

One year ago, not one country in Eastern Europe had held a democratic election in over forty years. By the end of this year, with the exception of Albania, the ballot box will have been tried in every country of the region.

It is probable that most East Europeans would like to throw out the Communists. And, even with the short notice available for opposition parties to form themselves and campaign, it is probable that Communists will not fare well. So what awaits these brave, pioneering democrats? What awaits them is what will have brought them to the power in the first place: economies in a state of virtual collapse, in such bad shape that it would almost be easier to start from scratch than to salvage prosperity from the mess which now exists.

The problems vary in degree from country to country. But there is a common illness with a common pathology. We know the symptoms:

- outdated, and in some cases non-existent infrastructures;
- old, inefficient and outmoded industrial sectors;
- mountains of foreign debt;
- inflationary pressures;

- price and wage structures totally unrelated to real costs;
- and currencies barely worth the paper they are printed on.

Finally - and perhaps most importantly - there is a crisis of attitude. We tend to think that initiative is innate. That born in every human is the desire to compete, to make a profit, to get out there and hustle. But these habits too are cultural. They are not automatic. It is a contradiction in logic to suggest that one can "teach initiative" any more than one can legislate democracy.