motivation for long-term effort within the framework of international competitiveness and globalisation.

This already busy agenda of these countries gets even more complicated by the fact that in more than one respect it proves to be contradictory. For example, large-scale privatisation is needed, but privatisation, at least in the beginning, determines workforce redundancies, with serious effects on the domestic product and on democratic support; the opening of capital markets to foreign investments, absolutely indispensable, may inhibit the initiatives of the domestic capital, which, in its turn, is equally needed in view of durable reconstruction; making economic activities profitable often conflicts with the tendency of preserving already established organisations, sustained by popular vote; etc. **However, it is exactly such a busy and often contradictory agenda that needs to be applied in order to achieve reconstruction by transition in the societies of South-eastern Europe.**

By 2003, the mentioned societies in South-eastern Europe had assumed privatisation, market economy, political pluralism, and the rule of the law. Consequently, their reconstruction as open societies is in progress. However, these societies have largely remained one whole not just due to their previous history, but also due to the stage they have reached in applying the reforms adopted so far. In their particular case, privatisation has been achieved to a lesser extent, administrative decentralisation has been hesitant, foreign capital influx has stayed relatively modest, the emergence of the functional market is still slow, pressure exerted towards social compensation, against the background of poor private initiative, has been higher. Where does this slower rhythm of changes come from? The answer at hand is: "from the history of this region". **My opinion is that history can explain a lot of things, but it cannot always entirely explain everything.** Among the factors that should be considered, there are factors other than history (the relative distance at which South-eastern Europe has always been from the rest of Europe during the modern age, the sternness of the communist dictatorships in the region etc.). I will try to identify these factors by drawing a brief comparison with the evolution of the societies in Central Europe.

2

In Central Europe, countries once members of the Eastern socialist system – Hungary, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Poland – have undergone a more rapid transition to open society and have got further in this direction. Their economy is more competitive, their administration is more flexible and efficient, foreign capital investments have become substantial, market has become indeed the main controller of economy, the entrepreneurial initiative has gained ground. How can we explain this advance?

In this case, too, historical factors (a stronger affiliation of these countries to the history of Western and Central Europe, cultural affinity for the West, stronger modern traditions in economy, administration, mentality) and the geographical proximity to the West can be invoked. **However, not even here can history and geography account for everything.** Undoubtedly, the proximity to western markets and the influence of western democratic traditions represent an advantage, and this advantage could be noticed throughout the entire post-war period: in Central European countries, private economy has survived to a larger extent even under communist regimes or was re-established partially under these conditions, the single-party dictatorship had to compromise under the pressure of civic movements and of the churches, individual freedoms were wider, western assistance stronger.

However, the advantage of proximity to the West from which Central European countries benefited cannot be considered – as it continues to be by improvised explanations and by ideologies