

Editorial

One of the recent debates in history pertains to the question as to how the fall of the Weimar Republic can be integrated into the transnational history of democracy.¹ Was democracy history of the interwar period a story of success or failure? The numerous transitions from non-democratic regimes to democracy and from democracy to dictatorship are of interest not only for historians. Transformation research is one of the main areas of political science and current contemporary history research.² Despite the paramount importance of the study of the reasons for survival and breakdown of democracies, researchers have mostly concentrated on analyzing transitions from dictatorship to democracy and largely neglected transitions from democracy to dictatorship. Moreover, even in the former case the first formative transitions of the interwar period have attracted too little attention.³

The development of political regimes is normally path-dependent. It is only during the so-called “critical junctures”⁴ that this process may go off the rails. One of such “critical junctures” was the outcome of World War I. Monarchical non-democracies, both autocratic and constitutional, were swept away Europe-wide. Around 1918 – just like in the early 1990s – most observers of the political world thought that the worldwide victory of democracy as the only legitimate form of government was imminent.⁵ Post World War I, after the Russian February Revolution, the number of democracies in Europe exploded. However, shortly afterwards, at the end of 1917, the October Revolution in Russia marked

1 See e.g. Paul Köppen, *Neue Perspektiven zur Zwischenkriegszeit – Eine Antwort auf Claus-Dieter Krohn* (http://www.ifz-muenchen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Vierteljahreshefte/Forum/Köppen_Müller.pdf; 19.2.2015); Claus-Dieter Krohn, *Neue Geschichtsmetaphysik. Tim B. Müllers Blick auf die Weimarer Republik* (http://www.ifz-muenchen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Vierteljahreshefte/Forum/Krohn_Müller.pdf; 19.2.2015); Tim B. Müller, *Krieg und Demokratisierung. Für eine andere Geschichte Europas nach 1918*. In: *Mittelweg 36. Zeitschrift des Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung*, 4 (2014), pp. 30–52.

2 Cf. as an excellent overview of the state of research: Raj Kollmorgen/Wolfgang Merkel/Hans-Jürgen Wagener (eds.), *Handbuch Transformationsforschung*, Wiesbaden 2015.

3 One of the exceptions is e.g. the excellent work by Kurt G. Weyland, *Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin America since the Revolutions of 1848*, Cambridge 2014. Currently Steffen Kailitz at the HAIT in Dresden as well as Jørgen Møller and Svend-Erik Skaaning at the University of Aarhus organize broadly conceived projects about democracy development in the interwar period.

4 Cf. for the concept of “critical junctures” developed in historical institutionalism: Giovanni Capocchia/Daniel R. Kelemen, *The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism*. In: *World Politics*, 59 (2007) 3, pp. 341–369; Hillel David Soifer, *The Causal Logic of Critical Junctures*. In: *Comparative Political Studies*, 45 (2012) 12, pp. 1572–1597.

5 For more details see the contribution by Steffen Kailitz in this issue.

the beginning of the communist era. In Italy, Austria, and Germany fascist and national-socialist movements were established as new right-wing regime alternatives. As early as in 1923 Italian democracy – the first of the new democracies – was replaced by a fascist regime. By 1939 all democracies in Central and Eastern Europe had broken down, with the exception of Czechoslovakia,⁶ Finland, and Switzerland. In Southern Europe – either West or East – not a single democracy survived. Only democracies in North-West Europe and Anglo-Saxon settler colonies (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States) – which, as a rule, had been established relatively long ago – managed to survive the fierce battle of regime alternatives in the context of the socioeconomically extremely turbulent interwar period. The interwar years can be viewed as a “natural experiment” – a kind of a “stress test” for democracies. The grave socioeconomic consequences of World War I and the world economic crisis of the 1930s affected all democracies without exception – albeit not to the same extent.

Meanwhile, a whole range of excellent analyses of individual countries or country groups and studies on the influence of certain factors on the regime development in the interwar period has been conducted, particularly in history⁷ and social sciences.⁸ Further studies on the reasons for survival or breakdown of

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- 6 With respect to Czechoslovakia it is debatable whether it should be considered as one of the exceptions. It is beyond dispute, however, that democracy in Czechoslovakia did not survive the interwar period. For the problematic of assessing the “borderline cases” see the contribution by Steffen Kailitz in this edition.
- 7 See e.g. Robert Gerwarth (ed.), *Twisted Paths. Europe 1914–1945*, Oxford 2007; Martin Gilbert, *Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts, Band II: 1919–1933*, München 1998; id., *Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts, Band III: 1933–1941*, München 1999; Gunther Mai, *Europa 1918–1939: Mentalitäten, Lebensweisen, Politik zwischen den Weltkriegen*, Stuttgart 2001; Horst Möller, *Europa zwischen den Kriegen*, München 1998; Martin Kitchen, *Europe Between the Wars. A Political History*, London 2006; Karl J. Newman, *European Democracy Between the Wars*, Notre Dame 1971; Robert Alastair Clarke Parker, *Europa 1918–1945*, Frankfurt a.M. 1993; Heinrich August Winkler, *Geschichte des Westens. Band 2: Die Zeit der Weltkriege 1914–1945*, München 2011.
- 8 Cf. e.g. Frank Aarebrot/Sten Berglund, *Statehood, Secularization, Cooperation: Explaining Democratic Survival in Inter-War Europe – Stein Rokkan’s Conceptual Map Revisited*. In: *Historical Social Research*, 20 (1995), pp. 210–225; Nancy Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*, Princeton 2003; Giovanni Capocchia, *Defending Democracy: Reactions to Extremism in Interwar Europe*, Baltimore 2005; Gregory M. Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe*, Oxford 1991; Steffen Kailitz, *Sailing the Ship through the Storm. Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for the Breakdown and Survival of Democracies in the Interwar Years*, paper for the ECPR workshop “Democratic Regressions: Patterns and Causes,” Salamanca 2014; Juan Linz/Alfred Stepan (eds.), *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Europe*, Baltimore 1978; Svend-Erik Skaaning, *Democratic Survival or Autocratic Revival in Interwar Europe? A Comparative Examination of Structural Explanations*. In: Gero Erdmann/Marianne Kneuer (eds.), *Regression of Democracy? Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 1 (2011) Sonderheft, Wiesbaden 2011, pp. 247–264; Thomas Saalfeld/Ekkart Zimmermann, *Economic and Political*

democracies in the interwar period can build upon this existing body of research. However, there is a persisting problem – with but a few exceptions⁹ – that the findings from social sciences are not sufficiently taken into account in history, and vice versa. Hannah Arendt Institute wanted to address this communication deficit with its conference “After the ‘Great War.’ From Triumph to Demise of Democracy 1918/19–1939.” The following edition presents the first results. A broadly conceived volume is in preparation. It catches the eye that the previous research on the interwar period has concentrated on the central cases of democratic breakdown (namely Germany and Italy), whereas the development of democracy in the so-called “semi-peripheral”¹⁰ states like Greece, Lithuania, or even Poland has been ignored. Such concentration creates a picture of the interwar period in which democracies were wrestled down by extremist movements during the “Age of Extremes.”¹¹ Although it is undoubtedly an important part of history, by statically focusing on it one risks overlooking the fact that most democracies were not overthrown by clearly antidemocratic forces. As a rule, democracies are overthrown by a democratically legitimized head of government with (at the very least) non-extremist programmatic or by the military that intervenes during a state crisis.

This issue concentrates on the reasons for survival and breakdown of democracies during the interwar period, but at the same time aims to contribute to the development of a more extensive explanatory model for breakdown and survival of democracies. This should provide a more sound foundation for consolidation research, which currently stands on a truly boggy ground. Consolidation research is based – explicitly or implicitly – on the assumption that a democracy

Reactions to the World Economic Crisis of the 1930s in Six European Countries. In: *International Studies Quarterly*, 32 (1988) 3, pp. 305–334.

- 9 Among the exceptions are the groundbreaking contributions of Karl-Dietrich Bracher, which are highly regarded in both social sciences and history: Id., *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik: Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie*, Villingen 1960. Particularly propelling for the transnational democracy research on the interwar period in Europe are the results of the interdisciplinary international project under the management of Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Jeremy Mitchell. However, they have been surprisingly under-received among the German historians: Dirk Berg-Schlosser/Jeremy Mitchell (eds.), *Conditions of Democracy in Europe, 1919–39: Systematic Case-Studies*, New York 2000; id. (eds.), *Authoritarianism and Democracy in Europe, 1919–39: Comparative Analyses*, Basingstoke 2002. See also the following interdisciplinary volume: Christoph Gusy (ed.), *Demokratie in der Krise: Europa in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, Baden-Baden 2008.
- 10 See e.g. Nicos P. Mouzelis, *Politics in the Semi-periphery: Early Parliamentarism and Late Industrialisation in the Balkans and Latin America*, Houndmills 1986; E. Spencer Wellhofer, *Globalization and the Failure of Democracy on the Periphery of the Global Economy, 1870–1946*, paper for the ECPR workshop “Democratic Regressions: Patterns and Causes,” Salamanca 2014.
- 11 Eric Hobsbawm, *Das Zeitalter der Extreme: Weltgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Darmstadt 1994.

can be considered consolidated if its breakdown is extremely improbable.¹² The fundamental problem of this research area is to agree on the prerequisites that have to be fulfilled to make a democracy breakdown is improbable. A thorough analysis of historical processes of democratic survival and breakdown can provide a solid basis for answering the question as to when a democracy is actually “consolidated.” This thematic issue and the upcoming edited volume seek to bring together and carry forward different lines of contemporary historic and social sciences research on transitions from democracy to dictatorship in the interwar period.

This edition starts with a contribution by Steffen Kailitz (Hannah Arendt Institute) who examines the interwar period from the perspective of the global history of democracy. From this viewpoint, the interwar years combine the elements of triumph of democracy with the elements of its demise. Between 1914 and 1920 the number of democracies worldwide almost tripled. In the short period between early 1919 and mid 1920 the number of democracies “exploded.” This “explosion,” euphorically celebrated by the contemporaries, was followed by “recoil” in the first half of the 1920s and a deep democracy crisis in the 1930s triggered by the world economic crisis. Neither before nor afterwards has one observed the fall of so many democracies in such a short period of time as in 1933/34, including the collapse of democracies in such developed industrial states as Germany and Austria.

Jørgen Møller and Svend-Erik Skaaning (University of Aarhus) specify the demarcation line between democracy and non-democracy in Europe of the interwar period. They examine the existing datasets in relation to the differentiation between democratic and non-democratic periods in European countries. Møller and Skaaning identify disputable cases, namely Bulgaria, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Yugoslavia. With respect to these countries, there are significant differences in the assessment as to whether and when during the interwar period they were democratic. Backed by the studies of historians, the authors come to a clear conclusion for most of these countries. Thus, these are not real “borderline cases.” In some few cases like Bulgaria and Yugoslavia the research basis for a definite judgment is too meager and the information regarding the minimal democracy criteria is contradictory. Therefore, these countries can be viewed as the actual “borderline cases.”

12 Cf. Larry Diamond, *Toward Democratic Consolidation*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 5 (1994), pp. 4–17, here 15; Richard Gunther/Hans-Jürgen Puhle/P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, Introduction. In: Richard Gunther/Hans-Jürgen Puhle/P. Nikiforos Diamandouros (eds.), *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation*, Baltimore 1995, pp. 1–32; Andreas Schedler, *Expected Stability. Defining and Measuring Democratic Consolidation*, Wien 1997; Harald Waldrauch, *Was heißt demokratische Konsolidierung? Über einige theoretische Konsequenzen der osteuropäischen Regimewechsel*, Wien 1996; Andreas Schedler, *What is Democratic Consolidation?* In: *Journal of Democracy*, 9 (1998) 2, pp. 91–107.

Arnd Bauerkämper (FU Berlin) shows in his contribution that World War I led to a pervasive social and political mobilization and radicalization. This climate facilitated the rise of communism and fascism as well as new authoritarian movements and regimes, which appealed to traditional values. These authoritarian regimes of the interwar period drew on the strong role of the state during World War I and the widespread need for security and stability. The emphasis on traditional values has been ignored in the theoretical analyses of the interwar period due to the dominant perception as the “Age of Extremes” (Eric Hobsbawm). Bauerkämper calls researchers to pay more attention to the authoritarian regimes of the interwar years that utilized traditional values.

The authoritarian regime of General Józef Piłsudski¹³ after the coup in May 1926 in Poland is one such example. However, democracy and autocracy research on the interwar period still does not properly consider East-Central Europe and thus underestimates the importance of the new forms of authoritarian regimes that emerged during the interwar years.¹⁴ The analysis of East-Central Europe is indispensable for a complete picture of European and global democracy history. Heidi Hein-Kircher (Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe, Marburg) examines the democracy development in Poland after World War I. She demonstrates that in the face of a grave socioeconomic situation and severe – partly military – border conflicts with nearly all its neighbors Poland failed to consolidate the parliamentary democracy. Polish politicians perceived it as incompatible with the priority interest of consolidating the Polish statehood that had been reclaimed after World War I. From this perspective, the overthrow of democracy was increasingly viewed as a legitimate means of protecting the Polish nation from dissolution and stabilizing it both internally and externally. The Polish case reflects the arguments that have been addressed in the contributions of Bauerkämper and Kailitz from a comparative perspective.

The study by Lothar Fritze (Hannah Arendt Institute) on ideocracies lies slightly outside of the main focus of this edition. Fritze analyzes the indoctrination attempts of extreme dictatorships, both right- and left-wing, which emerged after the fall of democracies (or the failed transition to democracy¹⁵) and put their mark on the “Age of Extremes” (Eric Hobsbawm). In Fritze’s view, ideocracies have to look to the people who have the ability to think and act independently within the strict limits prescribed by the ideology of the regime, without ever

13 See e.g. Heidi Hein, *Der Piłsudski-Kult und seine Bedeutung für den polnischen Staat, 1926–1939*, Marburg 2002; Jerzy Kochanowski, *Horthy und Piłsudski – Vergleich der autoritären Regime in Ungarn und Polen*. In: Erwin Oberländer (ed.), *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1919–1944*, Paderborn 2001, pp. 19–94.

14 Cf. Agnes Laba/Maria Wójtczak, *Aspekte einer Demokratiegeschichte in Ostmitteleuropa und im Baltikum im Nachklang des Ersten Weltkriegs*. In: *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropaforschung*, 64 (2015) (in preparation).

15 In Russia the February Revolution with a democratic objective was followed, just a few months later, by the communist October Revolution.

questing or doubting the regime ideology itself. In this inner contradiction of the ideological project, according to Fritze, are the seeds of its self-destruction.

Gratitude is expressed to all the authors of this issue and colleagues at Hannah Arendt Institute who have contributed to its creation, above all Uwe Backes, Darya Kulinka, and Kristin Luthardt; and furthermore to all participants of the conference “After the ‘Great War.’ From Triumph to Demise of Democracy 1918/19–1939.”

Steffen Kailitz