bania. In the concluding section, Agh examines the dense network of pan-European and regional institutions that facilitate the process of "(re)europäization" of both regions.

The substantive focus of the book is on the politics of democratization, with only occasional references to economic and social issues. The author devotes particular attention to political institutions and the processes leading to their emergence and consolidation (parties and party system formation, parliaments, elections). The author seldom cites sources in local languages, but, throughout the book, demonstrates a remarkable familiarity with the English-language literature of the subject. This is equally true of the general works on democratic transitions and consolidations, and of reports on the politics of specific countries. Agh does not introduce his own analytical framework. His methodology is rather eclectic, in the good sense of this word. It combines elements of various theories of democratization, in a creative and coherent manner. Perhaps the greatest value of this book lies in its truly comparative approach. Agh does not simply tell us the story of the transition from communism in particular countries; rather, he shows how events in one country have influenced developments elsewhere in the region. This can be best illustrated by his analysis of the roundtable negotiations in Poland and their role in precipitating the fall of communist regimes in other East European nations.

As in any synthesis of this magnitude, there are some shortcomings in Agh's book. Sometimes his analytical insight gets buried under minute details (in particular in the Balkan chapters). He seems to attach too much weight to what he describes as the democratic experience in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary during the 1944-49 period. Even if political pluralism was allowed at that time (including relatively free elections and coalition governments), the communist were in fact firmly in charge and were already consolidating their power. The fate of the Smallholders Party in Hungary, the winner of the 1945 election effectively dismantled by the communists by the end of 1947, speaks to this point, I believe. Another flaw can be found in the analysis of Yugoslavia. The author devotes insufficient attention to the role of the governance system put in place by Tito (in particular the constant rotation in the top federal party and state posts), the unintended consequence of which was the shift of power from the federal to republic level that contributed greatly to the collapse of the old Yugoslavia. Also, in the coverage of the new, "small" Yugoslavia, the situation of Montenegro is almost completely neglected.

All in all, however, this is a fine book. It would have made a perfect textbook for undergraduates, had it been not for its price.

Krzysztof Jasiewicz
Washington and Lee University


These two books both represent attempts to explore (and explain) the emergence of new institutions in the wake of the European collapse of communism. Both are important and useful works, but more for the detail in which they pursue their case studies than for any larger conclusions. Both also suffer from being somewhat dated, but this is a simply unavoidable problem facing those scholars following the post-Soviet democracies.

Of the two, Elster et al. is perhaps the more ambitious but less useful. The author's take four cases – Bulgaria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – and place them in rela-
tion to each other in terms of levels of democratic consolidation. It will be no surprise to observers of East European politics that the Czech Republic and Hungary score far higher than Bulgaria or Slovakia. The question, then, is how to explain this disparity, and the book tries to offer a framework that provides a more complex route to this obvious outcome.

The authors focus on three variables. One is "legacies," or "determinants of present outcomes that stem from the (distant) past [sic]." (p. 293) Another is institutional design; a third is decisions made by elite participants in the transition process. All of this is sensible but not surprising, as it tells us little more than that, in the authors' own words, "a balanced account of the transition and the determinants of its outcomes in terms of consolidation will probably have to assess the relative weight of all three of these factors - the residues of the past, the configuration of rule-making actors that emerges at the moment of transition, and future-oriented strategic decision making of key political and economic actors." (p. 295) In other words, the outcomes of transitions are explained by just about everything of consequence that has happened to the society in question, as well as what is happening and who is leading the way during the transition itself. It is hard to imagine, in this framework, what social or political phenomena would be excluded from the analysis. Such a conclusion is unarguable but also unremarkable; if the authors are suggesting that deep historical and empirical work on each case is the prerequisite for explaining the particular outcome of each nation's transition to democracy, they will find no argument here, but it is difficult to see how this is a replicable "framework."

This overly broad approach is, paradoxically, what makes the volume valuable, because it required the authors to cover every aspect of each case in detail. Readers seeking descriptions of everything from the details of constitutional reform to policies on minimum wages and price subsidies will find all they are looking for and more. As a reference book on social, political and economic data in the four countries studied, it will be a useful addition to any academic bookshelf. But it is disappointing to go through all of this detail only to come to the conclusion that "poverty as such does not necessarily put democracy in jeopardy; on the other hand, democracy does not necessarily put an end to poverty. What is likely to endanger democracy is a drastic decline in the standard economic performance of a society." (p. 307) This is an elaborate reinvention of the wheel, and such hypotheses hardly needed the massive data assembled here to support them.

As a final note, the volume is written in the increasingly unreadable style of political science, and it is suitable only for advanced graduate students and specialists. Not only does it assume the reader is conversant with much of the previous literature on transitions and institutions, but undergraduates and non-specialists are not likely to be able to digest sentences like "In this chapter we deal with the politico-institutional conditions which enabled, facilitated, discouraged, or disabled the surfacing of agency in the field of political will-formation." (p. 109)

The Taras volume, by comparison, seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate about presidentialism in new democracies by adding to our substantive knowledge about those presidencies in the former communist states. The volume opens with a brief essay by Juan Linz, among the most prominent critics (along with Arturo Valenzuela) of presidentialism. Ray Taras, in an introductory chapter, notes that the study of postcommunist presidencies has tended to be a series of biographies rather than institutional studies, and provides a short but useful overview of the ongoing scholarly debate over presidentialism vs. parliamentarism. What follows is a series of cases that try to abstract institutional matters away from personalities. The choice of cases is mixed, in an attempt to include both strong presidencies like Russia and Kazakhstan, but also semi-presidential or "mixed" systems like Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.