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REAL CIVIL SOCIETIES

Dilemmas of Institutionalization

edited by

Jeffrey C. Alexander



SAGE Studies in International Sociology 48

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Mistrusting Civility: Predicament of a Post-Communist Society

Piotr Sztompka

Trust as a Resource of Civil Society

In one of the earliest comments on the anti-communist revolution of 1989 in Eastern-Central Europe, Ralf Dahrendorf suggested that the clock of transition runs at three different paces. 'The hour of the lawyer' is the shortest; legal changes may be enacted in months. 'The hour of the economist' is longer; dismantling command economies and establishing functioning markets must take years. But the longest is 'the hour of the citizen'; transforming ingrained habits, mental attitudes, cultural codes, value systems, pervasive discourses. This may take decades and presents the greatest challenge (Dahrendorf, 1990).

The insight that the quality of the citizens, the 'human factor', will ultimately be decisive in the battle for democracy, occurred a decade earlier to those 'organic intellectuals' (to use A. Gramsci's phrase) who allied themselves with political opposition in the 1980s. At that time, the old and entirely forgotten sociological notion was dug out, revived and inserted into the mainstream of public discourse. It was the concept of 'civil society'. The history of democratic opposition in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia may be written as the history of struggle for civil society, so fragile or almost entirely destroyed under the communist regime (Garton Ash, 1989: 194; 1990; Tismaneanu, 1992; Szacki, 1994: 112).

In the course of struggle and accompanying intellectual debates, the concept of civil society acquired three distinct meanings, attributable to the three theoretical traditions from which it was extracted. The first may be called the sociological concept with antecedents in the classical theories of human groups, those of Ferdinand Tönnies or Georg Simmel (even though those authors did not use the term itself). Here civil society is the synonym for community (Gemeinschaft) or mezzo-structures - the intermediate sphere of human groups between the micro-level of the family, and

the macro-level of the nation-state. From that perspective the main weakness of communist society was defined as the 'sociological vacuum, that exists between the level of the primary group and the level of the national society' (Nowak, 1981: 17). The same meaning of civil society may be found in recent sociological literature, when it is conceived as 'the totality of social institutions and associations, both formal and informal, that are not strictly production oriented nor governmental or familial in character' (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992: 49).

When the concept was used with this connotation the ideological message was clear: to overcome state monopoly, authoritarian control, totalitarian 'colonization of the life-world' (Habermas, 1987). In this respect the struggle was highly successful. Long before 1989, there had appeared a dense network of unofficial, sometimes illegal, associations, discussion clubs, voluntary organizations, self-education groups, trade unions, culminating in the social movement Solidarity. And since 1989, we have witnessed a true explosion of such intermediate bodies, now official, legitimate and recognized. Suffice it to mention that more than 100 political parties have registered in Poland since that date, some 20 of which entered the first democratically elected parliament. The foundations and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) number in the thousands. In this sense, the civil society was reconstituted, sometimes even overblown. It will take some time before it regains normal proportions. Yet certainly, the 'sociological vacuum' is no longer there.

But there is another sense of the concept, which was also revived by Eastern European intellectuals. It is the economic concept, related to the classical heritage of Karl Marx and Max Weber. Here, civil society refers to the autonomous sphere of economic activities and relationships, the 'mode of production' rooted in private ownership, moved by entrepreneurial initiative, pervaded by rational calculation and aimed at individual profit. The actors operating in that sphere are labeled the 'bourgeois' in traditional language, or the 'middle class' in modern terminology.

In the hands of democratic opposition, the ideological message implied by such a concept was to overcome the command economy centrally controlled by the state, and eliminate the privileged status of state property as the dominant mode of ownership. In this respect, too, the battle has been considerably successful. After 1989, individual, private property regained its full legitimacy: the policy of privatization has already transferred large chunks of state capital into private hands. There was an outburst of entrepreneurial activities, initially in the domain of small-scale trade, financial

operations, and short-term investments, aimed at quick profit, but clearly evolving in the direction of serious, long-range ventures of larger scale. Just to mention some numbers, in Poland within two years about 88% of retail trade has been put into private hands, and more than a half of GNP is already produced by the private sector. In 1993 the private sector accounted for 59% of employment, and taking into account an extensive 'gray sphere', around two-thirds of the population are employed outside the public sector (Poland, 1994: 127). The market already exists, and a sizable middle class has emerged. Thus the civil society, in the second meaning of the term, has been at least partly reconstituted.

The picture becomes more complex when we move to the third meaning of the concept. This may be called the cultural concept derived from the heritage of Alexis de Tocqueville and Antonio Gramsci. Here civil society indicates the domain of cultural pre-suppositions, ingrained 'habits of the heart', values and norms, manners and mores, implicit understandings, frames and codes – shared by the members of society, and constraining (or facilitating) what they actually think and do. It is the sphere of Durkheimian 'social facts'. Robust civil society is synonymous with axiological consensus and developed emotional community, bound by the tight network of interpersonal loyalties, commitments, solidarities. It means mature public opinion and rich public life. It means the identification of citizens with public institutions, concern with common good, and respect for laws. In modern sociology, such a neo-Durkheimian, culturalistic interpretation of civil society is put forward by Jeffrey C. Alexander: 'Civil society is the arena of social solidarity that is defined in universalistic terms. It is the we-ness of a national community, the feeling of connectedness to one another that transcends particular commitments, loyalties, and interests and allows there to emerge a single thread of identity among otherwise disparate people' (1992: 2).

The communist regime has never succeeded in fully destroying the civil society understood in this way (in the Polish case, one may even say that it stopped trying quite early, around 1956). But whatever remained of civil society was nevertheless pushed underground, became the 'civil society in conspiracy', directly opposed to the state and its institutions. Nowhere and never before has the opposition of civil society and the state, the people and the rulers, 'we' and 'them', been so clear-cut and radical. In the case of Poland the polarization was enhanced by a sequence of historical circumstances: more than a century (from 1794 to 1918) of partitions among neighboring foreign powers, then Nazi occupation (1939–45), and then Soviet domination (1945–89) – producing a strong stereotype of

the state as something entirely alien, imposed and hostile. The idea of a nation, a cultural, linguistic or religious community rooted in sacred tradition, was opposed to the state, oppressive machinery of foreign domination. Instead of the hyphenated idea of a nation-state, we had two, not only separate, but mutually opposed concepts: the nation and the state.

In the period after World War II, and particularly in recent decades, this strongly embedded archetype has produced a double effect. The first was an affirmation and idealization of the 'private'. Most of the people have retreated into the familial sphere, where they cherished and cultivated national traditions, went to church, and silently complained about the regime. It was their authentic civil society. Most of that was not a true social entity; it had only a virtual reality, existing in imagination, memories, thoughts and dreams. The hard reality required that most of the people had to enter the public sphere for professional, occupational, career reasons – and then, in public roles, they opportunistically played by the imposed rules, only to escape back as soon as possible, more or less ashamed, to their private, imaginary enclaves.

The second, concomitant effect was the negation of the 'public'. Any deeper association with state institutions, politics, regime – like taking governmental office, accepting position in the parliament, enrolling in the ruling party – was considered as polluting, stigmatizing, sometimes akin to treason. Therefore those for whom passive withdrawal ('internal emigration') was not enough, and who wanted to participate in authentic political life, had to constitute it outside official politics. The leaders of democratic opposition have couched characteristic notions: 'non-political politics' (Konrad, 1984; Havel, 1988; 1989), 'parallel polis' (Benda et al., 1988), 'alternative society', 'the power of the powerless' (Michnik, 1985), 'the strength of the weak' (Geremek, 1992). As Andrew Arato described the discourse characteristic for Polish oppositionists: 'one point unites them all: the viewpoint of civil society against the state – the desire to institutionalize and preserve the new level of social independence' (1981: 24). In the Polish case, the emergence of alternative society was facilitated by the Catholic Church, the only large-scale organization which managed to stay outside state control, and which provided ready-made organizational networks, the symbolic rallying point for anti-state sentiments, and even the buildings open for conspiratorial meetings and educational enterprises.

The 'civil society in conspiracy', at the beginning restricted to narrow groups of activists, started to grow in the 1970s, and it exploded in the phenomenon of the massive social movement Solidarity in the 1980s. 'What Solidarity was able to provide, on a

heroic scale, was the structure and practice of a social movement whose hallmarks were national mobilization and monolithic solidarity' (Kumar, 1992: 15). It strengthened the association of civil society with spontaneity, self-organization, massive activism, mobilization from below, autonomy and independence from the state, with a strong anti-étatist orientation. In conspiracy, in the period of struggle it had proved immensely successful. But then the glorious year 1989 came and civil society came out of conspiracy, entering the world of normal politics. Its success pre-empted its continued viability. As Krishan Kumar puts it:

The strengths of its period of opposition became the weaknesses of its period of rule, and of its relevance as a general model of civil society ... It has in any case proved impossible to depart too far from its basic conception of civil society: as an organization (or 'self-organization') of society against the state. (1992: 15–16).

I wish to examine the hypothesis that the key to rebuilding robust civil society (in the cultural sense) is the restoration of trust in public institutions, public roles, and political elites, as well as in the viability of a new political and economic order. Trust is a powerful cultural resource, a precondition for proper and full utilization of other resources, like entrepreneurship, citizenship, and legalism, and for full exploitation of institutional opportunities provided by the emerging market, democratic polity and pluralistic thought (Sztompka, 1993).

The Prolegomena to the Theory of Trust

Socio-individual praxis is always oriented toward the future, and shaped in its course by anticipations of future relevant conditions. Such conditions may appear in two forms: as natural environment and social milieu. Natural and social environments threaten human agents with certain dangers and risks to which they have to adapt or respond. Thus, the future of society is always an area of complexity and uncertainty. Trust helps to reduce complexity and alleviate uncertainty (see Luhmann, 1979), by taking some aspects of the future for granted, 'bracketing them', and proceeding as if everything was simpler and more assured. Trust is the resource for dealing with the future.

Trust deals in this manner primarily with socially generated aspects of the future, with the social environment of action. When we speak of the social environment we have in mind other people and their actions. People live and act in the world constituted of other people and their actions. The others – like ourselves – are free

agents, and may take a variety of actions. Some of them will be beneficial for us, some will be harmful. We cannot know in advance which actions others will choose. There is always a risk that they will decide on harmful and not beneficial actions. The risk grows as potential partners become more numerous, heterogeneous, distant from ourselves – in short, when our social environment becomes more complex. 'In conditions of increasing social complexity man can and must develop more effective ways of reducing complexity' (Luhmann, 1979: 8). Most often the risk produced by a complex environment is unavoidable, because to go on living we have to carry interactions nonetheless. So we make bets about future actions of others: we give or withdraw trust.

I propose the following definition: *trust is the bet on future contingent actions of others*. This brief formula has a number of implications.

First, trust refers to human *actions* and not to natural events. With reference to future natural events we express hope rather than trust. Compare two statements: 'I hope that the earthquake will not strike'; 'I trust the fire brigades to be well prepared for that eventuality.' Or another pair: 'I hope the weather will be fine'; 'I trust the meteorological forecast for tomorrow.' Hope describes our attitude towards events beyond human control, which neither we, nor apparently anybody, can influence, and to which people may only adapt once they occur. Trust describes our attitude towards events produced by human actions, and therefore at least potentially subject to our control, to the extent that we may monitor and influence the actions of others. To put it in more general terms, the concept of trust belongs to the *agency-focused discourse*, the concept of hope to the *fate-focused discourse*.

Second, both trust and hope are directed towards *uncertain* events, i.e. those of which we do not have full cognitive grasp. We cannot seriously say 'I trust the sun will rise tomorrow', or 'I hope the night will come.' Common experience as well as astronomical knowledge convince us that those are certainties. Uncertainty of natural events implies impersonal dangers; uncertainty of social conditions produces humanly created risks. *Trust is expressed in risky situations, hope in dangerous situations*. Risk is a concept belonging to the discourse of agency, and danger to the discourse of fate.

Third, the uncertainty of future social conditions derives from the *contingent* actions of others; it means actions in which they exercise freedom of choice. Trust expresses our expectation of some outcomes, among many options that others may have. If actions are not contingent, but fully enforced, coerced by other people or by myself, there is no place for trust. It would not be natural to say: 'I trust my

slave to serve me' (as if he had a choice), or 'I trust the convict to remain in prison' (as if there was another option).

Fourth, the trust is vested in the actions of *others*. Normally I don't put trust into my own actions, I simply do them. It wouldn't sound natural to say 'I trust I will brush my teeth this evening' (because I will if I want). The exceptions are those conditions of affection, intoxication, incapability etc. when I lose control over my own will, and appear to myself as somebody else. This may be expressed in saying: 'I cannot trust myself not to hit him', or 'I cannot trust my driving today', or 'I trust I will be able to walk after that disease.' Here I myself become a quasi-other whose actions I endow with trust or distrust.

Fifth, trust is a *bet*, and that means two things. On the one hand, it means the commitment through some actions of my own. I 'place a bet', I 'make a bet', by engaging in some activity: marrying a woman I trust, voting for a politician I trust, buying from a salesman I trust, lending to a partner I trust. On the other hand, trust means the *expectation with certain probability that the actions of others will be beneficial for me*: that my wife will take care of the household, that a politician will lead, that the salesman will not cheat me, that the debtor will be solvent. When expectation of beneficial actions is not joined by active commitment, by the 'bet', there is only confidence, and not trust. Confidence is the passive, detached estimation of beneficial outcomes, resulting from the actions of others: 'I have confidence that the politicians will somehow prevent nuclear war'; 'I have confidence that ecological catastrophe will somehow be averted.' Thus, confidence belongs to the family of concepts focused on fate, rather than agency.

Sixth, the *content* of the bet may involve more or less demanding expectations. Trust implies that the others will be trustworthy, i.e. their future conduct will exhibit some combination of the following traits (ordered along growing strength of expectations):

- 1 regularity (orderliness, consistency, coherence, continuity, persistence), and not randomness or chaos
- 2 efficiency (competence, discipline, consequentiality, proper performance, effectiveness), and not futility or negligence (Barber, 1983)
- 3 reliability (rationality, integrity, e.g. considering arguments, honoring commitments, fulfilling obligations), and not voluntarism or irresponsibility
- 4 representativeness (acting on behalf of others, representing their interests), and not self-enhancement
- 5 fairness (applying universalistic criteria, equal standards, due

- process, meritocratic justice), and not particularistic bias (favoritism, nepotism)
- 6 accountability (subjection to some socially enforced standards, rules, patterns), and not arbitrariness
 - 7 benevolence (disinterestedness, help, sympathy, generosity), and not egoism (Barber, 1983).

Trust may be vested in various social objects, constructed at various levels of generality:

- 1 In the social order as such, or its particular form: 'America is a great society', 'Democracy is the only equitable regime.' This kind of trust may be called *generalized*. It provides the people with 'ontological security', i.e. 'confidence in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of surrounding social and material environments of action' (Giddens, 1990: 92).
- 2 In all the institutional segments of society, e.g. economy, science, education, medicine, justice, and the political system: 'The German economy works', 'The Swedish medical system is highly developed.' This kind of trust may be called *segmental*.
- 3 In expert systems, i.e. 'systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organize large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today' (Giddens, 1990: 27), such as transportation, telecommunications, defense arrangements, financial markets, computer networks. The principles and mechanisms of their operation are opaque and cryptic for the average user. And yet, in our time we could hardly survive without using – and trusting – them. This form of trust may be called *technological*.
- 4 In concrete organizations, e.g. a particular government, corporation, university, hospital, court of law. This may be called *organizational* trust, and when it refers to political organizations – government, police, army, legal system, parliament, civil service – it is one form of the public trust.
- 5 In products, i.e. all kinds of goods satisfying various human needs. Trust in this case may refer in a general way to goods of a certain type ('corn flakes are healthy'), or to goods made in a certain country ('Japanese machines are highly dependable'), or in more concrete fashion to products of a certain firm ('I buy IBM only'), or even creations of a specific author ('If this is by Le Carré it surely will be an exciting book'). Let us call it *commercial* trust.
- 6 In social roles performed by incumbents of specific positions, e.g. attorneys, judges, medical doctors, priests, and representatives of similar professions. Trust is granted here irrespective of concrete

personal qualities, to all incumbents at a par. Thus it may be called *positional* trust.

- 7 In persons. Here trust depends on perceived individual competence, fairness, integrity, generosity and similar virtues. It reaches its peak in the case of persons considered as eminent, great heroic, ascribed with charisma. Let us refer to that primordial form of trust as *personal*. When the persons are public but are treated on their own, individual merits, as Mitterrand, Clinton, Walesa, and not just presidents, it is another form of public trust. When on the other hand we endow with trust of this type those persons present in our private individual micro-settings – friends, family members, co-workers, business partners etc – it will be a form of private trust.

If in a given society trust is typically vested in one selected kind of object, we shall call it *focused*. For example, there are societies which exhibit considerable trust in the interpersonal, intimate, private relations, and have deep distrust in the more abstract institutions. But trust (or distrust) may also be *diffused*, occurring more or less consistently at all levels. Metaphorically, we speak about the climate or the atmosphere of trust, or distrust, pervading the whole society. If that happens, the consequences for the whole social life are very profound. Trust (or distrust), widely shared and manifested in all areas of social life, turns into a normative expectation, becomes embedded in a culture, and not only in individual attitudes. When the *culture of trust* or the *culture of distrust* appears, the people are constrained to exhibit trust or distrust in all their dealings, independent of individual convictions, and departures from such a cultural demand meet with a variety of sanctions.

Social life does not allow for a vacuum. If trust decays, some other social mechanisms are apt to emerge as functional substitutes for trust, satisfying the universal needs for orderliness, predictability, efficiency, fairness etc. Some of them are clearly pathological.

The first reaction is *providentialism*: the regression from the discourse of agency toward the discourse of fate. The supernatural or metaphysical forces – God, destiny, fate – are invoked as anchors of some spurious certainty. They are thought to take care of a situation about which nothing can be done, as it is entirely predetermined. For the people, it remains to 'wait and see'. This 'vague and generalized sense of [quasi] trust in distant events over which one has no control' (Giddens, 1990: 133) may bring some psychological consolation, repress 'anxiety, angst and dread', but at the social level it produces disastrous effects: passivism and stagnation.

The second, quite perverse substitute for trust is *corruption*

(Elster, 1989: 266). Spreading in a society, it provides some misleading sense of orderliness and predictability, some feeling of control over chaotic environment. Bribes provide a sense of control over decision makers, and the guarantee of favorable decisions. 'Gifts' accepted by medical doctors, teachers, bosses are to guarantee their favors or preferential treatment. The same tissue of social bonds is replaced by the net of reciprocal favors, 'connections', barter, sick 'pseudo-Gemeinschaft' (Merton, 1968: 163) of bribe-givers and bribe-takers, the cynical world of mutual manipulation and exploitation (see Gambetta, 1988: 158-75 on the Italian mafia).

The third mechanism is the overgrowth of *vigilance*, taking into private hands the direct supervision and control of others, whose competence or integrity is put into doubt, or whose accountability is seen as weak, owing to inefficiency or lax standards of enforcing agencies. If businessmen do not trust their partners, the handshake will no longer do. They will draw meticulous contracts, insist on bank guarantees, and count on litigation if partners breach trust. But enforcing agencies may themselves be distrusted. If the police force is judged as inept, private security agencies are employed. If banks cannot elicit debts, private debt collecting agencies appear, which occasionally resort to force. If medical doctors are not trusted, a patient will check diagnosis with a number of them.

The fourth mechanism may be called *ghettoization*, i.e. closing in, building unpenetrable boundaries around a group in an alien and threatening environment. The diffuse distrust in the wider society is compensated by strong loyalty to tribal, ethnic or familial groups, matched with xenophobia and hostility toward foreigners. People close themselves in ghettos of limited and intimate relationships, isolated and strictly separated from other groups, organizations and institutions. By cutting the external world off, they reduce some of its complexity and uncertainty. For example Polish emigrant groups in the US, arriving in the first half of the twentieth century, have never been able to assimilate and still tend to live in closed communities, cultivating traditions, religious faith, native language, customs. This may be explained by the culture of distrust arising in relatively uneducated, poverty stricken groups coming from pre-industrial settings and finding themselves in an entirely new and alien social environment (see Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918-20).

The fifth reaction may be called *paternalization*. When the 'culture of distrust' develops, with existential 'angst and dread' becoming unbearable, people start to dream about a father figure, a strong autocratic leader (Das Führer or Il Duce), who would purge with an iron hand all distrustful ('suspicious', 'alien') persons, organizations and institutions, and who would restore, if necessary by force, the

semblance of order, predictability and continuity in social life. When such a leader emerges he easily becomes a focus of blind, substitute trust.

The sixth reaction may be called *externalization* of trust. In the climate of distrust against local politicians, institutions, products etc., people turn to foreign societies, and deposit their trust in their leaders, organizations or goods. By contrast, they are often blindly idealized, which is even easier because of the distance, the selective bias of the media, and the lack of direct contrary evidence. In this vein we believe in foreign economic aid or military assistance, the exceptional merits of American democracy or the unfailing quality of Japanese cars.

The Syndrome of Distrust in Post-Communist Society

Let us turn now to more concrete social realities, and apply these conceptual distinctions to the case of post-communist societies in Eastern-Central Europe.

Endemic distrust, appearing at all levels and in all regions of social life, remains a reality six years after the fall of real socialism. Evidence for that can be sought in two directions. First we may examine some *behavioral indicators*, what people do or are ready to do: more precisely, typical modes of actual or intended conduct, which inferentially would signify a lack of trust. Second we may examine *verbal indicators*: straightforward declarations, evaluations of various aspects of social life, elicited by surveys and opinion polls, in which various types of distrust find more direct articulation. The evidence refers exclusively to the case of Poland, but I suppose similar tendencies could be spotted in other countries of post-communist Europe.

Perhaps the strongest *behavioral indicator* of generalized distrust in the viability of one's own society is the decision to emigrate. This is the clearest form of the 'exit option' (Hirschman, 1970) which people take when life conditions become unbearable and no improvement is in sight. The stream of refugees fleeing East Germany in 1989, or the 'boat people' escaping Haiti, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Cuba, or Mexicans slipping through the American border, show that those people have lost 'internal trust' in the political or economic system of their own society. At the same time, the functional substitute of 'external trust' develops: either in the vague, diffuse notion of 'the free world', 'the West' etc., or in the more specific idea of an intended, most attractive country of immigration (be it the US, Canada, Germany etc.). Now look at the Polish case. Long after 1989, when all previous political motivations

are no longer present, a considerable stream of emigrants is still flowing out of Poland, coming especially from higher educated groups and professionals (doctors of medicine, engineers, artists, musicians, sportspeople etc.). In the American 'visa lottery' Poles consistently get the largest quotas, which indicates that the number of applicants is also the largest. And even more tellingly, survey data show that 29% of citizens, i.e. approximately one in three, seriously consider emigrating (*Central and Eastern Eurobarometer*, March 1993).

The phenomenon akin to emigration, just another variant of the 'exit option', is the withdrawal from participation in public life, and the escape into the closed, private world of the family, friendship circles, work groups, or voluntary associations. In those 'ghettos' people find 'horizontal trust', compensating functionally for the lack of 'vertical trust' in institutions. During the communist period it was referred to as 'internal exile'. But some symptoms of that seem to continue. One is electoral abstention. In the first democratic presidential elections in Poland, almost 50% of citizens chose to abstain; later in municipal elections the overall participation was around 34%, falling to 20% in cities. In the area of economic conduct it is characteristic how extended families or kinship networks are mobilized to provide capital or labor for entrepreneurial ventures. In a relatively poor country, it is quite striking how enormous amounts of money can be raised in philanthropic actions, as long as they are defined as spontaneous and private, and not run by the government. The same people who donate large sums to the 'Great Orchestra of Festive Help' (a nationwide telethon to raise money for sick children) will use all their wits to evade taxes.

Pervasive distrust may alternatively be manifested by the 'voice option' rather than the 'exit option'. Those who do not want to emigrate, or to become passive, take to collective protest. The number of 'protest events' is a good sign of public distrust. Of course this must be accompanied by some level of trust in the contesting groups or movements and their potential efficacy. Distrust in official politics is substituted functionally with trust in 'alternative politics' from below. The life of post-communist society is rich in protest events. In the case of Poland, we observe repeated waves of strikes, street demonstrations, protest rallies, marches, road blockades, prolonged fastings, expressing generalized distrust in government or more specific distrust in concrete policies.

Distrust may be spotted when we examine forms of behavior directed toward the more distant future. If the image of the future is unclear or negative we observe the presentist orientation: concern with the immediate moment, to the neglect of any deeper temporal

horizon. Some authors refer to contemporary Poland as a 'waiting society', showing 'reluctance to plan and think of the future in a long time perspective' (Tarkowska, 1994: 64-6). Evidence of such attitudes is found when we turn to some prevailing types of economic behavior. One of them is conspicuous spending on consumer goods, to the neglect of investing. Most people are still reluctant to invest in private business; only 14% consider it seriously, and only 7% are ready to invest in stocks (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30 April 1994). But even among those who decide to invest a characteristic pattern appears. It is striking that most investments still go into trade, services, and financial operations, rather than production or construction (Poland, 1994: 125). This reflects the uncertainty about legal regulations, terms of trade, and consistency of economic policies. Another sign of economic distrust is to be found in saving decisions: 59% of the people declare that saving is entirely unreasonable (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 18 October 1994). Among the minority of those who do save, foreign currency is still considered more dependable by a large segment of the population, in spite of low interest rates. Approximately 36% of all savings are put into foreign currency, most of that in US dollars and Deutschmarks (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3 April 1994), and 25% of Poles believe that saving in dollars is the best defense against inflation (*CEBOS Bulletin*, January 1994). This is another symptom of externalization of trust.

If we look at consumer behavior, the externalization of trust becomes obvious. People consistently prefer foreign over local products, even of comparable quality, and even if local prices are lower. This refers equally to agricultural products, food, clothing, technical equipment, all the way up to automobiles.

Institutional distrust in the economic area may be indicated by the typical behavior of investors on the stock exchange, a new institution in the Polish economy. Most investors completely disregard 'fundamental analysis' based on objective indicators of performance reported by the firms, using at most the 'technical analysis' of price curves, according to some fashionable magical recipes ('Elliott waves' are particularly in vogue). Investors seem to rely on the wildest rumors, and exhibit pervasive suspicion of all official pronouncements, statistical data, and economic prognoses.

In the area of services, the distrust in public institutions is glaring. If the choice is available, people most often prefer private over public services. When socialized, state-run medicine lost its monopoly, a large proportion of patients switched immediately to private doctors and their clinics, in spite of high expenses. More and more private schools at elementary and secondary level are draining students from public education, in spite of excessive tuition. This is

slowly extending to the level of higher education, where even highly prestigious state universities are abandoned by some students in favor of new private establishments. The ruling assumption seems to be that the only dependable guarantee of good services is money.

Generalized distrust in the social order and public safety is visible in the spread of all sorts of self-defense and protective measures. Vigilance develops as the functional substitute for trust. The sales of guns, gas pistols, personal alarms, the installation of hardened doors, specialized locks and other anti-theft devices at home and in cars, the training of guard dogs, have all grown into a flourishing business. There has been an eruption of private institutions and organizations, making up for the undependable operation of state agencies: private security guards, detective agencies, debt collectors etc. We also observe the growth of voluntary associations aimed at the defense of citizens against abuse: consumer groups, tenants associations, creditor groups, taxpayers' defense organizations and the like.

Let us move now to direct opinions, evaluations, and projections, in which people verbally exhibit some measure of distrust.

At the most general level, the best *verbal indicator* of trust is the appraisal of systemic reforms, their success up to now, and their future prospects. Unfortunately, only 29% of the citizens unconditionally approve reforms, while 56% declare distrust (*Central and Eastern Eurobarometer*, February 1993). In another poll 58% of the respondents appraise the current political and economic situation as deteriorating (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22 February 1994). When asked about more specific dimensions of reforms, only 32% declare that democracy is a good thing, while 55% are dissatisfied with democratic institutions (*Central and Eastern Eurobarometer*, February 1993). Similarly, only 29% believe that privatization brings 'changes for the better' (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 April 1994). When pressed about the concrete changes, which after all did take place, the respondents show a strikingly negativistic bias, perceiving mostly the dark side of reforms. As crucial changes, 93% indicate the growth of crime, 89% the appearance of economic rackets, 87% socioeconomic distance and growing polarization into rich and poor, 57% reduced social security and care for the needy, 62% weakened mutual sympathy and helping attitudes among the people (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 June 1994).

Another indicator of generalized trust is the comparison of the present socioeconomic situation with the past. Again, distrust clearly prevails. Asked about their own, personal condition, 53% feel that they are living worse than before (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 June 1994). Appraising the situation of others, around half of the respondents believe that people were generally more satisfied under real

socialism. This surprising result is confirmed by three independent polls, estimating the percentages at 52%, 48%, and 54% (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28 June 1994).

When thinking about their society in the future, people are even more pessimistic. Only 20% trust that the situation will improve, 32% expect a turn for the worse, and 36% hope that it will at least remain unchanged (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 April 1994). More concretely, in respect of the overall economic situation, 62% believe that it will not improve (*Central and Eastern Eurobarometer*, February 1993), and 55% expect the cost of living to rise (*CEBOS Bulletin*, January 1994). A confirmation of distrust in the future is found in the list of problems that people worry about: 73% indicate the lack of prospects for their children as something that worries them most (*CEBOS Bulletin*, January 1993).

More concrete institutional and positional distrust takes many forms. Politicians are treated with greatest suspicion; 87% of a nation-wide sample claim that they take care only of their own interests and careers, and neglect the public good (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 July 1994). If anything goes wrong in society, 93% of the people declare that 'the politicians and bureaucrats are guilty' (Koralewicz and Ziolkowski, 1990: 62). Moreover, 48% see public administration as pervaded by corruption, and only 8% perceive corruption in private businesses (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19 March 1994). The veracity of those in high office is also doubted: 49% of citizens do not believe information given by the ministers (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 25 March 1994), 60% are convinced that data on levels of inflation or GNP growth released by the state statistical office are false (*CEBOS Bulletin*, January 1994). Not much trust is attached to fiduciary responsibility (Barber, 1983) of government or administration: 70% believe that public bureaucracy is entirely insensitive towards human suffering and grievances (Poleszczuk, 1991: 76). Fairness and justice are found to be absent in public institutions: 71% say that in state enterprises 'good work is not a method of enrichment' (Koralewicz and Ziolkowski, 1990: 55), and 72% believe that people advance not because of success in work but owing to 'connections' (Poleszczuk, 1991: 86). This extends to the courts of law: 79% claim that verdicts will not be the same for persons of different social status (1991: 88). The police are considered with the traditional lack of confidence, and hence public security is evaluated as very low: 56% of the people try to avoid going out after dark (*Polityka*, 14 May 1994) and 36% do not feel safe in the streets at all, day or night (*CEBOS Bulletin*, November 1993). To the question 'Is Poland an internally safe country?', 67% respond in the negative, and only 26% feel secure (*Gazeta*

Wyborcza, 21 March 1994). Even the Catholic Church, traditionally the most trusted of all public institutions, seems to be affected by the climate of distrust, especially when it takes a more political role: 54% disapprove of such an extension of the Church's functions, and 70% would like the Church to limit its activities to the religious area (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10 May 1994). It seems as if any contact with the political domain is polluting.

The mass media, even though much more independent and not linked directly to the state, do not fare much better. Apparently they have not yet regained trust, which was devastated by their instrumental role under real socialism: 48% of the people still do not believe the TV, and 40% distrust the newspapers (*Central and Eastern Eurobarometer*, February 1993).

The obverse side of the strong internal distrust in its many manifestations is the emphasis on external trust toward the West. It has been found that 49% of the people are aware of European integration treaties, and 48% declare a positive view of the European Union and its policies. As much as 80% would like Poland to join the European Union, and 43% opt for doing it immediately (*Central and Eastern Eurobarometer*, February 1993). The support for joining NATO is even stronger, as the result of pervasive external distrust toward Russia and other eastern neighbors of Poland.

In the generalized climate of distrust, a vicious self-fulfilling mechanism starts to operate. To trust those who are deemed untrustworthy is clearly irrational. It is more rational to be distrustful in an environment devoid of trust. Those who manifest trust will not only lose in the game, but will be censured for stupidity, naivety, credulity, simple-mindedness. Cynicism, cheating, egoism, evasion of laws, outwitting the system, turn into virtues. And that cannot but lead to even deeper corrosion of trust.*

Toward the Recovery of Trust

The main issue of policy is how to break that vicious, self-enhancing sequence, and how to reverse it. Directly targeting distrust by moralizing, preaching, convincing people of the benefits of trust is very limited in its effectiveness in a situation in which preachers are

*In the case of post-communist transition the speed of events clearly overtakes the publishing process. At the moment when this book comes out the diagnosis based on the data for the early nineties doesn't seem so gloomy anymore. There are already clear signs of the consistent recovery of trust, in all respects mentioned above.

not trusted either. Thus the only viable policy is the indirect approach: consistent democratization and persistent improvement of democratic mechanisms. Restoration of trust must be brought about by consistent governmental policies. The battle should be fought on six fronts.

First, *against tentativeness and for certainty*. Consistency and irreversibility of pro-democratic policies must be safeguarded. They must be followed according to a clear pattern, blueprint or logic. They must document the unwavering, reform-oriented will of the authorities, by means of creating *faits accomplis* and pre-commitments. Hesitation, *ad hoc* reversals, slow downs on the democratic course must be avoided. People must feel that the authorities know what they are doing and where they are going, that they have a clear program and execute it persistently. The atmosphere of tentativeness, of trial and error, of another grand 'political experiment' must be eliminated, even if that provides the politicians with easy excuses for their failures. Jon Elster makes an excellent point: 'The very notion of "experimenting with reform" borders on incoherence, since the agents' knowledge that they are taking part in an experiment induces them to adopt a short time horizon that makes it less likely that the experiment will succeed' (1989: 176).

Second, *against arbitrariness and for accountability*. The key to that is the rule of law, constitutionalism, judicial control, as well as the efficiency of enforcement agencies of all kinds. In legislation and application there must be no place for voluntarism, arbitrariness, *ad hoc* action, opportunistic stretching or modifying of laws. The immutable principles of the constitution must precisely define the foundations of social and political organization, and include provisions preventing easy amendments. It must have the air of eternity. The laws must be binding for all citizens irrespective of their status. Enforcement of laws and citizens' obligations must be rigorous and must not allow of exceptions. Strong measures must be taken against crime.

Third, *against insecurity and for personal rights*. Fundamental rights of citizens have to be assured, and among them the right to private property. Consistent privatization and constitutional affirmation of private property are perhaps of key importance. Clear and precise financial laws, banking statutes, trading codes must safeguard the security of investments and economic transactions. Strict and consistent currency policies must restore the faith in local money.

Fourth, *against secrecy and for visibility and familiarity*. Governmental actions must be made as open and transparent as possible.

An efficient media policy aiming at that must be worked out and implemented. Pluralistic independent media and autonomous institutions for gathering statistical data, census offices, and reform watch centers must be developed. The politicians must be made more personal and familiar by disclosing some aspects of their private lives. Continuous polling, monitoring and reporting of public moods must become the rule. Survey results feed back to the public and eliminate the lack of awareness of the opinions of others, the pattern of 'pluralistic ignorance', so detrimental to trust.

Fifth, *against monocentrism and for pluralism*. There is a need for consistent decentralization, delegating competences to local authorities and providing local units with autonomy and self-rule. Only when people feel that some public issues really depend on them will they develop public responsibility and loyalty to institutions. 'Political systems that leave more decisions to the individual ... can generate more trust' (Elster, 1989: 180). Pluralism must also refer to political allegiances, consumer choices, cultural preferences. The larger and more variable the field for trusting commitments, the stronger the mobilization for trust.

Sixth, *against ineptitude and for integrity of personnel*. People arrive at judgments about the political, economic or other 'expert systems' and institutions by encountering their representatives: ministers and mayors, clerks and mailmen, bus conductors and airline hostesses, secretaries and teachers, doctors and nurses. All of them operate at 'access points' to the systems (Giddens, 1990: 90). Their demeanor may exude trust – when they show professionalism, seriousness, competence, truthfulness, concern for others, readiness to help. On the other hand, any bad experiences at 'access points', any frustrating contacts – even when vicarious, through the media, and not personal – are immediately generalized to the whole system (1990: 90–1). Extensive training, meticulous screening, and highly selective recruitment to all positions of high social visibility – including first of all the political offices – are prerequisites for generalized, institutional and positional trust.

None of these policies is easy to implement. But one thing is certain: without political will and determination in this direction the crisis of trust that we observe at present in post-communist societies will not be overcome.

Note

Several arguments and data presented in this chapter have been used by myself in two earlier articles: 'Vertrauen: Die Fehlende Ressource in der Postkommunistischen

Gesellschaft', in B. Nedelmann (ed.), *Kolner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, Sonderheft 35/1995*, September 1995, pp. 254–76; and 'Trust and Emerging Democracy: Lessons from Poland', *International Sociology*, 11 (1), March 1996: 37–62.

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The Public Sphere and a European Civil Society

Víctor Pérez-Díaz

'Generalists' versus 'Minimalists'

In this essay, I discuss some topics which are related to current problems in the process of development of a European public sphere, which is a key component of a European civil society in the making. The difficulties arise from the fact that (a) European society is composed of national societies whose citizens' attention is focused mainly on matters of political responsibility and economic policy at a national level; (b) explicit pro-European discourse is not consistent with the actual politics of the main political actors; and (c) it is not easy to articulate narratives that could help in building up a feeling of belonging to a European 'community'. Such is the subject matter of the following sections. However, the present section is devoted to providing a better understanding of the development process by placing it within the framework of a general discussion of the relationship between the concept of the public sphere and that of civil society (taking careful note of the different uses of this term). I conclude by suggesting that the difficulties alluded to should, in fact, be considered as opportunities or challenges.

The recent uses of the term 'civil society' come mainly from three sources, which are connected to three different archaeological strata in the term's modern intellectual history. Firstly, there are those theorists who use the term in ways which are fairly close to that of the Scottish philosophers of the eighteenth century. They adopt a broad view of civil society (or 'civil society *sensu lato*') as the ideal type of a society characterized by a set of *sociopolitical* institutions such as the rule of law, limited and accountable public authority, economic markets, social pluralism and a public sphere. They could be called 'generalists' and include, for instance, Ernest Gellner (1994) and myself (Pérez-Díaz, 1993; 1995). Secondly, there are those who use the term to denote the non-governmental components of civil society *sensu lato* (namely, the economic markets together with associations