

MEMORY OF NATIONS

Democratic Transition Guide



[Experience of Selected Countries]

CEVRO

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The project was funded by the National Endowment for Democracy.

The opinions expressed reflect the personal views of each author and do not necessarily represent the views and positions of the organizer or the funder of this project or the respective institutions the authors are or were working for.

First edition:

The Czech / Egyptian / Estonian / German / Polish / Romanian / Russian Experience
Praha, Czech Republic, 2017
ISBN 978-80-86816-01-2

Second edition:

The Argentine / Cambodian / Czech / Egyptian / Estonian / Georgian / German / Polish / Romanian / Russian Experience
Praha, Czech Republic, 2018
ISBN 978-80-86816-36-4

Third edition:

The Argentine / Cambodian / Chilean / Czech / Egyptian / Estonian / Georgian / German / Polish / Romanian / Russian / South African / Spanish Experience
Praha, Czech Republic, 2019
ISBN 978-80-86816-39-5

This publication is available to download at www.cevro.cz/guide.

INTRODUCTION

Since September 2016 CEVRO has been working on the very ambitious project, *Memory of Nations: Democratic Transition Guide*, under the auspices of the US based National Endowment for Democracy. This project offers a unique and a systematic way of experiencing the transition process of selected countries that successfully transitioned from authoritarian regimes to democracies. Each democratic transition is carefully analyzed by a team of experts from the particular country, which is meticulously selected by CEVRO to ensure the most transparent and accurate description of the transition process.

The general aim of the project is to provide a guide to those countries that have not yet democratized, particularly to the forces in these countries who are trying to bring about democratization. The expertise the country wants can be extracted from the experiences of the previous democratic transitions of the countries themselves. It is clear from all the examples covered in the *Guide* that the amount of preparation of the democratic forces directly affects the transition process by making it quicker, smoother and more viable. Hence the *Guide* most importantly serves the purpose of helping the democratic forces in countries where democracy is still only an idea of the silent few or the oppressed, in addition, it has an educational and historiographical purpose. The *Guide* is not a step-by-step instruction manual to the transitioning nation, this would be unrealistic, since every country's situation is unique. The aim is simply to provide the transitioning country and its democratic forces a comprehensive set of issue-specific advice, coming from real life experience.

The first edition of the *Guide* covered seven countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Egypt, Germany, Poland, Romania, and Russia) and three countries were added to the second edition (Argentina, Cambodia, and Georgia). In this latest edition we continued by adding three more democratic transitions from three other countries (Chile, Republic of South Africa, and Spain). We furthermore expanded the *Guide's* the scope of influence by translating all the volumes to Spanish. We believe that it is necessary for such an extensive database of important knowledge to be accessible in more than one language, so it can reach a larger audience, especially in the region of Latin America where democratic transitions are still rare and there are still petrifying dictatorships in place.

Events of recent years have shown that the demand for democratization of authoritarian or otherwise non-democratic regimes is strong and growing worldwide, spreading even to societies without democratic traditions. Concurrently, the rise of modern communication technologies and information have become accessible, like never before. It can be argued that non-democratic regimes will, in the near future, find it increasingly difficult to resist the pressure of their own people wanting to democratize,

which will inherently hinder the government's ability to stay in power. In this environment, what is often overlooked are the issues of long-term reconciliation within their society, resolving the questions of past wrongdoings, and dealing with its own history in a way that is just and honest. The focus of any new governing body stepping in immediately after a political transition is indeed critical to maintaining national stability, developing a working government and political structure, and preserving the well-being of its people.

The experience of countries that have undergone transition in recent decades shows that facing the questions of the past, in particular, addressing the legitimacy and legality of the former regime, and remembering its crimes and their perpetrators, is as crucial to the democratization of any society as is a working legal system or a developed economy. To avoid the proverbial "repeating of its own past", marginalization of its history and past wrongs, taking a clear stance concerning both the victims and the culprits, embedding this stance into the legal system, education and society's memory is a necessary, but an often underestimated task for every transitioning nation. A prime example of the consequences of such an underestimation might be the Czech Republic, where more than 30 years after the fall of communism, the unreformed Communist Party still presents a major political force with an increasing portion of its electorate being young voters. Former members and informants of the brutally oppressive secret service remain in high positions in both the private and public sector, and members of the anti-communist resistance movement still have not been fully recognized for their activities. It is therefore important for any reformers and democratic leaders to pay attention to reconcile with the past.

Unfortunately, the issues of reconciliation, punishment of the totalitarian crimes, and preservation of national memory are not priorities for the first phases of any transition. Partly, it is because the democratic leaders have other priorities (such as economic transformation or free elections), but it is also because the issues of memory preservation and reconciliation are not priorities for democratic assistance, and therefore the leaders are not equipped with the sufficient skills. The *Guide* aims to provide the democratizing forces a comprehensive and extensive database of transition experiences that can help the transition process and prepare the ground for a stable and viable democracy arising from totalitarian or authoritarian regimes of all types.

This *Guide* of the transitional experience will be regularly updated and new countries will be added. Organizers of this project will further focus on making the *Guide* more universal by adding more countries and translating it to more languages.

Team CEVRO would like to thank the National Endowment for Democracy for supporting this project, democracy, and freedom worldwide in general.

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