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Book Review

Hajdinjak, Sanja, Beatrice-Elena Chromková Manea, & Roman Chytilek (eds.), 2022. *Behind the Illiberal Turn: Values in Central Europe*. Leiden & Boston: Brill. x + 189 pp., ISBN 978-9004514058, €135.16 (hb)

The editors of this volume, i.e. Hajdinjak et al., have brought together a collection of six articles on the topic of values in Central Europe. The main concern of the volume is to find an explanation for what they refer to as the 'illiberal turn' in Central European politics. According to the editors and authors, the joining of the region to the European Union which transferred liberal values to the area immediately after the collapse of communism at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties has been challenged by the illiberal turn. First of all, the authors restrict Central Europe to six post-socialist countries in this volume that, geographically, fall under the Central European area, including Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia. In addition, some of the analyses also include two other countries which can geographically be considered Central European, Austria and Germany. These countries share the legacy of large empires and, to an extent, of socialism (East Germany). The editors have good reasons to isolate these countries forming the geographical core of 'Central Europe'. These Central European core countries have been part of continental empires encountering different historical and traditional experiences as parts of these continental empires, like the Habsburg Empire, the German Empire, the communist Soviet Empire and the Yugoslav Federation in the twentieth century. These imperial experiences have contributed to the attitudes of citizens towards the state institutions, to the role of the media, to co-members of their own ethnic group, i.e. the so-called national identification processes, to the role of religion in everyday life, to the respect for authority, to the management and perception of minorities and migrant issues, to the role of elites and political parties and many other values which this volume discusses in-depth.

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The reference point to the contents of 'illiberalism' is Western Europe to which these countries joined in the framework of the European Union. The Central European countries are still considered as democratic in this volume, but they are starting to differ from Western Europe for the worse, where liberal values are still strongly dominating the government and public discourse, while in Central European a blended form of government combing liberal and illiberal tendencies have developed resulting into a hybrid system. In their introductory article, the editors argue that the illiberal turn in Central Europe can be pinned down in time. It is related to a speech of the Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán in 2015 where he launched the term 'illiberal democracy' for the first time. He was referring precisely to the different set of historical and traditional values demarcating Central Europe from Western Europe and pointing to the overlapping tendencies in Central Europe with authoritarian countries to the East, like Russia and China, but also countries with a more Western outlook like Singapore, lacking liberal traditions but displaying a quick, steady financial-economic development. The lessons right-wing populists from Central Europe have learned from these illiberal projects in the East is that a prerequisite for financial and economic development is not necessarily related to liberalism. In fact, laissez-faire liberalism in the beginning of the 1990s had not brought the high expectations of quick socio-economic improvements in Central Europe. The process of European integration took more than a long decade and the privatization of former state properties under communism brought their winners and losers. The latter group was actually the loser of the Central European variant of globalization which formed the backbone of the newly formed electorate of the Central European illiberal political forces.

This volume is organized into two parts. The first part analyses changes in values through cross-sectional comparisons of political values across countries and regions in Central Europe. The second part includes in-depth studies of individual countries, offering a time-series perspective on changes within countries. The most interesting results of the volume are those that lay bare correlative trends based on in-depth studies, like the generational differences in the support for liberal values. In the third chapter, Linek and Vomáčka point out that older generations that have experienced the communist totalitarian system support democracy more that the younger generations which have been growing up under the newly established democracies. The older generation does not support the return to a totalitarian system, even tough they might be victims of globalization, whereas the younger generation observing the somewhat marginalized situations of their parents and grandparents have more political trust in strong, authoritarian leadership providing for the

promise of a better socio-economic future. The merit of the present volume is to focus on the debate of the illiberal turn in Central Europe which will have an impact on the unity and future challenges of the European project.

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