

Assisting the Transition Process: Speed, Clarity and Definition

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As a representative of the 'new democracies' that constitute the Višegrad four and the Vilnius group, I share the obligation felt by all our countries to support the cause of those trying to break away from their communist past. Observation of the transformation process in each of our countries throws light upon a shared condition that I believe is vital to successful transition. No matter how different our approaches to transition were, whether we promoted the use of roundtables, a 'velvet revolution', or an emphasis on national liberation, there was one thing that seemed to ultimately decide the success or difficulty of our experience, and that was speed.

The quicker the transition the better the consequences, whatever the circumstances. After all, transition is a struggle that can result in both indecision and uncertainty that not only prolongs the suffering of the people, but makes the whole transition process much more difficult, and the efficiency of the transition much slower. Speed, I believe, lessens the level of suffering and results in a higher chance of success.

In order to enhance the process of transition there must also be clarity, that is to say the public must be aware of one's agenda, one's future activities and plans. Democratic transition cannot be implemented by an academic elite; rather, transition must have the support of the people. Only by making one's agenda crystal clear to the public from the outset can one guarantee no loss of energy and time in futile disputes.

Another problem of clarity, of course, is defining the opponent. If one wants to perform a successful transition, it is vital to cut the strength of one's opponent as much as possible. We are talking here not about physical attack, but rather about a clear cut moral condemnation of the previous regime. Of course, there will be a small number of the most visible criminals which will have to be legally punished, but the emphasis must be not on the moral castigation of each and every communist, but of communism per say. Such public and open condemnation restricts any possible romanticization of the regime by the people. So how do we come to define those people who will lead the revolution? As mentioned before, leaders and those participating in the revolution must not be those people that have supported the regime at any point in time. Potential leaders must be supported and developed with the help of the outside world through the use of media and international awareness.

Another extremely important issue is the dismantling of the secret police. If we are talking about diminishing the strength of the opponent, then we have to bear in mind that however paranoid it may sound, a large part of communist society has been impregnated by the secret police. Yet one cannot and should not perform a witch-

hunt. Rather one must take into account the differences between cases, individual and moral explanations and so on. The most important thing is to deprive these circles of their weapons; that is to say take away their possibilities for moral torture, blackmail and all resources given to them by the state, by making society and processes open, clear and transparent.

Finally I will deal with an issue that is often neglected. Every country which is going through transition will find problems with foreign investment. Of course Cuba has the people in Miami, a financial support base we did not have, so theoretically the process could be smoother. Yet during transition, there is always the question of how to approach the selling of goods. How shall we sell it? Will it be for its real price, or will we sell it for pennies? My advice is to sell for pennies. The trouble my government faced was that during transition, there were a lot of groups who were willing to fight to the death to get as much money as possible from the selling of old communist enterprises. This was a disaster as those who were attempting to make money were also the same people defining the rules and controlling the market. If we compare that to Hungary, where they sold everything for pennies in six months, the result is clear — they didn't gain revenue, but they gained something which is absolutely impossible to estimate. The people who wrote the rules of the game in Hungary brought rules and regulations that even the former KGB representatives with KGB money had to comply with.