernization and theoretical diversification of approaches in political science, taking into consideration observations of the skeptics of these tendencies. This concerns especially the arguments of G.G. Almond or J. Gunnell, perceiving the dangers of fragmentation

and a lack of correlation between particular research traditions, and also fears of ahistoricity and alienation of modern political science (Gunnell, 1991). Correspondingly as in American political science, with which a particular model of political science is associated, a division into traditionally oriented political scientists and researchers more open to contemporary trends becomes noticeable.

Finally however, in the light of analysis of the theoretical foundation of political science research in Poland, it seems, that presently a traditional model of political science, based on the historical and empirical cognitive perspective dominates. Data prepared at the beginning of the new millennium, as part of the international programme of research on the development of political science in countries of Central-Eastern Europe illustrate, that the main research approaches represented are: Behavioralism – 3, Cybernetics – 0, Existentialism – 0, Hermeneutics – 2, Marxism – 0, Theory of rational choice – 4, Game theory – 2, Neoinstitutionalism – 3, Historical approach – 7, Functionalism – 2, Phenomenology – 0, Systemic approach – 4, Organizational theory – 4. Authors of the report on the state of political science research – S. Gebethner and R. Markowski – notice that despite new theoretical approaches are recognized, their presence is limited to detailing the methodological debates conducted in Western elaborations, rather than using them in research practice (Gebethner, Markowski, 2002). A certain degree of conservatism in this matter is visible also in some textbook studies in the field of political theory, methodology of political science research, or an introduction to political science, all of which exhibit a problem structure that takes into consideration the paradigmatic aspects of political science analysis only marginally, or not at all. Their undisputed advantage is, however, drawing from the Polish variation of research tradition, which preserves properties characteristic of it, independently of the influence of historical materialism and the impact of German, French, British, and finally American political science. The focus here is especially on the influences of normatively oriented theory in the works of F. Ryszka, J. Baszkiewicz, analytically oriented approach of the so called “Bodnarowska School” organized around the Central Methodic Hub and the so-called “Poznańska School” of J. Kmita, J. Topolski and L. Nowak, in which elements can be found referring to hermeneutics and the “humanist interpretation”. In the context of relations between a homogeneous and pluralist model of political science, it seems that an observation by T. Klementewicz formulated at the beginning of the nineteen nineties, stating that in Poland “the dispute between traditional and theoretical political science

has a hidden, or likewise silent nature” (Klementewicz, 1991, p. 8) does not currently lose relevance.

Together with the globalization and mass communication processes, it can be expected that in countries of Central and Eastern Europe the ties between political science and a theoretical tradition developed within the limits of Western political science will tighten. This process will have a significant influence on directions of transformation within political science as a discipline, and a shift of the prevailing manner of perceiving the structure of knowledge about politics. Certainly a wider debate on the role and meaning of political theory in processes of conceptualization and interpretation of results of empirical research becomes unavoidable (Levy, 1998) The process can be considered, according to T. Klementewicz’s designation, as theoretization of political science, which became “the direction of reorientation of the theoretically-methodological awareness of political scientists” (Klementewicz, 1991, p. 45). Subsequently, following the path of Western political science, it can be expected that interest in historical studies on the development of political science will rise, what in a situation of theoretical diversification can constitute an important point of departure for serious discussions over the condition, identity, methodological status and growth trends of the discipline in countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Condren, 1997).

4. Conclusion

Western trends in the transformations of the theoretical structure of political science research presumably imply a need to recognize and appreciate the social roles and cultural determinants of the research conducted. They are a phenomenon strongly justifying arguments in favor of perceiving science as one of the social processes, which has a dynamic character and is distinguished by particular modernization trends. This pertains also to the epistemic and methodological standards, which in a traditional model of political science were often considered constant and unchanging. This feature of scientific knowledge is emphasized inter alia by B. Krauz-Mozer, who wrote: “The system of rules and procedures which are in force in research and constituting of the value of scientific knowledge is not something unchanging or infallible. (...) These socially created and socially accepted norms of epistemic behavior are not eternal, do not hold universal value, moreover, they change depending on the time, place or cultural distinctiveness of societies” (Krauz-Mozer, 2007, p. 20–21). From this point of view the dynamics and transformations

of the theoretical structure of knowledge about politics can be perceived not so much as a manifestation of an anomaly, but rather a natural symptom of developmental trends in political science.

With the passage of time it can certainly be expected that in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, not unlike Western political science, wider acceptance will be acquired by postulates of a greater opening of political science to new ideas and a critical tolerance towards competing research approaches, which is a necessary step in the progressive development of political science. Of course, it is not about perfunctory incorporation of any theoretical "fads", but of open possibilities of their participation in wider academic debate, as part of which their critical verification, potential modification, and in effect, at times also association into existing epistemic standards takes place.

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