Building Democracy and Civil Society East of the Elbe

Essays in honour of Edmund Mokrzycki

Edited by Sven Eliaeson

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Building Democracy and Civil Society
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This book explores the idea of democracy and civil society and how democracy is being implemented in Eastern Central Europe. The implosion of the Soviet empire 15 years ago and the new wave of democratization opened a new field of inquiry. Scholars, who had failed to anticipate the transitions, were faced with the frustrating task of understanding the difficulties of applying existing models of political democracy and practice in different national cultures.

The wide-ranging debate on the transition became focused on a conceptual battle, the question of how to define “civil society.” Because totalitarian systems shun self-organization, real existing civil societies were in short supply East of the Elbe, and their emergence took complex and puzzling forms, which varied with political culture, and reflected the imprint of the historical past.

This book relates the concept of civil society and developments in Eastern Central Europe to a wider theoretical and historical frame, and makes international comparisons where appropriate. It covers a huge variety of aspects of civil society, and examines the difficulties of establishing a political culture of accountability and trust. It assesses the problems and prospects for the transformation processes in Eastern and Central Europe and what we can learn for the future.

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