In the late 1980s, when the Berlin Wall was breached, the post-Communist world was full of great expectations for its future. The Second World was rapidly dissolved, and all the Communist countries that were ruled by Socialist parties and belonged to the international Communist movement (Brown 2009: 4) chose to exit. The level of political euphoria was high. Christopher Bryant and Edmund Mokrzycki pointed out that the collapse of state socialism was viewed as “a new great transformation,” “a revolution at the time to many participants in the East and observers in the West” (Bryant and Mokrzycki 1994: 1). On a global level, the world expected that the end of the “Soviet military threat” would increase the level of security and democracy worldwide. The so-called Western view, or the tenor of the Western political discourse of the issue, was that an immediate successful transition to democracy in the former Second World was expected. However, as often happens in history, the reality differed from the expectations. The huge gap between them was due to the fact that “representations of democracy in Eastern Europe were a product of constructive imagination that was not simply anti-communist but developed within communism and its mythological constructions of reality” (Wydra 2008a: 60). In particular, it was associated with the “myth of democracy” that would bring first of all freedoms and prosperity (Wydra 2008b: 18). Indeed, for the Central-European states of the Warsaw Treaty, the fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized the end of Communism and their swift EU membership, i.e., as Aleksandr Rar commented, “a realization of their own free and prosperous living in the West” (Rar 2009). Much later, Ivan Krastev (2010: 87) explained the common attitude to liberal democracy as “the point of arrival for post-Communist states” that was taken for granted. In the post-Communist region, the population was enthusiastically looking forward to a fast victory for democracy, which would bring them much greater prosperity than under Communist rule. Bryant described these attitudes as “economic utopianism” (Bryant 1994: 58); nevertheless, they were common. Actually, the dream of prosperity was nothing less than a dream of freedom, and both were associated with a transition to democracy. As for Central-European post-Communist countries, the newly elected governments were oriented toward quickly joining the EU and following the Western model of democracy, economic development, and life style; they were
sure that the West would strongly support their efforts to complete radical post-Communist changes as soon as possible. Even in the post-Soviet republics that became newly independent states, democracy and the market were viewed as mantras that would immediately help overcome all previous economic shortages and political contradictions. Following the slogans of the liberal elites of the late 1980s, many people believed that “Other is not given” (Afanas’yev 1988). Overall, this period was described by many social scientists, politicians and the public in both the East and West as a great triumph for liberal democratic expectations, implying that everything would be better soon. It was the real end of the Second World as a network of states subordinated to the USSR and oriented towards a Marxist ideology, one-party political system and planned economy.

Currently, the visible results of the fall of the Second World seem to be much more problematic and ambivalent than in 1989. This ambivalence applies to all spheres of societal life in all former Communist countries, including even the most successful states, such as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Estonia, which joined the EU quickly. The transformation in the economically and politically less developed states, such as Romania and Bulgaria, was (and still is) much more difficult (Klingemann e.a. 2006; Gill 2002; Kornai and Ackerman 2004).

As for the rest of the former Second World, that which is left beyond the EU borders (the post-Soviet states), was and remains more complicated. The population in these countries felt dissatisfied with the consequences of the economic and political results of the radical 1989–1991 changes. Not only economic expectations about prosperity, but even the political promises of the elites to bring more equality and freedom turned into imitation—the keyword for understanding the post-Soviet transformation (Levada 2000). Their dreams of prosperity and democracy did not become reality.

This chapter attempts to answer questions about why the situation seems to be not very promising for liberal democracy in the post-Soviet region. First, it will describe why post-Soviet populations dreamed of democracy in the early stage of transformation and what they expected from it. Next it will address the paradoxes of democracy; contradictions that emerged in the public opinion in the former Soviet states in the process of their transformation. The sociological data from this region will help illustrate the public attitude towards democracy in the post-Soviet states. Finally, an explanation of these paradoxes and possible scenarios of further development of democracy in the post-Soviet region will be presented.

My major argument is that the trajectories of political transformation in the post-Soviet states have a zig-zag character, with more stops and turns up and down than has been expected, and with results that are very far from the ideal