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Western Studies on the Sovietization of Eastern Europe

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Abstract: This paper reviews the studies of Western scholars on the Sovietization of Eastern Europe. Internationally, Sovietization was a significant component of the Soviet Union's strategy in Eastern Europe after 1945. The Sovietization of Eastern Europe involved regulating international relations, defining the boundaries of these countries, determining the ethnic makeup of these countries through expulsion and population transfer, participating in the drafting of these countries' constitutions, and deciding the composition of their governments. It is believed that Sovietization aimed to change all aspects of human experience and fundamentally rebuild cultural life, making the Soviet official ideology the guiding ideology of individual life in Eastern European countries. In the view of Western scholars, Sovietization led to two consequences. Firstly, it enabled the Soviet Union to hijack Eastern European countries to form the Eastern Bloc, and through COMECON and the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet Union long controlled Eastern European countries, causing the majority of them to become one side of the Cold War, to deviate from their original socio-economic development trajectory, and to become "The Other" of Europe. Secondly, Sovietization was incompatible with the historical, political, and economic traditions of Eastern European countries in many ways, resulting in Eastern European countries seeking development paths that were in line with their national characteristics and interests in different ways since the mid-1950s, and ultimately leading to dramatic changes in Eastern European politics from 1989 to 1991, completely abandoning the Soviet model and returning to the Western political and economic development models that existed in these countries between the two World Wars.

Keywords: Eastern Europe, people's democracy, socialism, Sovietization, Soviet Union

The Sovietization of Eastern Europe used to be a recurring motif of the Western academia. The so-called Sovietization (советизация) is a historical phenomenon that

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emerged in Soviet Russia after the October Revolution of 1917. Its aim was to create a specific Soviet system with its own institutional structures and practices, including in the economic, political, and social spheres. It features distinct modes of integration and governance that set it apart from other systems. This is a process of ideological and cultural transformation that involves a sense of identification with the Soviet system. Sovietization involves a radical re-conceptualization of the past, present, and future, changing all aspects of human experience and fundamentally reconstructing social life. Sovietization was shaped by Soviet ideology and, on a deeper level, Russian cultural values and concepts.

In Eastern Europe, Sovietization refers to the process by which the Soviet Union transplanted its social and economic system into Eastern European countries after World War II. In other words, it involves the voluntary and involuntary adoption of the Soviet political, social, and economic structures and cultural subsystems by Eastern European countries under specific historical conditions, resulting in the formation of a “Socialist Camp” centered around the Soviet Union, officially the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Since the Soviet Union was the sole embodiment of Sovietization, the historical process that occurred in Eastern European countries from 1945 to 1953 could also be referred to as “USSR-ization”.

Conceptually, Sovietization helps analyze the essential workings of the Soviet ruling system, and also serves as a norm that carries positive or negative evaluations. During the 1940s and 1950s, it was widely used in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The term fell out of use for some time, but since 1989 it has been reintroduced by scholars in Eastern Europe and the West in order to reassess the development paths of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries in the 20th century.

It should be noted that Sovietization is a fundamental element in the generation of the Soviet socialist model. It somewhat offers an explanatory framework for understanding Stalinism, the Cold War, the alliance of socialist states in Eastern Europe, the international communist movement, the reform movements in the socialist era, the dramatic changes in Eastern European politics, the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In this context, this paper aims to probe into the perspectives of Western scholars on the Sovietization of the Eastern Europe based on a review of existing literature.

1 Semantics and Semiotics of the Word “Sovietization”

Traditionally, Western historiography on Sovietization has focused on the post-Stalinist period, from west to east, between the Soviet Union’s occupation zone in

Germany and the western border of the postwar Soviet Union, and from north to south, between the Baltic coast of postwar Poland and the southern border of Bulgaria, with Yugoslavia and Albania being exceptions. In the existing literature, two recurring topics are: uniformity versus diversity, and external coercion versus local development. However, the term “Sovietization” is not used by all authors to describe the post-war history of the region.

Semantically, Western scholars define “Sovietization” primarily as the process of (in)voluntary alignment to Soviet interests and control, and the promotion of a specific lifestyle. This process was combined with the minimum consensus of a political system built on an ideological commitment to socialism and/or communism. Other related descriptions include “Communist-dominated government practice”, “Stalinist blueprint”, “Stalinization”, “Communist Party in power”, “Stalinism”, “satellite statehood”, or “the introduction of Soviet totalitarianism into Eastern Europe”, etc. (Tismaneanu, 2003, p. 107).

Historically, the term appeared shortly after the October Revolution. During the Second World War, Sovietization was already included in the USSR dictionary. The Russian Dictionary (4 volumes), edited by Ushakov in 1940 had entries for советизация, советизировать, and советизироваться. The two interpretations of the term советизировать were: (1) “the formation of a Soviet regime in a certain place”; (2) “the inculcation of Soviet ideology, worldview and understanding of the practical tasks of the Union regime” (Ушаков, 1940, p. 341). Although the 14th volume of the Modern Russian Literary Dictionary published in 1963 also included these words, it deleted the definition of “inculcation of Soviet ideology and worldview”, and only described it as “to make Soviet” (Чернышев, 1963, p. 78). According to some Western scholars, the term “Sovietization” was no longer used in the USSR in the 1950s (Mertelsmann, 2003).

Although the term disappeared from Soviet dictionaries and public discourse, and it is impossible to trace the complete history of the term, its semiotic complexity is still worth investigating. The connection between the noun “Sovietization” and the verb “to Sovietize” suggests the activity of making something Soviet by copying or introducing Soviet features. In fact, for Sovietization, which took place outside the western borders of the Soviet Union in the postwar period, “something Soviet” could simply be exported from one society to another. This implies that an exporting subject, using essentially the same set of Sovietization tools, could achieve the same results anywhere. Yet another aspect of Sovietization implies “being Sovietized”—the passive voice points to the transformations experienced by those affected, as well as their estimated (and required) efforts at self-transformation. This distinction suggests that there is always a clear line between the subject and the object of Sovietization.

2 The Origin and Manifestation of Sovietization

The Western academia believes that the first wave of Sovietization emerged after the October Revolution in Russia. The actual case of Sovietization was first established in Russia, followed by Ukraine and Belarus. With the Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War, Sovietization extended to Siberia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

As Sovietization continued to unfold, the Soviet government introduced the so-called localized ethnic policy in the 1920s. It aimed to enhance the Soviet regime's appeal to non-Russian nationalities and encourage their participation in the new political system by presenting the regime in non-Russian national languages. Moreover, it sought to accelerate the cultural, economic, and political development of non-Russian nationalities. Historian Terry Martin describes this period of the Soviet Union as the world's first "affirmative action empire" (Martin, 2001). The Soviet government spent considerable resources integrating non-Russians into the socialist mainstream, codifying ethnic distinctions, creating Central Asian written languages, and establishing separate administrative units according to ethno-linguistic divisions. This policy assumed that as long as minorities had considerable freedom to develop their own languages, cultures, and national elites, they would be integrated into the Soviet system, recognizing the progressive and positive nature of Soviet socialism. Through the policy of fostering non-Russian languages and cultures (Ukrainianization, Belarusianization), Sovietization thus also became part of the process of state and nation building. More importantly, the Soviet government sought to build loyalty to the state based on tolerance of different cultures and a common belief in socialism, which was at the core of "Sovietization". Sovietization was spread to the three Soviet-occupied Baltic states and eastern Poland in 1939.

Early Sovietization went through several stages, including wartime communism, the New Economic Policy, and command economy. Each stage constituted a particular variant of the Soviet model and was closely linked to broader aspects of the Bolshevik regime's development strategy, including its policies toward the peasantry, the working class, intellectuals, ethnic minorities, and women. Sovietization created new governmental structures and new relationships between the state and these different social groups.

Sovietization involved much more than the spread of the Russian language and the European (Russian) way of life. It was also a form of "modernization", including industrialization, urbanization, and the growth of state intervention in everyday life, from universal education to military service and social welfare. Sovietization aimed to use state power to transform a primitive and backward society into a modern, scientific and rational one. Nevertheless, despite the economic, social, and

cultural successes, Sovietization was in many ways anti-modern, and placed several restrictions on society and its citizens. To a large extent, this approach misunderstood the nature of modernity and severely limited the development of other areas.

Sovietization is an all-encompassing political concept and manifests itself in several areas. It included the adoption of a new calendar and the creation of a specific concept of historical time; it also involved the renaming of towns, streets, schools, farms and factories, in new buildings, monuments and sculptures. This was reflected in the transformation of the countryside, the transformation of non-Russian areas, and the conquest of remote areas including the Arctic (McCannon, 1998).

In the public and private spheres, Sovietization was reflected in the intensification of indoctrination, the creation of new patterns of behavior, and new codes of communication that sought to instill new norms of discipline and to foster an emotional relationship between the individual and the state, a relationship embodied by state leaders (Lane, 1981). The new Soviet civilization was based on a strong utopian, revolutionary, and tradition-breaking impulse. Sovietization was combined with the development of specific organizing principles, particularly embodied by the party's democratic centralism. During the Stalinist era, the Bolshevik organizational principle permeated through all other institutions of the Soviet Union.

In the intellectual sphere, Sovietization aimed to create a new Soviet worldview, ethics, language, concepts, value system, and discourse. It transforms popular culture through education and censorship, and develops an artistic policy shaped by socialist realism, thus establishing something more universal, more classical, and more related to Russian realist cultural tradition. Socialist realism encapsulates three basic aspects: peoplehood, social classes, and Party spirit. The writer was conceived as the "engineer of the human soul". Sovietization sought to foster a collective consciousness and create a new Soviet mankind (Геллер, 1994).

With respect to the economy, Sovietization included the socialization of the economy and the elimination of private property after phasing out the New Economic Policy in 1928/1929. It combined a program of forced industrialization through successive "five-year plans", which prioritized heavy industry on the basis of state ownership and planning. Through collectivization and de-farming, agriculture was reorganized and the private sector was counteracted and abolished, although smallholder land and collective farm (kolkhoz) markets remained important to the economy.

At the end of World War II, Sovietization crossed the Soviet borders and began to pervade Eastern Europe as the Soviet Red Army liberated many Eastern European countries from fascism and stationed troops in those areas.

3 The Historical Background of Sovietization in Eastern Europe

In the view of some Western scholars, the Second World War not only constituted the historical background of the Sovietization of Eastern Europe, but also laid the foundation for it. It is thus essential to review some important events before 1945 to understand the Soviet policies regarding Eastern Europe after the Second World War.

Firstly, Soviet leaders believed that Eastern Europe should be transformed into a buffer zone to prevent the revival of German militarism and possible future invasions by Western armies. The Napoleonic Wars, the First World War, the Russo-Polish War of 1919–1920, and Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union deeply influenced Stalin's perception of national security and convinced Soviet leaders that they must prevent the resurgence of hostile forces to the west of the Soviet Union. This did not necessarily require imposing communist regimes on the region (at least not in the short term), but it did require the formation of a firm pro-Soviet government.

Secondly, compared with the time period between the two World Wars, the Soviet Union had enough military and political power after the Second World War to establish its dominant position in Eastern Europe. In other words, the Soviet Union could use its armed forces to support communist parties and pro-Moscow forces throughout the region. Moreover, Moscow gained direct political influence in this region by cultivating, supporting, and supervising the rise of communist parties in Eastern European countries, including those with little or no communist influence traditionally. Since the late 1920s and 1930s, communist leaders in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Bulgaria had lived in exile in the Soviet Union, and their careers were based on and dependent on the Soviet Union. With Soviet support, they gained the opportunity to take power in their own countries, and were thus often more loyal to their Soviet mentors than to the domestic powers of their respective countries during the Second World War, which was entirely different from the hostile situation the Soviet Union faced between the two World Wars.

Thirdly, starting with the Tehran Conference in December 1943, the United States and Britain continuously made concessions to the Soviet Union on the issue of Eastern Europe. At the Tehran Conference, while making the decision to open the second front in Europe before May 1, 1944, the border between the Soviet Union and Poland was readjusted to the Curzon Line. In October 1944 when discussing post-war arrangements in Moscow, Churchill and Stalin had a "percentage agreement" on giving the percentage division of control over the Balkans. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, further discussions were held on the Polish

border and the formation of a new Polish government. Roosevelt announced that all American troops would withdraw from Europe within two years after the war. After the United States allowed the Soviet Red Army to be the first to enter Berlin and Prague, Stalin's suspicions of American and British policies towards Eastern Europe vanished. The Western leaders tacitly approved Stalin's demands on Eastern Europe, strengthening the Soviet leaders' belief that the Soviet Union would enjoy a secure sphere of influence in the region after the war (Mastny, 1979, p. 279). It is evident that the Western countries would not pose a serious threat to Soviet military and political hegemony in Eastern Europe. As a result, the Soviet Union was able to establish its dominant position in Eastern Europe after World War II due to the weakness of the region and the liberation of many Eastern European countries by Soviet troops, as well as the consensus of the great powers in the post-war arrangements.

Fourthly, towards the end of World War II, the Soviet Red Army participated in the liberation of most Eastern European countries. This helped the Soviet Union establish its dominant position in these countries. Stalin believed that "whoever occupies [post-war] territory also imposes their own social system, as far as his army can reach" (Djilas, 1962, p. 90). Some western scholars believe the Soviet Union's military presence in Eastern Europe had several effects. Undoubtedly, it won at least some favor in certain Eastern European countries. Countries like Czechoslovakia and Poland occupied part of the former German territory due to border adjustments and expelled millions of Germans from their own and newly acquired territories, leading to the psychological and material needs of revenge that relied on the Soviet Union to resist Germany. Moreover, since many countries were liberated by Soviet troops, it made it possible for the Soviet armed forces to remain stationed in these countries for a period of time after the war. In addition, the Soviet Union was convinced that communist officials and labor activists would lead the revival of Eastern European governments and unions, providing a foothold for the later takeover by the Communist Party. All these factors secured the Soviet Union's strong influence over the Eastern European countries' coalition government from 1945 to 1947.

Fifthly, the "political culture" of Eastern Europe was incompatible with the Soviet model of socialism (Wilson, 2000, p. 245). Except for Czechoslovakia, Eastern European countries experienced some form of authoritarian rule during both World Wars. At the birth of the Cold War, communism had not gain broad support among the population in East European countries, except for Bulgaria. While some Eastern European countries allowed the Communist Party to exist, their role in national political life was mostly insignificant. Although World War II had a significant impact on the political culture of Eastern Europe, only a few countries (Albania, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia) saw a significant increase in the role of the Communist Party.

4 The Transitional Phase of Sovietization in Eastern Europe: People's Democracy

After World War II, the Soviet Union did not immediately implant its model of a socialist system in Eastern European countries, as seen by the Western academia. This was because, in the early post-war period, the unity of the Allies still existed in form, political forces in Eastern European countries under Soviet influence were not yet dominant, and Stalin's uncertainty about possible political and socio-economic changes within the Soviet sphere of influence remained. Meanwhile, Soviet leaders' views on the overall European situation after the war were also optimistic. Stalin advised the Soviet Red Army and Eastern European Communists to avoid making dogmatic statements on the critical issue of the transition to socialism. As a result, a transitional period called "People's Democracy" (Naimark, 2010b) emerged.

The concept of People's Democracy did not come about all at once, but evolved gradually. In this process, Soviet leaders, Eastern European Communist Party leaders, Marxist researchers, and scholars participated to varying degrees and expressed their own views.

Soviet leaders had scattered and vague comments on the nature of the post-war political systems in Eastern European countries, accompanied by multiple interpretations. Stalin believed that proletarian dictatorship was necessary both during the Paris Commune period and in Russia after November 1917 to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

In September 1946, Stalin suggested that the new Bulgarian constitution should be a "people's constitution", and urged the establishment of a united labor party that included all labor classes, including farmers. This can lead to multiple interpretations when constructing ideology or policy statements. There were no conclusions in terms of which view and position were "correct". After hearing the experts' "discussion", it was up to Stalin to make a decision based on his own judgment.

The first systematic attempt to define the theory of people's democracy was made by Boris Nikolayevich Ponomarev, who was the Deputy Director of the International Intelligence Department, Deputy Director of the Marx–Engels–Lenin Institute, the main ideologist and historian of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Ponomarev believed that three key issues needed to be analyzed: who holds power, who controls the military, and how the economic structure is organized.

With regards to the political situation, the process of democratization varied in countries that were either liberated or occupied by the Red Army (such as Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Romania, Hungary, and Finland) and in countries that were liberated by the Allied powers (such as France,

Italy, Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, and others). Ponomarev opposed the concept proposed by the Publicity Department of the CPSU, which suggested that the first category of countries should be referred to as “proletarian and peasant revolutionary democratic dictatorship states”. He believed that this was a formula put forward by Lenin in 1906–1907 in a completely different context. Today, the new power base consists of National Liberation Committees and political groups comprising communist, socialist, and agricultural parties. Although their composition is complex, the prerequisite for their participation in the government is that they have no connection with Nazi Germany.

As for who controlled the military, Ponomarev’s report differentiated the military situation in wartime Allied countries such as Yugoslavia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, where the military was being rebuilt on a new basis to create a new army. In Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary, the old military still existed but had undergone thorough reform through purges. Subsequently, new armies were formed in Bulgaria and Romania by personnel who had participated in the struggle against fascism. It was believed that in Hungary, the proportion of “old forces” in the military was higher than in Romania.

Regarding the economic issue, Ponomarev believed that the landlord class in Eastern European countries had already been eliminated. Although he admitted that some mistakes had been made in this process (especially in Poland and Romania), he denied that these countries had any intention of collectivizing agriculture, which was not put on the agenda. The situation in the industrial sector was more complex. In Poland and Yugoslavia, 70 %–80 % of enterprises were already under state control. In other countries, most enterprises were in private hands. Many capitalists had been excluded from important sectors of the economy, and foreign trade had rapidly shifted towards the Soviet Union, greatly weakening the influence of Western capital and capitalists in Eastern Europe.

In Soviet academia, the discussion on people’s democracy has gone through roughly three stages.

- (1) The early stage when the National Front was established in the Eastern European countries: the academia tried to justify the political importance of the new Eastern European states using Marxism–Leninism. During this period, two leading figures of the academic community, Ilya Trainin, the director of the Institute of Law, the Academy of Sciences, and deputy editor-in-chief of the journal *Soviet State and Law*, and Eugen Varga, the director of the Institute of World Economy and World Politics and editor-in-chief of the journal, *World Economy and World Politics*, published articles in 1947 discussing the special form of democracy and the new type of democracy.
- (2) The phase of rethinking, which began in late 1947 after the establishment of the Communist Intelligence Service, consisted mainly of discussions of the issue by

Soviet economists and jurists. In these debates, although less attention was paid to the subject of people's democracy, there was no lack of criticism of the theories of people's democracy by people such as Trainin and Varga.

- (3) The New Doctrine Stage. In December 1948, after the expulsion of the Yugoslav Communist Party from the Communist Intelligence and the consolidation of the Communist Party leadership, Georgi Dimitrov Mihaylov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party, presented a new statement on popular democracy. He admitted that his statement was designed and directed by Stalin, which immediately reverberated among the communist parties of other Eastern European countries.

The new doctrine was completed mainly by Soviet scholars. In the fall of 1949, Naum Farberov's *Public Law in People's Democracies* (Фарберов, 1949) was published. His views were considered authoritative in the discussions of the Academic Council of the All-Union Institute of Jurisprudence. At this stage, the earlier theories of the Soviet academy, especially the earlier "incorrect" views of Trainin and Varga, were severely criticized. In this discussion, the new authoritative theories contrasted the earlier theories in seven ways: the proletariat dictatorship and its functions, the leadership of the Communist Party, the people's democratic revolution, the crashing of the bourgeois state, the People's Republic as a new form of state, the economic and class structure, and the basic laws of the transition to socialism.

Thus, the actual practice of people's democracy was underpinned by Leninism and Stalinism, embodying the laws of transition to socialism and the commonality of the path to socialism in all countries. In other words, Leninism and Stalinism were also applicable to people's democracies. People attribute this to Stalin because people's democracy regarded the Soviet Union's experience as a general rule and adjusted it according to the specific conditions of Eastern European countries, which indicated the direction of people's democracy toward socialism, and provided practical advice and guidance to the Communists of Eastern Europe.

The revisionism of the Soviet theoretical concept of people's democracy shifted from the original concept of a road to socialism in each country to the concept of a "common Leninist Road". With the exception of Yugoslavia, there were no major differences in the interpretation of the concept of Upper People's Democracy by the Communist Parties of the various Eastern European countries. The Communist Parties of the Eastern European countries fully accepted the influence of Soviet theories of people's democracy on their practical policies. The twists and turns in the interpretation of Soviet scholarship on people's democracy reflect both the difficulty of establishing an adequate theory for this nascent phenomenon in history and the strong influence of changes in international relations in Europe and in the Eastern European countries themselves on people's democracy.

5 Three Stages of Sovietization in Eastern Europe

In 1947 and 1948, with the heated exchanges between the Soviet Union and the United States over the Marshall Plan and the conflict between the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia over many issues, especially the Balkan Federation and the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Communist Intelligence Bureau, Stalin decided to de-emphasize the different development paths of individual countries but speed up the transition from people's democracy to the Sovietized model. Popular democracy was short-lived and the Eastern European countries quickly established so-called Soviet-style socialism.

The Western community has identified three distinct stages of the Sovietization of Eastern European countries (Naimark, 2010a). These stages were determined by many factors, including the changing perceptions of Soviet leaders toward the West, the relative strength of the communist parties in Eastern European countries, and the gradual emergence of the Cold War. Although Sovietization did not occur at the same pace in every Eastern European country, and the scale and depth of Sovietization varied from country to country, the general homogeneity of the stages of Sovietization across the region suggests that Moscow controlled the content, pace, and intensity of Sovietization in Eastern Europe.

Phase One (1944–1947) was the most challenging phase during Sovietization. Communists in Eastern European countries were urged to build people's democracy, as a transition from bourgeoisie to Soviet socialism. The foundations of socialism were created by confiscating the assets of large landowners and industrialists, without collectivizing the peasantry or replacing the parliamentary system with the proletariat dictatorship. Private property was to be respected and the National Front program was to be an impeccable form of democracy. Communist leaders who moved too quickly to proletariat dictatorship would have been criticized by the Soviet leadership and even removed from power. Instead, the Soviet Union advocated recognition of the socio-economic and cultural uniqueness of each Eastern European country, and thus the path to socialism should be different. At the same time, the prominent social democrats, Christian democrats and peasant party politicians remained in the political arena of their respective countries. All these left the impression that coalition governments and mixed economies would be sustainable.

Phase Two was from 1947 to 1950. On March 12, 1947, U.S. President Harry S. Truman announced what would come to be known as the "Truman Doctrine", stating that the United States would take over from Britain in providing aid to communist threatened Greece and Turkey. In June of the same year, George Marshall, the US Secretary of State, announced that the United States would provide financial support

for the recovery of Europe, a.k.a. the European Recovery Plan, or the Marshall Plan. Although the Plan initially included the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, the Soviet Union judged that the Plan was not intended to include the Soviet Union and had anti-Soviet restrictions. Soviet leaders not only rejected the Marshall Plan themselves, but also banned Eastern European countries from participating in the Marshall Plan. In response, the Soviet Union took two major steps. Economically, the Soviet Union introduced the so-called “Molotov Plan” (Slany & Churchill, 1972), which aimed to help European and Asian countries that were politically and economically aligned with the Soviet Union to recover their post-war economies. Politically, in September 1947, the Soviet Union initiated the Communist Intelligence Service, which was designed to exchange intelligence information among the various Communist parties. Andrei Zhdanov, acting on behalf of Stalin, made it clear at the founding ceremony that the flexibility and openness of the first phase of Sovietization in Eastern Europe was over. The world had been divided into two camps, capitalism and socialism. To ensure the victory of socialism, the Communist parties had to establish more leadership and control within and between their respective countries.

Subsequently, under the supervision of Moscow, Eastern Europe countries embarked on the path towards complete Sovietization. The Soviets placed advisors in Eastern European industrial and agricultural enterprises. The Communist Intelligence Service was also increasingly transformed into an agency directed by Moscow to control the actions of Eastern European communist parties rather than an agency engaged in active struggle with the West. Unlike other Eastern European countries, Yugoslavia opposed Soviet interference in their internal affairs and foreign policy, leading to the Yugoslav–Soviet split.

Phase Three (1950–1953) is overlapped with the full-scale Stalinization of Eastern Europe. During this period, the worship of Stalin was ubiquitous in the Eastern European countries. Streets and institutions were named after Stalin, Stalinist monuments were seen everywhere, and even Stalinist-style wedding cakes became popular. “Learning from the Soviet Union means learning how to win” was the slogan of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, and “love for the Soviet Union is not to be reserved”, said the Czech newspaper *Rudé právo* (Red Justice) (May 25, 1952). Eastern European leaders, while emulating Stalinist behavior, were creating their own personality cults, becoming “little Stalins” (Applebaum, 2012, pp. 43–55). They encouraged hero worship and unconditional obedience in their own countries. Communist parties in Eastern European countries increasingly imitated the Soviet Union directly, launching programs to emulate the highly-touted success of the Soviet regime.

6 Areas of Sovietization in Eastern Europe

With the rapid spread of Sovietization in Eastern Europe, Sovietization and so-called Stalinism were reflected in all areas of political, economic, military, and social life in Eastern Europe.

In the political sphere, Sovietization was reflected in two main areas: the consolidation of communist dominance and the elimination of the Titoists. During the period of people's democracy from 1945 to 1947/1948, the communists formed coalition governments in alliance with other left-wing middle-class or peasant parties. Since the transition to socialism, the Soviet Union encouraged the Communist parties of the Eastern European countries to use the so-called "sausage slicing" tactic to weaken the non-Communist factions and personalities in the coalition governments and their power. Meanwhile, the Communist parties had showdowns with the traditional parties, especially the Social Democratic Party, and urged some of them to merge. After weakening their political opponents, the Communists won the elections and eventually solidified their power. The Communist seizure to gain one-party rule went hand in hand with the evolution of the Cold War and the Yugoslav–Soviet split. Political Sovietization made it possible for Soviet-backed Eastern European Communists to take control of those countries.

During the transition from people's democracy to socialism, the Soviet Union oversaw the process of Sovietization in Eastern European countries through its military presence, intelligence services, government and party organizations. In the Eastern European countries, the main promoters of Sovietization were mostly individuals who had once resided in the Soviet Union, and their working methods were deeply influenced by the Soviet model, including Mátyás Rákosi in Hungary, Georgi Dimitrov Mihaylov in Bulgaria, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in Romania, Bolesław Bierut in Poland, and Klement Gottwald in Czechoslovakia.

Another important manifestation of the Sovietization of the political sphere is believed to be the so-called "Great Terror" (Kuromiya, 2007) or "Great Purge" (Getty, 1985). After the Yugoslav–Soviet conflict, experts from the Soviet security services were sent to Eastern European countries to instruct them to carry out political purges in their own countries after the model provided by the 1934–1938 Soviet Great Purge. In Eastern European countries, several leaders of the Communist parties were arrested and even executed due to wrongful judgment. The erroneous expansion of the purges also affected the populations of Eastern European countries. From the late 1940s to the early 1950s, numerous innocent civilians in Eastern European countries were imprisoned in concentration camps on the pretext of political crimes (McDermott & Stibbe, 2010).

In the economic sphere, Soviet economic policy toward Eastern European countries after World War II emerged earlier and was more explicit than its political policy. The goal of Sovietization was to make Eastern European economies completely dependent on the Soviet Union. Eastern European countries were required to accelerate agricultural reforms and force collectivization, e.g., the reforms in Hungary in 1945 and the forced collectivization of agriculture in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania.

In commerce, a typical way in which the Soviet Union sought to control the economies of Eastern European countries after World War II was through joint ventures established between 1945 and 1948 with Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Poland, through a flexible interpretation of the clause on German assets in the bilateral peace agreement. Without actually spending money, the Soviet Union gained economic influence in these Eastern European countries.

In order to gain full and deep control over the economies of the Eastern European countries, on January 25, 1949, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was established under Soviet leadership, bringing the economic Sovietization of the Eastern European countries to a new stage. Nominally, the COMECON was intended to enhance the exchange of economic experience, technical assistance, mutual aid and trade, and to proclaim a partnership among the COMECON member countries. But in reality, this move was aimed at establishing an economic community with the Soviet Union at its core, imposing on the Eastern European countries the model of economic ties that existed among the Soviet bloc countries, and breaking the original economic systems and comparative advantages of the Eastern European countries.

With the COMECON, the Soviet Union wanted to achieve several strategic goals. First, it used COMECON to dictate and exert pressure on the Eastern European countries through central economic planning. Second, the COMECON drastically changed the trade pattern of Eastern European countries, which would increasingly direct trade from Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union, while limiting member countries' economic ties with the West. By 1953, more than 60 % of Soviet foreign trade was conducted with Eastern European countries, compared to a prewar level at about 1 %. Likewise, trade among Eastern European countries (excluding the Soviet Union) expanded from prewar levels. As a result of this new trade pattern, the importance of Western Europe to Soviet and Eastern European trade declined significantly, and Eastern European countries became fully economically dependent on the Soviet Union. This not only deepened the economic divide between Eastern and Western Europe, but also laid the groundwork for a major economic and technological divergence between Eastern and Western Europe in the mid-1970s (Berend, 2009). Third, the Soviet Union created a "ruble zone" in the COMECON to put financial relations across the region on a common and more manageable basis. By adopting

the ruble as a common unit of account, economic relations within the COMECON were insulated from world prices. And this insulated price system served not only as a new tool for consolidating Soviet economic and political control over Eastern European countries, but also further strengthened Eastern Europe's economic decoupling from the West.

In the military sphere, Stalin wanted to expand and strengthen the military power of Eastern European countries for three reasons. First, after the Yugoslavia–Soviet conflict, Stalin considered military intervention in Yugoslavia. At a meeting of Eastern European leaders in early 1951, Stalin stressed the need to increase the military potential of the Eastern bloc countries in the next two to three years. To enhance the military capabilities of the Eastern European countries, the Soviet Union provided them with attack aircraft IL-10 capable of occupying strategic positions in Yugoslavia.

Second, the Yugoslavia–Soviet conflict was used by the Soviet Union to strengthen its control over the Eastern European countries and to completely deprive them of their military sovereignty. Stalin tried to show the leaders of the Eastern European countries that the Soviet Union had the right to supervise their armed forces. To this end, the Soviets sent military advisors to the armed forces of Eastern European countries. The military-industrial complex was also tightly controlled by the Russians. Stalin decided on the top personnel of the Eastern European defense ministries, to ensure their obedience and loyalty to Soviet Union in future military conflicts. The Soviet Union also required Eastern European countries to tighten their budget in order to guarantee defense spending.

Third, after the Iron Curtain was drawn, the Soviet Union began to prepare for war against the West. At the Budapest Congress in 1949, Mikhail Suslov, the chief ideologist of the CPSU, accused the United States of actively preparing for and provoking war, saying that the United States and the entire Western world were working to destroy the Soviet Union. Such propaganda coincided with Soviet preparations for a massive arms race with the West.

The process of Sovietization in Eastern Europe varied from country to country and depended on many factors, both internal and external: from the democratic and political relations in Eastern European countries prior to World War II, the position and influence of the Communist Party in political life, and the control of the government and the role of the military. After the completion of the Sovietization process, the Eastern bloc countries had a unified system of government, a unified ideological and economic system, and a unified foreign and military policy.

7 Conclusions

The issue of Sovietization in Eastern Europe has long been debated in academic circles among Western and Russian scholars. The debate has centered on whether Stalin intended to transplant the Soviet model to Eastern Europe from the beginning, or whether other factors (such as threats from the West and the emergence of “alternative” elements in Eastern European countries) were at work. Most Russian historians tend to believe that the Sovietization of Eastern Europe was the result of multiple factors. Many Western historians and a few Russian historians believe that Stalin’s plan to develop an anti-fascist front and a people’s democratic government was as much about maintaining the alliance during World War II and currying favor with the British and Americans as it was about the fact that the Communist Party was not in a strong position in Eastern European countries in the early post-World War II period.

Vojtech Mastny and Vladislav Zubok, the renowned Soviet diplomatic history experts in the Western community, tend to support the latter view. Mastny emphasized Stalin’s fear of security and exaggerated needs as incentives for what came to be known as the “Soviet bloc” (Mastny, 1996, p. 93). Zubok, on the other hand, claimed that Stalin embodied the “revolutionary-imperial paradigm”, the traditional tendency to control Eastern Europe (Zubok, 2007).

Objectively speaking, the Soviet Union imposed its will on Eastern Europe in a gradual and cautious manner. There is no conclusive evidence that Stalin orchestrated this process. Stalin adjusted his policy toward the Eastern European countries in response to changes in U.S. foreign policy and the international situation, as well as to the possible adverse effects of different voices and paths within the Eastern bloc on the socialist community. That is to say, the Sovietization of Eastern Europe was the result of wartime alliance splits during World War II and factors within the socialist community. The Iron Curtain facilitated the transition from people’s democracy to socialism in Eastern Europe, and the Sovietized socialism of Eastern Europe reinforced the Iron Curtain.

After Stalin’s death, there was a phase of de-Stalinization in Eastern Europe, influenced by the political struggle within the Soviet Union. These Eastern European countries attempted to reform according to their own national conditions and sought to pursue a socialist path different from the Soviet model. However, this deviation from the Soviet model was unacceptable to Soviet leaders. As a result, the Soviet side put forward the Brezhnev Doctrine and repeatedly interfered in the internal affairs of Eastern European countries. In the mid-1980s, under the dual influence of Soviet intervention policies and Western “peaceful evolution” policies, dramatic political changes occurred in Eastern European countries.

In the long term, the Sovietization of 1948–1953 was the first socio-economic transformation of Eastern European countries in the 20th century, replacing the quasi-European socio-economic model that had existed during the two world wars with a full Soviet model of socialism. The dramatic political changes of 1989–1991 triggered the second major socio-economic transformation of Eastern European countries in the 20th century, with a complete de-Sovietization of the political, economic, diplomatic and social spheres and a return to the Western European socio-economic model. The two transformations had a significant impact not only in Europe, but also across the world, exerting both a positive and negative impact on world socialism. How to understand the two great transformations in Eastern European countries in the 20th century still requires active and rational thinking from the academia.

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