

Collegio Carlo Alberto



Civil Society Weakness in Post-Communist  
Europe: A Preliminary Assessment

Grzegorz Ekiert

Roberto Foa

**No. 198**

**January 2011**

**Carlo Alberto Notebooks**

[www.carloalberto.org/working\\_papers](http://www.carloalberto.org/working_papers)

© 2011 by Grzegorz Ekiert and Roberto Foa. Any opinions expressed here are those of the authors and not those of the Collegio Carlo Alberto.

# **Civil Society Weakness in Post-Communist Europe: A Preliminary Assessment**

**Grzegorz Ekiert<sup>1</sup> and Roberto Foa<sup>2</sup>**

**Harvard University**

Abstract: During the last two decades, scholars from a variety of disciplines have argued that civil society is structurally deficient in post-communist countries. The picture that arises from the literature is one of ‘democracies without citizens,’ where political elites have succeeded in protecting basic civic rights and implementing democratic procedures, but failed to enhance voluntary activity or civic engagement at the grassroots level. This paper, by contrast, challenges the ‘weakness of post-communist civil society’ consensus by using a wide range of data from various available sources. Tracing the stages of civil society transformations, we show that civil societies in Central and Eastern European countries are not as feeble as is often assumed. Some post-communist countries possess vigorous public spheres and active civil society organizations strongly connected to transnational civic networks and able to shape domestic policies. We suggest that existing studies have focused excessively on voluntary membership and survey data in assessing the strength of civil society at the expense of other equally if not more important factors.

---

<sup>1</sup> [ekiert@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:ekiert@fas.harvard.edu).

<sup>2</sup> [foa@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:foa@fas.harvard.edu).

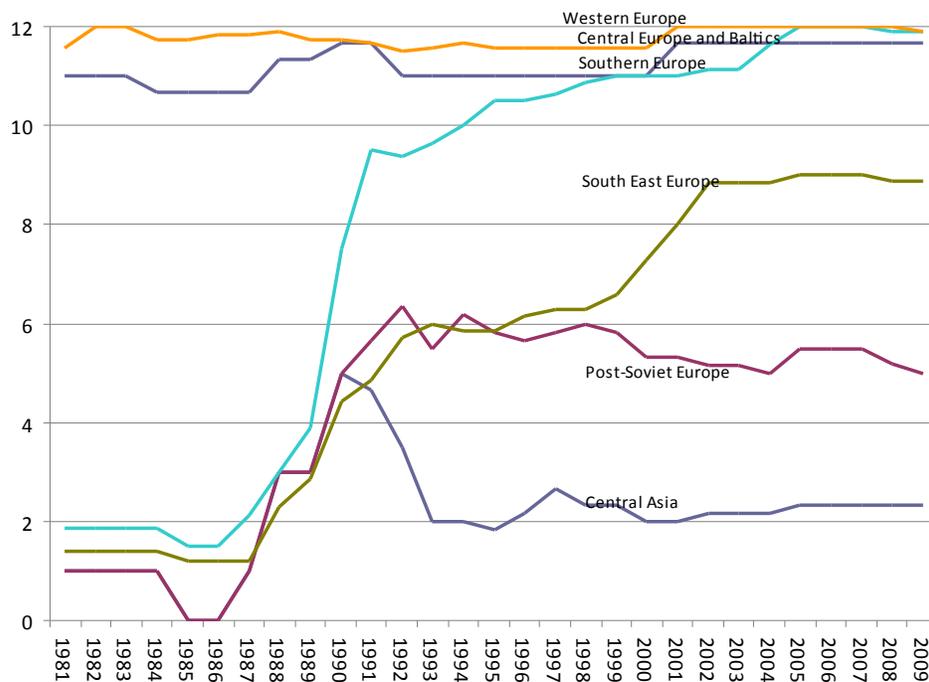
## **I. Introduction**

During the last two decades, scholars from a variety of disciplines have argued that civil society is structurally deficient in post-communist countries. Early studies of ‘social capital’ in the region found lower levels of social trust, community engagement, and confidence in social and political institutions across Central and Eastern Europe (Rose 1999, Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1996). Studies by Howard (2003) and Bernhard and Karakoç (2007), among others, have shown low levels of voluntary associational membership, and a paucity of public participation in comparison to post-authoritarian new democracies. Scholars have also criticized the failure of new democratic states to develop and strengthen civic initiatives and participation in governance (Lomax 1997, Ely 1994). The picture that arises from the literature is one of ‘democracies without citizens,’ in that political elites have succeeded in protecting basic civic rights and implementing democratic procedures, rule of law, and multiparty competition, but failed to enhance social cohesion and voluntary activity at the grassroots level, or increase popular support for the institutions of representative democracy. Warning of the dangers to democratic consolidation, some authors have pointed to the growing dissatisfaction and popularity of populist and radical right parties that exhibit questionable support for democratic institutions (Ramet 1999, Minkenberg 2002, Kopecky and Mudde 2003, Rupnik 2007). These concerns about weakness of civil society, its sources and consequences are echoed in many debates taking place in the region (Jawłowska and Kubik 2007/08, Civil Society Forum 2009).

Yet, is the consensus view, that all post-communist countries share weak and structurally deficient civil societies, in fact correct? Taking the conventional wisdom at its face value appears to generate a number of paradoxes. First, the events of 1989 were initially considered as the undisputable triumph of civil society movements over monolithic communist regimes. Why, therefore, have the seemingly strong, active and mobilized civil societies of the transition period become so weak after democracy was established? The inauguration of democracy with its guaranties of political rights and freedoms ought to have facilitated a flourishing of civic activity, rather than civic atrophy. Second, given

that communist regimes did not simply repress independent social and political organizations, but actively built their own associational structures, why would post-communist democracies have weaker civil societies than post-authoritarian democracies in Asia or Latin America? Authoritarian regimes routinely prohibited and constrained civil society organizations and deployed exclusionary and demobilizing strategies to undermine the organizational base of civil society, while corporatist organizations such as trade unions or professional associations, or sport clubs and leisure organizations, were consciously fostered under communist tutelage. Third, if civil society is uniformly weak across the post-communist space, why did some regimes in Central Asia lapse rapidly back into authoritarian rule, while others in Eastern Europe saw gradual deterioration in respect for civic rights and liberties, and others in East Central Europe held steady to the path of democratic consolidation? A glance at the Freedom House ranking illustrates well these contrasting trajectories of political transformations (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Civil rights and political liberties in Europe 1981-2009**



Source: Freedom House

It would be questionable to assume that these contrasting outcomes of post-communist transformations have no relations to the condition of civil society. This paper, therefore, challenges the ‘weakness of post-communist civil society’ consensus by identifying a number of civil society types emerging in the region and showing how they have been shaped by a variety of present and historical factors. Using a wide range of data from various available sources and tracing the stages of civil society transformations, we show that civil societies in Central and Eastern European countries are not as feeble as is often assumed. Some post-communist countries possess vigorous public spheres and active civil society organizations strongly connected to transnational civic networks and able to shape domestic policies. We suggest that existing studies have focused excessively on voluntary membership and survey data in assessing the strength of civil society at the expense of other equally if not more important factors. This implied a one-dimensional view of civil society. Yet, civil society is a complex multidimensional and interactive phenomenon (Anheier 2004). Specific dimensions of civil society in various countries may exhibit different levels of development and different qualities. The diversity of outcomes among post-communist regimes, and in particular the growing gap between democratic East Central Europe and the increasingly authoritarian post-Soviet space, is mirrored by the diversity in civic and social institutions, reflecting different historical legacies, political trajectories, and religious and cultural traditions. In fact, both the legacies of communist rule and more distant historical legacies important for the civil society development are significantly different across the post-communist space (Ekiert and Hanson 2001). We argue that we need more in depth empirical research specifically focused on real civil societies (Alexander 2006) to be able to capture emerging forms of civil society and their impact on politics in formerly communist countries.

### **The Weakness of Post-communist Civil Society Argument**

In the wake of the democratic revolutions of 1989, it was commonly asserted that communism had wiped out any traces of a genuine civil society, and that the legacy of

totalitarian rule was highly detrimental to reconstitution of pluralist associational life. As Wedel remarked, “under communism the nations of Eastern Europe never had a ‘civil society’... the lack of civil society was part of the very essence of the all-pervasive communist state” (Wedel 1994: 323). Ralf Dahrendorf (1990) famously argued that while building liberal political and economic institutions in Eastern Europe could be relatively swift, re-building strong and effective civil society would present a much greater challenge, only to be accomplished over the course of several generations. Since the claim that a vibrant civil society supports the consolidation as well as the quality of democracy is a long-established, although still debated, tenet of the social sciences (see, for example, Tocqueville 2004, Almond and Verba 1963, Putnam et al. 1993, Paxton 2002, Shils 1991, Diamond 1999, Rosenblum and Park 2002, Alagappa 2004, Berman 1997, Schmitter 1997 and Bermeo 2003), its absence in post-communist countries was treated as a great obstacle to building working democratic systems. The paucity of associational life and civic engagement registered by the cross-national public opinion surveys over the last two decades would seem to confirm the persistent deficit of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe and place in doubt the future health of democracy in the region.

While the transition to democracy after 1989 might have been expected to lead to a civic renaissance, many observers noted instead a ‘civic demobilization’, as the negative legacy of communism was compounded by the manner in which the post-1989 democratic transformations occurred. The elite-driven strategies of democratic reform and economic liberalization implied the need for demobilization of the publics and further marginalized incipient civil societies (Lomax 1997, Ely 1994, Staniszkis 1999, Howard 2003). Reflecting on this phenomenon, Bernhard (1996) points to four factors responsible for the enfeeblement of a previously mobilized civil society: demobilization resulting from the manner in which pacted transitions privilege elite negotiations and cooperation at the expense of popular forces, collective action and grassroots organizations; the ‘decapitation’ of the civic movements organizational leadership through its migration to the new state bureaucracies, political parties and democratic institutions; the legacy of totalitarian rule undermining social trust and volunteerism; and the demobilizing social consequences of the economic recession and structural adjustment. Thus, the strong civil

societies that challenged communist government in the region subsequently became weak and demobilized as a result of factors inherent in the nature of the dual economic and political transformation occurring across the post-communist sphere. Some scholars argued that even EU accession process and membership, with its putative support for civil society initiatives, in fact did very little to boost civil society capacity and development (Giza-Poleszczuk 2009). While the question of the absence of civil society under communism depends to a large degree on the definition one adopts, the failure of citizens to respond to new opportunities after the democratic transition and the restoration of political and civil rights remains a puzzle.

The hollowing-out of Eastern European civil society is unexpected, given the dense associational structure of the old regime and its transformation after 1989. Students of communist societies always emphasized their heavy organizational hierarchy and mobilizational capacity: all citizens were forced or encouraged to join party-state imposed mass organizations (once dubbed ‘transmission belts’), spanning the entire spectrum of activities from leisure, to professional sphere, to neighborhood life, to high politics. The extraordinary organizational density and forced mass participation was one of the defining characteristics of totalitarian and post-totalitarian regimes in comparison to authoritarian regimes (Kubik 2000: 184-85). If such participation did not generate the “habits of the heart,” it nevertheless provided the skills, resources and reference frames for collective action. In addition, researchers in the region showed that a non-trivial number of pre-communist organizations survived under communist rule. While the authorities tightly controlled such organizations, they were able to protect their specific traditions and continued to perform many of their traditional social functions (Kurczewska 2004; Kurczewski 2003, Gasior-Niemiec and Glinski 2007a). Therefore, the picture of a total extinction of the pre-Second World War civil society may need to be reconsidered. If communist regimes had such dense state imposed associational life often with roots in the pre-communist past, what happened to these organizations in the process of transition? There is evidence to conclude that most, if not all, these organizations survived the democratic transition and swiftly adapted to the new democratic environment. It is puzzling, therefore, why the combination of surviving old and emerging new organizations should generate weaker not stronger civil society, especially

in comparison to post-authoritarian democracies. Moreover, if some European traditions of self-organization and public involvement survived the communist period, they should have provided underpinnings for the reconstitution of civil society.

Finally, the assumed weakness of civil society challenges the link between civil society and democratic consolidation. For if civil society is systematically weak across the post-communist space, how can we relate this to significantly diverging outcomes of political, social and economic transformations in the region? Two decades of transition have produced a striking diversity of outcomes ranging from consolidated liberal democracies to various types of authoritarianism, and from a social market economy, to predatory state capitalism. A glance at various measures and indices gauging the progress of political and economic reforms shows that a number of post-communist countries (in particular those that joined the European Union in 2004 and in 2007) have made considerable progress even despite the recent global crisis. The quality of their democratic institutions is similar to that enjoyed by the citizens of established western democracies. They also have working market economies and extensive welfare systems. In contrast, political and economic reforms in several Balkan countries as well as countries that emerged from the dissolution of the former Soviet Union (except for the Baltic republics) are less advanced. Moreover, the recent data show a growing split between these two parts of the former Soviet bloc, as well as further deepening of sub-regional divisions. On the one hand, there exists a striking convergence between the new member states of the EU and the official candidate countries. They are richer and have lower levels of income inequality and poverty and more developed welfare systems. Moreover, their economies are growing faster, while liberal democratic standards are safeguarded by consolidated democratic systems. On the other hand, the majority of former Soviet republics (including Russia) have emerged poorer and less egalitarian while concurrently being plagued by more severe economic difficulties, massive corruption, and increasingly authoritarian political regimes (Ekiert, Kubik and Vachudova 2007). How do these diverse outcomes square with the notion of uniformly weak civil society across the entire post-communist space? It is clear that a theory of post-communist civil society needs to account for the diversity of transformation paths found in different countries and to show

their specific causes and mechanisms.

In summary, in the literature on post-communist political developments there is an obvious tension between (often normatively inspired) claims about the weakness of civil society, and available empirical evidence that suggests significant diversity in the nature, development and robustness of civil societies across the region. It seems that given social and organizational legacies of communism, the survival of some pre-communist traditions, and a high level of popular mobilization during the transition, post-1989 civil society should be relatively dense and active. In addition, if one factors in significant external assistance for civil society building projects, considerable state support and subsidies, as well as a relatively advanced level of the socio-economic development, one would expect post-communist civil society to be relatively strong, especially in comparison to many post-authoritarian democracies. In this paper, we suggest that the vision of an anemic and passive civil society common to all countries in the region depicted in the Western scholarly literature is not accurate. Post-communist civil society as a specific singular phenomenon does not really exist. Or, to be more precise, it does not exist in a number of post-communist countries. Differences in civil society condition and strength within the region are as vast as differences across regions, despite the shared communist legacy.

## **II. Civil Societies in Eastern and Central Europe under the Old and the New Regime**

In order to reassess the current debates, we need first to reconstruct the origin and structure of civil society in post-communist Europe. Under the old regime, East European countries had a distinct (politicized, bureaucratized, centralized, and comprehensive) pattern of associational life and interest “representation.” The presence of this type of social organization was a defining element of totalitarianism and one of the most fundamental institutional differences between it and other political regimes, both democratic and authoritarian. There were, however, important differences among countries in the structure, historical continuity and function of associations that reflected

contrasting historical traditions, distinct strategies of the communist takeover and diverging political developments during the communist period. In particular, we emphasize that legacies of communist rule in the sphere of associational life are quite dissimilar for various post-communist countries and tend to influence their post-1989 civil society transformations. In the next section of this paper we are going to focus on three distinct periods that shaped the currently existing civil societies: communist, transition, and post-communist. We will outline differences among countries during these three periods and show the diversity of legacies and outcomes of civil society transformations we see in the region today.

### **1. The Incomplete Civil Society of the Communist Period**

The traditional associational sphere of the region, consisting of a wide range of social, professional and corporate associations, churches, charities, and local organizations, was largely destroyed during the imposition and consolidation of communist regimes; Hankiss (1989) described this as a “carpet bombing of civil society.” The communist onslaught followed the destruction to the social and institutional fabric of East European societies resulting from the Second World War. During the consecutive occupations, pre-war civil societies were deliberately repressed in countries invaded by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Social, professional and political organizations were banned, their leaders eliminated, and their resources confiscated. Genocide, ethnic cleansing, population transfers and border changes destroyed almost completely the social underpinning of associational life. Although many of the social and political organizations and charities that disappeared were reconstituted after the war, they were again disbanded, banned or forcefully merged into newly established mass organizations controlled by the communist party-states, or reconstituted under communist control (Les 2004).

After communist takeover, a dense and comprehensive organizational network of politicized, monopolistic, and centralized mass organizations was constructed, designed

to incorporate all social, generational and professional strata and categories. This massive institutional network of party controlled organizations filled the space between the party-state bureaucracy and the private lives of individuals. It constituted a spoiler representational sphere and provided a mechanism of indoctrination and political mobilization for the new regime, especially during the Stalinist period. Trade unions and other mass organizations were famously described as ‘transmission belts’ carrying forth the directives of the communist party to all segments of society (Selznick 1952).

At the same time, these new, politically controlled organizations were not purely coercive instruments of social control and mobilization. They provided various public goods to their members and their families, organized leisure activities, and often served as an integral part of the welfare provision system (Inglot 2008). These organizations also had some limited capacity to represent group interests and extract concessions, benefits and resources for their members from the party-state bureaucracies and central planners. Moreover, the associational landscape of communist societies was not exclusively populated by centralized mass organizations. Some pre-communist civil society traditions and even old organizations (mostly in the realm of leisure, education or culture) survived under communist rule, especially on the local level (Kurczewska 2004, 315; Gasior-Niemiec and Glinski 2007a: 255-6). They served as hidden carriers of local traditions and provided the space for some activities sheltered from direct political interference. Finally, various associational sectors in specific countries were organized differently. Some sectors were less centralized and hierarchical: Poland, for example, had four functionally segmented youth organizations. Membership in many of these mass organizations was usually automatic or routine (as part of employment or education) rather than compulsory and often collective not individual (all employees of an enterprise or all children at a school were members of specific organizations). In organizations where the membership was a matter of individual decisions, becoming a member carried some tangible social or material benefits and was not widely resented, as it is often implied in the weakness of post-communist civil society argument.

During the communist era these mass organizations underwent important

transformations. Following de-Stalinization in the 1950s and especially since the mid-1970s, this official institutional sphere experienced a gradual process of pragmatization, de-ideologization, and even pluralization. This happened to a different degree in various countries, with Poland and Hungary leading the way. In the 1970s and 1980s many of these organizations became less ideological, and acquired a degree of autonomy in managing their internal affairs, as well as a growing lobbying capacity. Membership in many organizations was increasingly voluntary and based on provision of various special benefits and collective goods. This gradual transformation of the nature and role of mass organizations had important consequences for state-society relations and produced striking differences across the Soviet bloc, with a growing split between 'reformist' and 'orthodox' communist regimes. The process of diversification was accelerated in the 1980 and aided by the systemic crisis of communism and by the emerging challenge from the embryonic independent and oppositional movements and organizations.

Alongside the transformation of state controlled organizations, independent or oppositional civil society networks emerged in many East European countries since the mid-1970s. Reflecting the decline of political repressions, growing intellectual and cultural dissent, the de-privatization of religion, and increasing opening to the West, autonomous social initiatives, human rights organizations, cultural, environmental, and religious movements were gaining ground in communist societies (Tokes 1979, Havel et al. 1985, Skilling 1988, Judt 1988, Ekiert 1991, Buchowski 1996, Sielawa-Kolbowska 2002). The appearance of opposition groups in Eastern Europe, and especially the emergence of the Solidarity movement in Poland, gave the impetus to rethinking the nature and role of East European dissent. These independent social and political initiatives were often described by Western observers as the formation of rudimentary forms of autonomous civil society (Arato 1981, Keane 1988). The implosion of the communist ideology, the emerging discourse of human rights, *samizdat*, and networks of independent communication provided foundations for this phenomenon. The self-organization of East European societies against their communist regimes provided a stimulus for the resurrection of the concept of civil society and the debate on the relationship between civil society and democracy in social sciences in the 1980s and

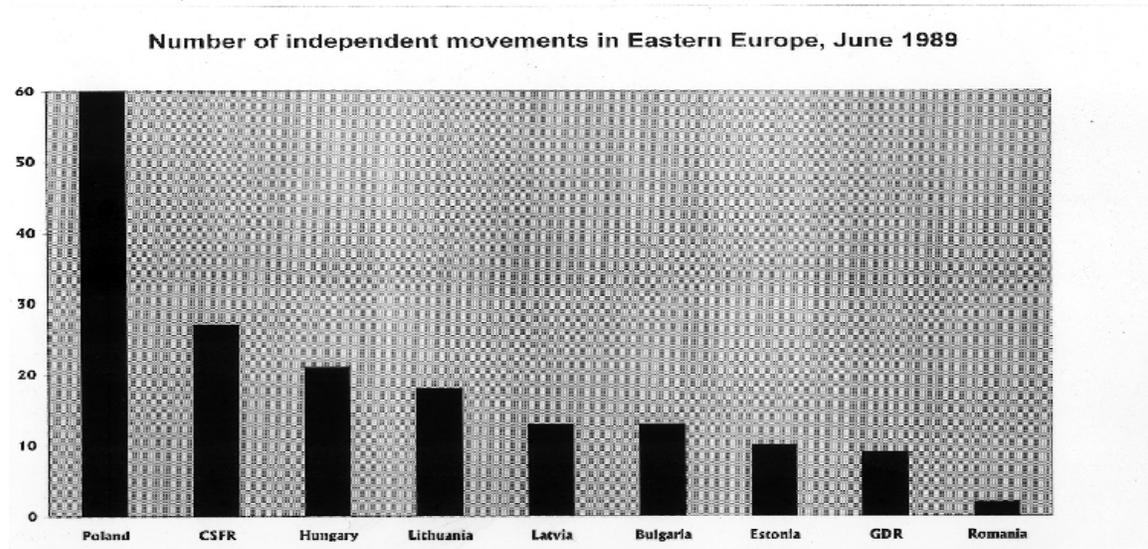
1990s.

By the 1980s, European communist countries had what can be described as incomplete civil societies (Ekiert and Kubik 1999; Kubik 2000) with a large number of associations and a dense structure of organizations at various levels and in all functional domains but without autonomy and a legally defined public space and enforceable rights and liberties. These incomplete civil societies shared many institutional characteristics across the region but also displayed some profound differences in the organization, normative orientation and practices within both their official and independent sectors. In all communist countries there was a massive state controlled sector comprised of mass organizations, including youth organizations, trade unions, farmers unions, professional associations, recreation and leisure organizations, sports clubs, women's organizations, veteran's and retirees' unions. This sector was institutionally similar across the region, although formal and informal practices within these organizations and the level of political control differed significantly among the Soviet bloc countries. In some countries, such as Poland and Hungary, the levels of pragmatization, de-politicization, pluralization as well as the lobbying capacity of the former "transmission belts" were relatively high. This transformation of the formal associational sphere allowed some interest articulation and representation, and redefined the state-society relations. It also opened the space for independent initiatives. In other countries, these processes were less advanced and still confined beneath the seeming organizational unity and the ritualized official discourse and practices.

The independent sector of civil society comprised of a wide range of groups, including semi-autonomous churches and religious organizations, human rights organizations and illegal political opposition, independent artistic and cultural movements, single-issue a-political movements (environmental, ethnic, consumer), and self-help groups, showed a much higher degree of diversity across the region. Central European countries (mostly notably Poland, but also Czechoslovakia and Hungary) had more robust independent sectors than other countries. These countries had a higher number of independent organizations (Pehe 1989), larger and more diverse oppositional movements, more public

support for independent activities, more coordination and contacts among independent groups and a higher number of contentious events challenging communist authorities (Bruszt, Campos, Fidrmuc and Roland 2007) as depicted in the following graphs.

**Figure 2. Number of independent organizations in June 1989**



**Table 1. Number of contentious events in European communist countries, 1985-1989**

	East Central Europe	Baltic States	Former Soviet Union	Former Yugoslavia
Contentious events	256	11	19	137

Source: Bruszt, Campos, Fidrmuc and Roland 2009

Not only the number of movements and protests differed across communist Europe, in

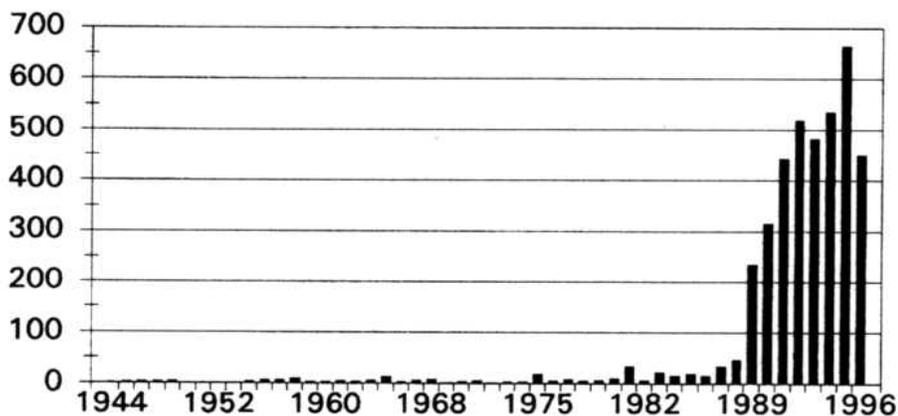
Poland and Hungary there were informal linkages between the official and independent sectors of their incomplete civil society. The existence of these linkages created an important precondition for the mode of democratization and power transfer in 1989 that in Poland and Hungary took a form of classic negotiated transitions.

In summary, three points must be emphasized. First, totalitarian regimes (in contrast to traditional authoritarian regimes) had a very distinctive impact upon civil society and upon associational life, and a highly unique pattern of institutionalizing and controlling the public sphere. Accordingly, we should observe in these countries a distinct social and cultural legacy shaping the transformations of civil societies during the post-communist period. Given the legacy of the dense state controlled associational structures and autonomous self-mobilization efforts, we should expect more robust civil societies in post-communist than in post-authoritarian new democracies. Second, since there were significant differences across the region in the composition, institutionalization and practices of these incomplete civil societies and their relations to the party-states, we should expect that these differences should carry over and have consequences for the post-communist period as well. Therefore, we should expect contrasting dynamics during the period of regime change with different patterns of civil society involvement and development. Finally, one would expect that given the extent of the organizational density of the old regimes, the extent of external assistance for civil society building, and the competition between old and new social organizations, the process of civil society re-formulation should be qualitatively different in post-communist and post-authoritarian cases. As a result, post-communist civil societies should be more robust and organizationally denser than post-authoritarian civil societies, especially in cases of successful democratization among societies that are at a similar level of socio-economic development.

## **2. 'Re-combinant' Civil Society of the Transition Period**

The collapse of communist regimes opened a space for the reconstitution of civil society and unleashed the process of civil society mobilization common to all cases of democratization (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1989). This process resulted in two parallel developments. First, there was the re-invention of non-existent, independent sectors of civil society. It was manifested in the massive social mobilization and rapid emergence of a wide spectrum of new organizations and movements (mostly NGOs, foundations, charities, religious and ethnic minority organizations but also employer and business associations).

**Figure 3. Registered civil society organizations in Poland**

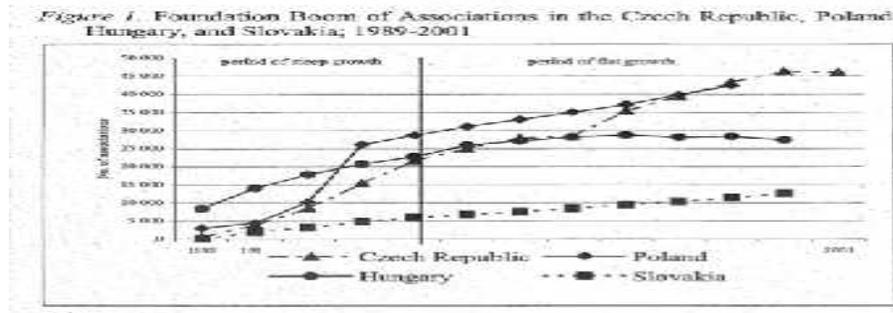


Source: Krasnodebska et al. 1996

These newcomers were by and large the organizations absent in the associational landscape inherited from the communist regime (such as NGOs, charities or foundations) as well as organizations competing directly with the inherited organizations (such as independent trade unions or new professional associations). Many of these organizations failed to secure resources and attract members and disappeared as quickly as they emerged, especially in the sectors of civil society where they faced competition from the former communist era organizations (labor unions, professional associations). The newly emerged independent sector had a different level of organizational growth and success and different composition across the region (OECD 1994; Anheier and Seibel 1998; Kuti

1999, Mansfeldova et al. 2004; Nalecz 2004, Nalecz and Bartkowski 2006). While no reliable comparative data on the formation of new, post-1989 associations exist, there are some data sets constructed for several post-communist countries. They show interesting differences in the speed and intensity of civil society growth.

**Figure 4. Growth of civil society organizations in four countries**



Depending on specific circumstances (conflicts and wars, quality of democracy, external support, existing traditions, and extent of economic crisis), the emerging new sectors of civil societies exhibited various institutional configurations, different balances between inherited and new organizations, contrasting styles of collective action, and normative orientations. Moreover, different collective actors played a dominant role in shaping civil society actions and political influence. Finally, new states employed different strategies to encourage some and discourage other activities through variety of legal regulations and financial means, including registration procedures, tax exemptions, subsidies, etc., (Simon 2004). State actors entered in differently structured relations with civil society actors on local and national levels as well.

Second, the majority of former communist controlled organizations experienced a complex and, by and large, successful process of reform and adaptation to new democratic conditions. They often lost a significant portion of their members and resources, frequently split into smaller organizations, and changed their names, leaders and agendas. But it should be emphasized that the majority of these organizations

survived transition to democracy in a relatively successful way and were able to protect most of resources that they had before 1989. Many of these organizations also preserved old linkages and preferential access to various bureaucratic levels of the state administration (Fric 2008: 244-45). There were some communist-era organizations that either collapsed and dissolved or survived by completely changing their organizational structure, identity and functions. While systematic data is not available, it is safe to assume that there were very few organizations that completely disappeared from the public scene.

This process of adaptation of communist-era organizations as well as the organizational and normative re-invention of new sectors of civil society was not uniform across the region. First of all, there were different levels of civic mobilization and political conflict during the transfer of power stage of democratization. In some countries the formation of new civil society was a highly contentious process while in others it moved in more orderly and subdued fashion (Ekiert and Kubik 1998). The intensity of the initial political conflict shaped the organizational landscape of new civil societies. The ratio of inherited and newly formed organizations also differed across the region. Old communist era organizations have remained more powerful in countries where former communist managed to stay in power. In countries that political opposition was successful there were two distinct patterns of adaptation that resulted in either a more pluralist (Poland as an ideal type) or a more corporatist (Slovenia, Hungary) structuring of civil society, with other countries falling between these two poles. These patterns shaped the rate of civil society organizational growth, the relation between civil society and the state, the level of competition among the organizations, and the level of contention in state - civil society and business - civil society relations.

Thus, postcommunist civil society emerged through a complex re-combination process involving internal transformations of the communist era associations, the emergence of new sectors of civil society, and interactions between old and new organizations as well as between them and the new democratic states. Stark (1996) introduced the concept of re-combination analyzing the process of economic and institutional transformations in the

region but it fits equally well other institutional domains. This peculiar nature of civil society reformulation created a range of civil society types that were highly diversified, variously networked, and unequal in distribution of resources and influence. In some countries organizations inherited from the old regime retained much of their resources and influenced, especially where new states lapsed into authoritarianism, re-imposed restrictions upon civil society activities and restored state sponsored and controlled networks of associations. Thus, the initial outcome of civil society resurrection and reformulation differed significantly across the region.

### **3. Civil society in new East European democracies – diverging trajectories**

The initial democratic transformations in Central and Eastern Europe resulted in the emergence of re-combined civil societies across the region. These new civil societies registered significant growth and have instantly undergone diverse processes of transformation. The emerging trajectories of civil society development were shaped by a number of factors. The most important were the quality of democracy in individual countries, the resources and strength of independent civic initiatives, the role of the state in financing and supporting emerging civil society sectors, the quality of institutional infrastructure, and the involvement of external actors.

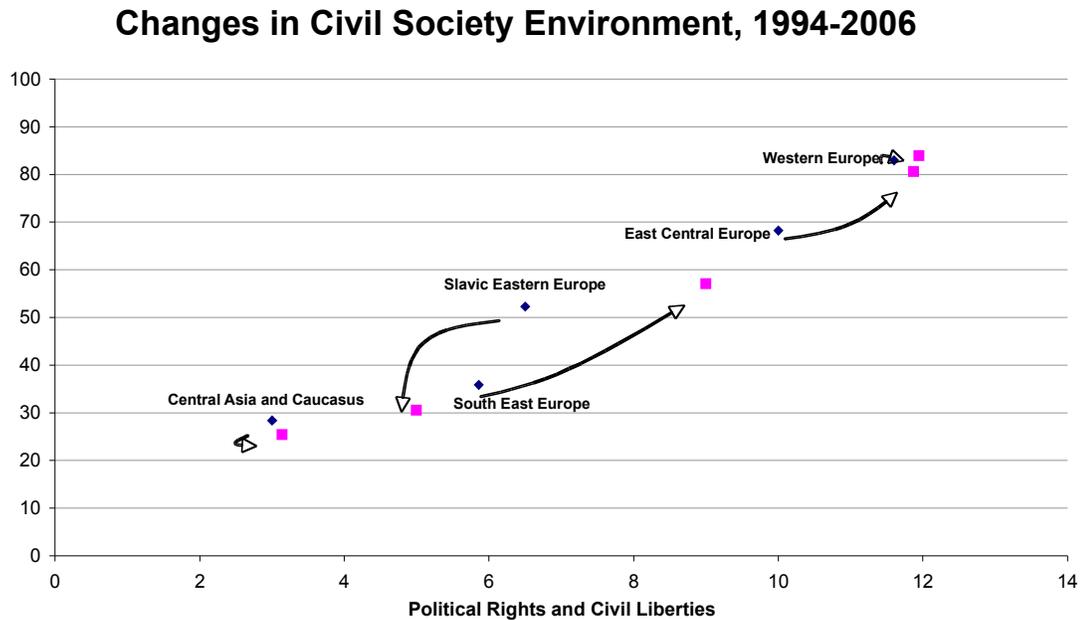
#### **a. The Quality of Public Space**

The most important split in the condition and development potential of civil societies has been between countries that experienced gradual consolidation of democratic institutions and practices, and countries that experienced retrenchment of liberties and freedoms and restoration of authoritarian systems. Obviously, the regime type defines the respect for political liberties and rights, shapes freedom of organization and expression, the capacity to acquire and exchange information, interest articulation, identity formation and modes of representation - all critical for the health of civil society. New authoritarian regimes in former communist countries impose multiple constraints on civil society activities even if they do not resort to open political repression. Students of emerging civil society in

Russia (Fish 1994; McFaul 2002), for example, have argued that the initial weakness of the Russian state contributed significantly to the organizational weakness of civil society. Subsequently, the turn to authoritarian rule resulted in gradual increased of political and bureaucratic constraints on civil society activities, its cooperation with transnational actors and freedom of communication (Neier and Benardo 2006).

The quality of public space, in terms of respect for rights of assembly and expression, is therefore the most important long-run parameter shaping civil society organization, strength and capacity to act. In this dimension there is a striking variation of conditions across the post-communist space as well as significant changes over time. The political regimes that replaced communist system has evolved in to the entire spectrum of regime types, ranging from fully consolidated liberal democracies in East Central Europe to “oriental tyrannies” of Central Asia with a range of hybrid regimes in between. It should not surprise anyone that such diverse political developments shape the nature of civil society in various post-communist countries and define its autonomy and capacity to pursue its goals. In countries that reverted to authoritarian rule, there are again incomplete civil societies without legally protected public space. The associational life is dominated by state sponsored and controlled associations and independent civil society actors face many restrictions, constraints, threats and repressions often akin to those they had faced in incomplete civil societies of late communism.

**Figure 5. The Quality of Public Space**



The comparison of four regions of the former communist world shows that in countries of East Central Europe the quality of public space, as measured by the Freedom House index of civil right and political liberties and index of Press Freedom, is similar today to one in established Western democracies. Countries of South Eastern Europe have made considerable progress in improving the quality of public space as well, while other sub-regions either did not make any progress (Central Asia) or register significant decline after initial improvement (the remaining part of the Soviet Union except for Baltic Republics) during the last decade or so. Thus, in this dimension so important for civil society condition and development the differences between various post-communist countries are enormous.

Although regime type is crucial for creating constraints and opportunities for public actors, the state policies vis-à-vis civil society generate another order of diversity. While postcommunist civil societies inherited relatively dense organizational structures and resources, they have been beyond any doubt late developing civil societies. A famous

distinction made by Gerschenkron between early and late economic development can easily be applied to civil society transformations in the region (Anheier and Seibel 1998). Since these have been late developing civil societies, then following Gerschenkron's logic we should expect that their transformations were characterized by the significant role of the state as well as by the importance of foreign funding and assistance. The states in the region have been instrumental in creating political and economic conditions for development of civil society organizations and in providing institutional infrastructure that imposed constraints and opened opportunities for civil society actors. The legal and institutional changes regarding registration procedures, financing and taxation mechanisms, restrictions of activities, subsidies, etc., have pushed civil society development into diverging trajectories across the region (Zimmer and Priller 2004, Part II, Hadzi-Miceva 2007, Rymsza 2008). These specific legal regulations, nature of subsidies and modes of cooperation between civil society and state actors reveal a model of state–civil society relations preferred by policy makers.

While there are diverse ways of structuring state-civil society relations in democratic countries (Gotz 2009, Osborne 2008, and Archambault 2009), there has been convergence of preferences across Europe towards a model outlined in the White Paper on European Governance adopted in 2001. Giving voice to the concerns of citizens and delivering services that meet people's needs are seen as fundamental to civil society role (Gawin 2006). Post-communist countries were not uniformly influenced by the dominant European model of state-civil society relations – that is, a corporatist model characterized by professionalized civil society, constituting a significant employment sector and involved in formal structures of social partnership, largely financed by the state and focused on service provision. Candidate and subsequent member countries of the EU, however, moved their domestic legislation in this direction. Civil society organizations in these countries increasingly sought resources from the European Social Fund and participated in projects funded by structural funds. Thus, for several postcommunist countries, the EU enlargement process and the EU membership provided critical turn in the pattern of civil society transformations. Accession of ten post-communist countries to the European Union in 2004 and 2007 has strengthened civil society actors in these new

member states in three distinct ways: the integration process provided opportunities to civil society organizations to enter EU-supported transnational networks, to tap the significant new resources through the access to EU structural and community funds, and to increase its political role on the local and national level through EU mandated procedures which stipulate the partner role of civil society organizations in many policy arenas (Kozlicka 2004, Gasior-Niemiec and Glinski 2007: 29-30).

Another dimension of diversity in postcommunist civil societies stems from the nature of sectoral re-balancing and diversification in civil society organizational structure.

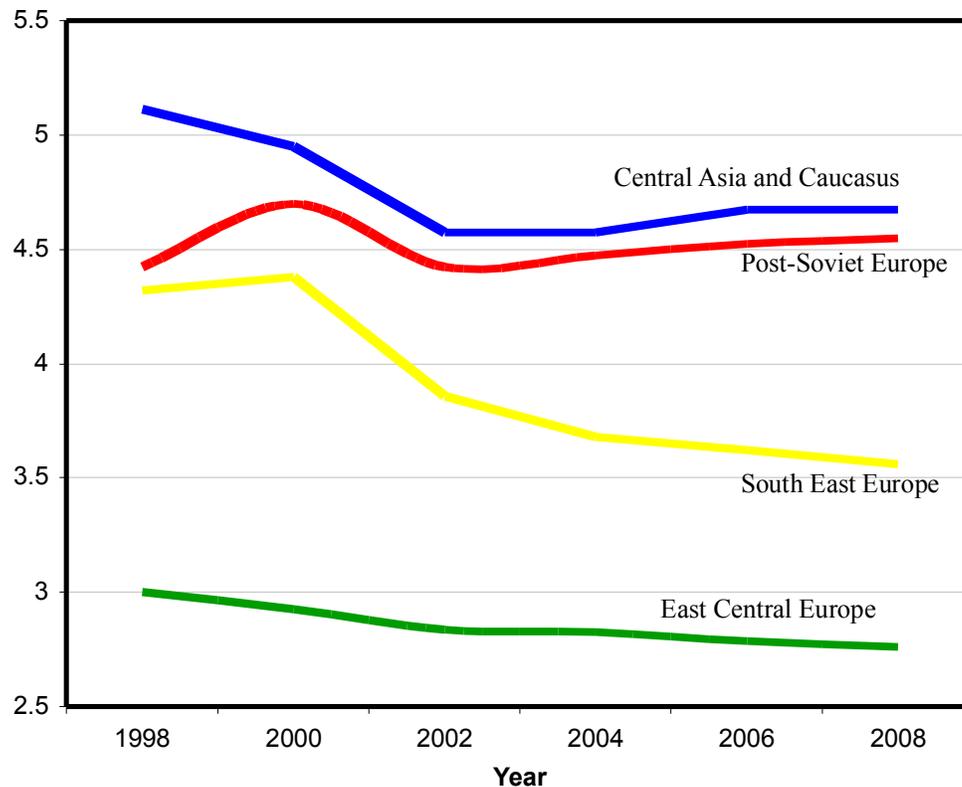
Traditional sectors of civil society inherited from the old regime composed of powerful trade unions and professional organizations weakened in response to structural changes in the economy, transformations of the labor markets and disarticulation of networks linking these organizations to state bureaucracies and policy makers. At the same time, the professional NGO sector experienced dramatic growth expanding the number of civil society organizations, redefining intra-organizational networks and building transnational links. Growing numbers of actors and progressing professionalization of civil society drives its fragmentation and specialization. The majority of organizations are no longer even single-issue organizations but rather tiny niche organizations specializing in a narrowly defined service or expertise in a specific location. This makes organizations more dependent on funding provided by the state, local administration or external actors and prone to seek stable arrangements leading to local micro-corporatism.

While growth of professional organizations and multiplication of their functions drives civil society transformations, its sectoral composition is also shaped by the strength of grass-roots activities, the networks of alliances, political affiliations and dependencies. Churches, political parties, local authorities, the state and transnational actors influence the composition of specific civil societies and their normative orientations to a different degree in different countries. Strong grass-roots movements bring new issues to the public arena, generate new organizations, and influence public policy. Strong links to churches and parties generates more politicization of civil society actors. In general, reviewing experiences of post-communist countries one could discern pluralist and

corporatist patterns of civil society organization. Pluralist civil societies, such as Polish one, tend to have more organizational growth and destruction, fragmented sectors with higher number of organizations, more competition among organizations, and less stable relations with political parties, local and national state administration. Civil societies dominated by large organizations tend to be more stable, less diverse and accommodating in their relations with the state. These multiple factors provide for a significant degree of diversity in patterns of civil society organization and activities.

When the number of different factors outlined above is taken into consideration the most striking differences among postcommunist civil societies are along sub-regional boundaries. The USAID's NGO Sustainability Index measuring systematically various dimensions of the civil society environment show a persistent gap between various groups of post-communist countries and relatively little convergence.

**Figure 6. The NGO Sustainability Index for four groups of post-communist countries.**



Note: lower numbers correspond to better conditions.

### **b. The Organizational Structure**

In many existing analyses, the organizational strength of civil society has been judged by the rate of membership in voluntary associations, as declared in public opinion surveys. Given the growing ambiguity of the concept of membership, it may be more accurate to focus on the changing organizational structure of civil society, if we are to assess its transformation over time. Registration data of new civil society organizations provide a good insight into organizational density and growth in various countries. The rates of growth in the number of organizations were the highest in the first few years of transition.

Poland, for example, achieved initially some 400% growth in the number of registered NGOs. While the growth leveled around 1994, it remained at around 100% every year with an average of some 4000 new NGOs and 500 foundations registered every year. The fact that fewer than 13% of all NGOs in 2006 were established before 1989 reinforces the point about strong organizational growth of civil society at least in some post-communist countries (Nalecz 2004). Moreover, in the Polish case growth has been registered across all types of organizations producing a balanced sectoral structure of civil society.

**Table 2. Growth across types of civil society organizations in Poland (registered organizations)**

Type of organization	2002	2008
NGOs (stowarzyszenia)	36,500	63,500
Foundations	5,000	9,500
Voluntary Fire Brigades	12,500	15,000
Social organizations (PTA, etc.)	6,650	4,000
Trade Unions	15,700	19,500
Religious organizations	14,800	15,500
Professional and employer associations	4,250	5,500
Sport clubs	4,300	6,000
Number of Organizations	99,700	138,500

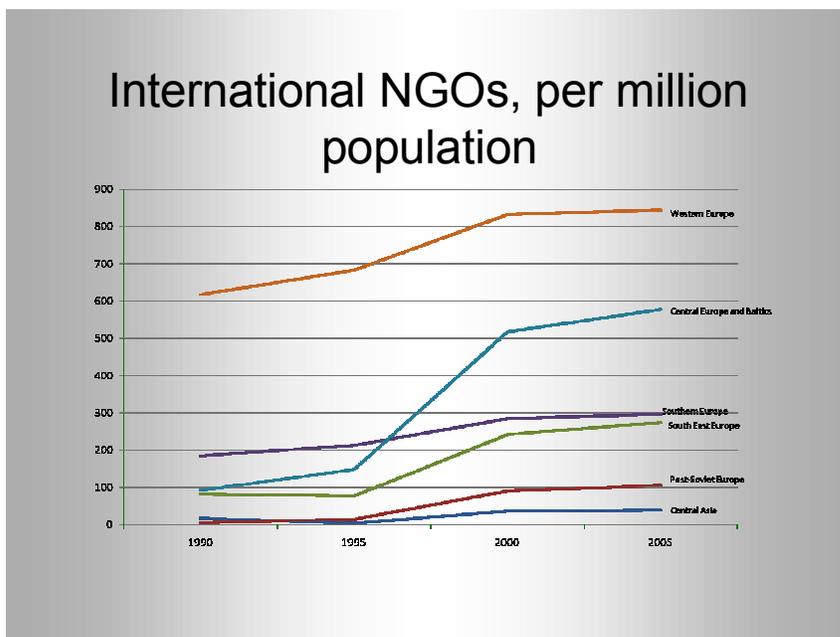
Source: Klon/Jawor, GUS. Data do not include all organizations that comprise broadly define civil society and include some that may not be active.

It is also important to emphasize that the development of civil society organizations in Poland has been distributed across the entire range of localities and not restricted to major urban centers, as only 24.1% of registered NGOs are located in big cities (defined as those with over half a million inhabitants), while 19.7% are located in villages, 34.7% in

small towns (up to 99,000 inhabitants) and 21.5% in larger towns (100-499,000 inhabitants) (Gasior-Niemiec and Glinski 2007a, 246). While, there is a considerable controversy how many of these registered organizations still exist and how active they are (Gumkowska, Herbst and Radecki 2009: 11-12) the rate of NGO creation when combine with other measures provide a testimony to the considerable vitality of civil society. There is no systematic data on organizational growth for the entire region but data from other countries show similar dynamic of growth (Randma-Liiv, Liiv and Lepp 2008, p. 258, Mansfeldova at al. 2004)

While public opinion surveys register low rates of reported associational membership, other available data paint a brighter picture of civil society strength. Figure 7 shows the number of international non-governmental organizations per capita:

**Figure 7. International NGOs per capita**



By this measure, East Central Europe is not much different from mature Western European democracies. These postcommunist countries seem to have higher density of

international NGOs than South European democracies that have had much longer record of democratic rule and EU membership. Moreover, there is also a striking level of difference among the sub-regions of the former Soviet bloc on this measure. There are a number of other data sources that can be included in the assessment of organizational strength of civil societies. For example, while the levels of membership in trade unions in new member states declined significantly over the last two decades, it is not much different from the European average (Visser 2006). The trade union membership rates are higher in the least democratic post-communist countries showing that their civil societies are still shaped by the old communist era organizations. Thus the progress of democratization, the quality of democracy and civil society organizational growth seem to go hand in hand.

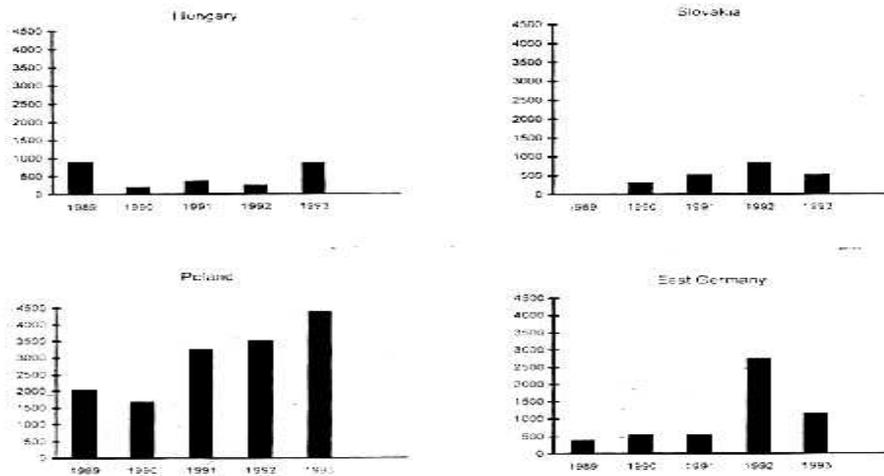
In short, during the last two decades there has been a consistent growth in the number and variety of civil society organizations in many postcommunist countries and important shifts in sectoral composition of their civil societies. Polish data exhibit these trends, although Poland may not be a perfect example of general civil society transformations, given the legacy of the Solidarity movement, political opposition under the old regime, and relatively high levels of contentions in early years of democratization. Other countries in the region, that have been able to consolidate their new democratic systems, also registered significant improvements in the condition and organizational strength of their civil societies. In the authoritarian part of the former Soviet bloc the organizational transformation of civil society is less advanced and the older, communist era organizations dominate the associational landscape.

### **c. Civil Society Behavior and Preferences of Actors**

Differences in the quality of public space, and in the organizational strength and composition of postcommunist civil societies, are further magnified by differences in the behavior of civil society organizations and the normative orientations of civil society actors. In their study of contention during initial years of political and economic

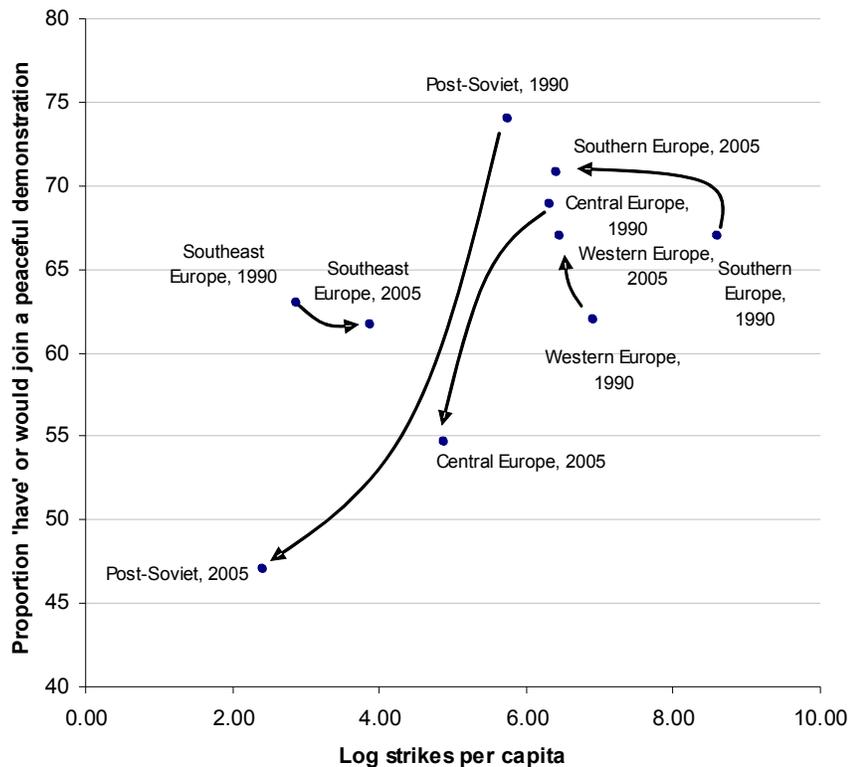
transformations Ekiert and Kubik (1998) noted striking differences among four Central European countries in number of protests sponsored by civil society organizations.

**Figure 8. Protest days in East Central Europe 1989-1994**



They argued that from the perspective of civil society actors' behavior there are two types of civil society emerging in the region: contentious and accommodating. However, the longer term data are necessary to assess how stable these early patterns of civil society activities have been. Other data suggest that participation in contentious civic behavior, such as demonstration or strikes (shown below) has fallen since the 1989-1992 period in all post-communist countries, though this may largely reflect the unusually heightened level of contention induced by the transition process. Moreover, a falling incidence of strike activity is consistent with a trend across the world towards lower rates of industrial action. Interestingly, civic 'demobilization' has been sharpest in the post-Soviet countries and East Central Europe, but relatively limited in southeastern Europe. Thus, the least and the most democratic post-communist countries registered the steepest drops in contention.

**Figure 9. Protest Participation and Strikes per Capita**



Notes: Source of strikes and lockouts data is the International Labour Organisation. Demonstration participation data is from the World Values Surveys, waves 2-5 (1990-2005).

It is also important to note that in non and semi-democratic countries of the former Soviet bloc there are recurring waves of civil society mobilization. So-called “colored revolutions” mark periods of the heightened political crisis usually centered around contested elections. These are cases of rapid mobilization and emergence of civic movements that are followed by de-mobilization, organizational atrophy and passivity of civil society actors (Bunce and Volchik 2006, D’Anieri 2006, Hale 2006, Kuzio 2006). Not surprisingly, in the least democratic post-communist countries there is a much lower level of sustainability of civil society organizations even following the periods of significant public mobilization.

While contentious actions are important part of civil society behavior, they are not the only public behavior of civil society actors. Volunteering for various social causes is a

part and parcel of routine civil society activity. There is a lot of data that show much lower levels of volunteering in post-communist countries (Nalecz and Bartkowski 2006). However, more focused opinion polls usually show higher levels of volunteering than general surveys such as the World Values Survey or the European Social Survey. For example, systematic surveys in Poland registered a relatively high, although fluctuating, level of volunteering and charitable giving (CBOS 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

**Table 3. Volunteering and Charitable Giving in Poland 2001-2010**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Volunteered in the past		58%		58%		56%		47%		54%
Volunteered last year		19%		24%		23%		20%		20%
Donated money to charity							49%	43%	54%	49%
Active in NGO		21%		24%		23%		20%		28%
Active in NGO and volunteered	33%		37%		36%		31%		36%	

Source: CBOS 2010a, 2010b, 2010c

The numbers reported for Poland and for some other post-communist countries (Gaskin and Smith 1997) are not strikingly lower than the numbers for West European countries.

**Table 4. Volunteering in Europe**

Country	% Volunteers
Austria	8%
Belgium	10%
France	14%
Germany	10%
Ireland	11%
Italy	4%
Netherlands	16%
Spain	5%
UK	30%

Source: The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Project (2004)

Thus, the data from the most democratic post-communist countries do not show significantly lower levels of volunteering and charitable giving than West European averages. By this measure, some post-communist civil societies are very active and strong.

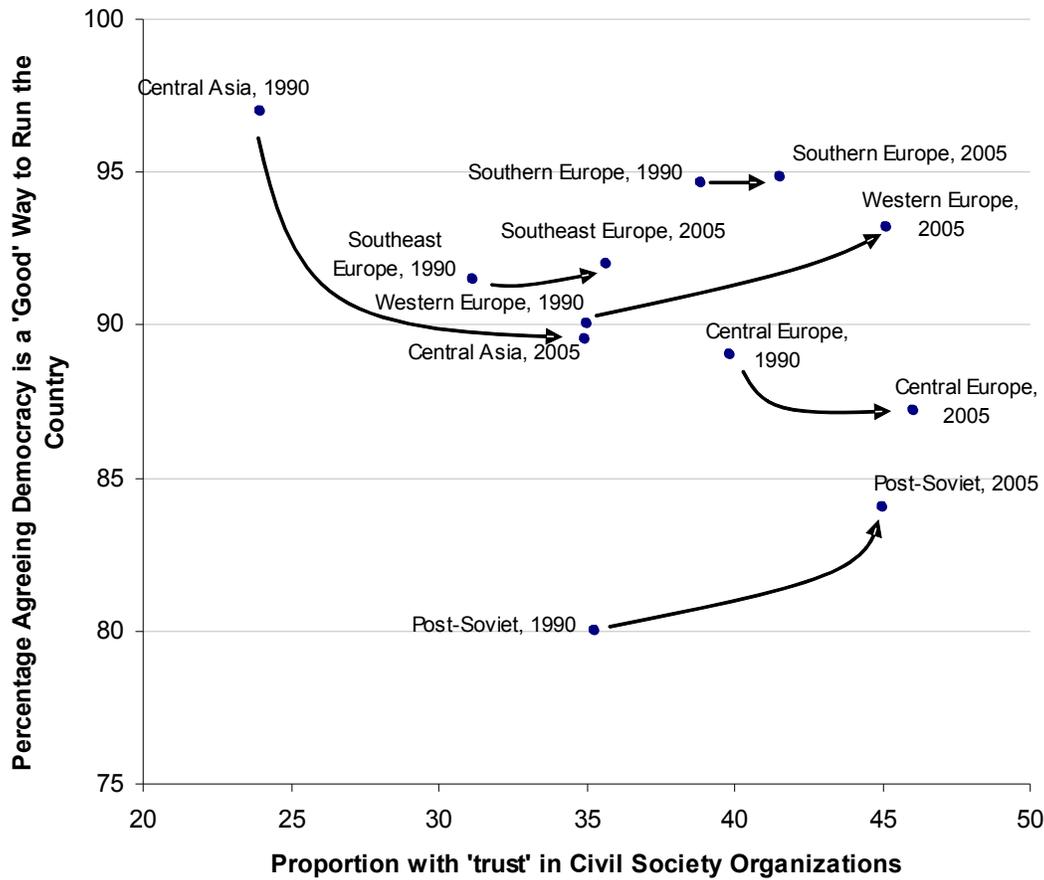
The values of civil society actors matter greatly in determining their behavior and the nature of political outcomes of civil society activities. In terms of the political orientation of civil society actors, one can distinguish between liberal and 'illiberal' civil societies. Berman (1997) provides a notable example in the case of Weimar Germany, where a dense middle-class organizational life ultimately supported conservative and Nazi opposition to the democratic regime, due to the weak underlying commitment to democracy of the German *Mittelstand* to open, pluralist institutions. In addition, values and preferences may determine whether civil society develops along normative or clientelistic lines, that is, whether civil society organizations exist to defend citizen rights, work for public good and advance the rule of law and democratic process, or simply as a means of extracting material rents for their leaders and members from the state and local administration.

Apart from studying programs and behavior of specific organizations, it is difficult to assess normative orientations of civil society actors. But, as an indicator of the liberal commitment of civil society actors, we can examine the degree to which citizens possess a normative commitment to democracy. Public opinion surveys often solicit the view whether democracy is a 'good', 'very good', 'bad' or 'very bad' way to run the country. These trends based on the World Values Survey data are shown for the four clusters of post-communist societies in the Figure below. The normative commitment to democracy is evidently weak among the post-Soviet states, while it stands almost as high in South Eastern Europe, as is the cases in Southern and Western Europe. Central Europe, meanwhile, fits somewhere in between the two. In terms of change over time, affective support for democracy has consolidated in the post-Soviet countries (from a very low

starting point), and experienced a sharp decline only in Central Asia.

Postcommunist civil societies also fare well with regard to the extent to which they are normative rather than clientelist in function. As one indicator which may detect the extent to which civic movements serve to advance the interest of citizens, rather than their own private interests, we can take the degree trust that survey respondents express to have in the civil society organizations of their country. In East Central Europe and post-Soviet Europe, public trust in the civic sector is comparable to that found in Southern and Western Europe; only in the Balkans and Central Asia, does this confidence lag behind, possibly reflecting the greater degree of clientelism and cooptation in these cases. Also charted is the trend over time in trust in civil society organizations since 1990. These trends clearly suggest that the transition from single party rule to pluralism has seen a consolidation of public trust in the civic sector, for public trust in non-government organizations has grown across all post-communist societies since 1990.

**Figure 10. Support for Democracy and Trust in Civil Society Organisations**



Notes: Source of attitudinal items is the World Values Surveys, waves 2-5 (1990-2005).

A further indicator of civic consolidation is the left-right placement of respondents. Since Bell (1960) it has been argued that ideological differences narrow as countries develop economically, and that this has occurred in western democracies in particular (Dalton 2005). However, in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, the concern has often been expressed that far from converging on the median, ideological divisions have widened, with the growing popularity in particular of populist and radical right parties (Ramet 1999, Minkenberg 2002, Kopecky and Mudde 2003, Rupnik 2007). Table 5 shows the left-right placement of respondents in a sample of West and East European countries, both in 1990, at the start of transition, and more recently in 2005, using the World Values Survey item for left-right placement on a ten-point scale. Respondents at

the extremes ('1' and '10') are classified as extreme left and right, respectively, while those in between are classified as centrist. It can be seen that while levels of ideological polarization in Western Europe have remained low and stable, in this sample of Eastern European countries radicalization has somewhat increased. However, it is also notable that the overall level remains low, both as an overall proportion of the population, and also by broader international comparison. While 6.6 per cent of Eastern Europeans in this country sample today position themselves as radical right ('10' on a ten-point left to right scale), the equivalent figures are 13 per cent in India, 19 per cent in Indonesia, and 25 per cent in Colombia. The thesis regarding the 'radicalization' of eastern European politics must therefore be kept in perspective.

**Table 5. Ideological Polarization among Survey Respondents, 1990-2 and 2005-7**

	Year	Extreme Left	Center	Extreme Right
France	1990	5.1	93.2	1.8
	2005	9.1	88.1	2.8
Italy	1990	8.5	88.8	2.8
	2005	4.9	91.9	3.2
Netherlands	1990	2.5	95.0	2.5
	2005	2.7	95.2	2.1
Sweden	1990	1.2	94.8	4.1
	2005	2.7	94.1	3.2
Great Britain	1990	3.1	93.5	3.4
	2005	3.8	93.8	2.5
West Germany	1990	0.9	97.5	1.7
	2005	3.1	95.6	1.3
<i>Western Europe Average</i>	1990	3.5	93.8	2.7
	2005	4.4	93.1	2.5
Poland	1990	3.6	88.6	7.9
	2005	4.5	85.7	9.9
Romania	1990	1.7	95.6	2.8
	2005	6.0	85.4	8.6
Slovenia	1990	2.5	94.9	2.6
	2005	6.8	86.8	6.4
East Germany	1990	2.2	96.2	1.6
	2005	6.5	92.2	1.4
<i>Eastern Europe Average</i>	1990	2.5	93.8	3.7
	2005	5.9	87.5	6.6

Source: World Values Surveys, waves 2 (1990-2) and 5 (2005-7)

Finally, a further indicator of civic engagement is the degree of public interest in politics, as this contributes to the development of programmatic politics, as well as the monitoring and accountability functions of civil society organizations. Such interest is high across the post-communist space, notably in Central Europe and the Baltic states, where a higher proportion of the public claim to be interested in politics than in Western Europe. However, even post-Soviet European, Central Asian, and Southeast European societies express a greater degree of public interest in politics than in the post-authoritarian societies of Southern Europe.

**Table 6. Level of Interest in Politics, Regions of Europe Compared**

<i>Percentage of respondents 'interested' or 'very interested' in politics</i>	Central Asia	Post- Soviet Europe	South East Europe	Southern Europe	Central Europe and Baltics	Western Europe
1990		53	45	27	65	47
1995	43	47	40	27	55	47
2000	45	45	42	32	51	47
2005	45	46	41	34	52	48

Source: World Values Surveys, waves 2-5 (1989-2006)

Similarly to other dimensions, the data on normative orientations of civil society actors show significant diversity among post-communist societies. They also show that some post-communist civil societies have become similar to West European civil societies during the last two decades of transformations.

### **Conclusions: Civil Societies in Post-Communist Europe**

In this paper we have suggested that since 1989 civil societies in formerly communist countries have experienced contrasting developments that after two decades have produced a wide range of outcomes. We also argued that a standard argument about the weakness of post-communist civil society is not based on uniform empirical evidence. If

we conceive of civil society as a multidimensional phenomenon, then we need to be more careful in making cross-national comparisons. We showed that the outcomes of political transformations generated the most profound differences in the nature of contemporary civil societies across Central and Eastern Europe. On the one hand, the return of authoritarianism in parts of the former Soviet bloc stifled emerging civic pluralism, slow down civil society transformation and preserved organizational structures inherited from the communist regime. On the other hand, consolidation of democracy and membership in the European Union have produced diversified, dense and active civil societies that are not much different from their West European counterparts. Our analysis also shows that civil society transformations cannot be linked exclusively to post-1989 political developments. Legacies of the communist rule in the sphere of associational life and deeper historical traditions seem to be very important in accounting for differences among countries that emerged from decades of communist rule.

The civil society literature suggests a range of mechanisms linking aspects of social and civic life to democratic transition and consolidation, and thus various aspects of civil society that we ought to measure. Pluralist theories of democracy, for example, following in the tradition of Robert Dahl (1961), stress the representative role of civil society groups and organizations in setting the agenda of democratic politics, thereby ensuring outcomes that reflect a sufficiently wide spectrum of public opinion. This view suggests the density of civic organizations, and in particular membership of organizations such as labor unions, business groups, or groups that represent salient social issues, competition among organizations and normative pluralism as an indicators of the health of civic life. On the other hand, a tradition in political culture dating back to Alexis de Tocqueville, though more recently expounded by Robert Putnam, sees civic organizations as mechanisms of democratic socialization - 'schools of democracy'—where citizens are socialized into the norms of democratic life such as debate, negotiation, and compromise. From such a perspective, it makes sense to adopt more inclusive definition of civil society and to track membership in more apolitical local voluntary groups, and participation in communal activities. Alternatively, a third tradition in behavioral political science sees the role of civil society organizations as a means of holding politicians to

account through acts of direct contestation, for example, organizing mass demonstrations when politicians renege on campaign promises, are exposed in corruption scandals, or violate constitutional norms. If this is how civil society affects political outcomes, then we ought to measure the propensity of citizens to engage in ‘contentious’ activities, such as protest, going on strike, or mobilizing through petitions and boycotts, rather than more passive acts of civic association, which may not have the same effect upon institutional accountability. Finally, there is the view associated with Jürgen Habermas, that a constitutive part of vibrant civil society is a ‘public sphere’, a forum in which diverse public opinions can engage one another, and an overlapping consensus emerge regarding the best policy options. Such a mechanism leads us to focus on legal guaranties ensuring equal access to the public domain as well as on civic participation in the media, both as readers and as contributors to the public debate, for example by writing letters to newspapers, running internet blogs, or attending local town meetings, as well as the legal guaranties that allow public communication to flourish.

If we pursue a multidimensional strategy for analyzing the constitution of civil society and civic behavior – that is, by measuring organization and behavior of civil society actors along a range of different dimensions and using a range of different sources rather than by a single concept or instrument - the picture of post-communist civil society becomes more complex and more interesting. First of all, there are striking sub-regional divisions on variety of measures, including the quality of public space, density of organization and behavior of civil society actors. Second, it becomes evident as to the extent to which prior studies of civil society have tended to be narrowly focused on just one dimension of civic life - typically membership in voluntary organization - and on a limited set of data sources, typically, public opinion surveys. Third, we are forced to abandon any simplistic generalizations regarding the ‘weakness of postcommunist’ civil society or its ‘demobilization’ following democratic transition, as many individual indicators tell a contrary story.

Though the collapse of communism may seem a relatively recent event, it is the same distance behind us as was the collapse of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy when Almond

and Verba published *The Civic Culture* in 1963. Today, as then, we are faced with the same paradox: how to explain the relative durability of democratic consolidation in the face of apparently weak participation in civic associations? We suggest that, just as Almond and Verba distinguished different dimensions of civic orientation, scholars should take into account different dimensions of civil society. Post-communist civil societies, we argue, are not as feeble as is often assumed, many possess vigorous public spheres and active associational life with civil society actors influencing policy outcomes on local and national levels. Moreover, after examining the different aspects of civic life we find no evidence of degeneration over time, as the decline of older organizational forms is balanced by the arrival of new organizations and expanding ties to international civil society. This, unfortunately, is not the uniform condition of post-communist civil societies. In many countries where initial democratic gains were lost the transformation of the associational sphere has been blocked or even reversed. Emerging civil society actors have been constrained, marginalized and repressed by new authoritarian rulers.

## References

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. (2006) *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Almond, Gabriel and Sidney Verba (1963) *The Civic Culture*. Boston: Little Brown and Co.
- Anheier, Helmut (2004) *Civil Society. Measurement, Evaluation, Policy*. London: Earthscan.
- Anheier, Helmut and Wolfgang Seibel (1998) "The Nonprofit Sector and the Transformation of Societies: A Comparative Analysis of East Germany, Poland and Hungary." Pp. 177-192 in *Private Action and the Public Good*, eds. Walter Powell and Elisabeth Clemens. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Alagappa, Muthiah, ed., (2004) *Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Arato, Andrew (1981) Civil Society against the State: Poland 1980-81, *Telos*, 47:23-47
- Ash, Timothy Garton (1985) *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*, Vintage Books 1985.
- Bell, Daniel. (1960). *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Berman, Sheri. 1997. "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic." *World Politics* Vol. 49, No. 3, April, pp. 401-429.
- Bermeo, Nancy (2003) *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*. Princeton University Press
- Bernhard, Michael (1996) Civil Society after the First Transition, *Communist and Postcommunist Studies*, 29, 3: 309-330.
- Bernhard Michael and Ekrem Karakoc (2007) Civil Society and Legacies of Dictatorship, *World Politics* 59, 539-67.
- Bruszt, Laszlo, Nauro Campos, Jan Fidrmuc and Gerald Ronald, (2007) Does Civil Society Development under Communism (1985-1991) Helps Explain Political and Economic Performance during Transition, manuscript (April).
- Buchowski, Michal (1996) The Shifting Meaning of Civil and Civic Society in Poland, in: Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn eds., *Civil Society. Challenging Western Models*, London: Routledge, 77-96.

- Bunce, Valerie J., and Wolchik, Sharon L. (2006) International diffusion and postcommunist electoral revolutions', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol.39, no.3: 283-304.
- Civil Society Forum Bratislava 2009, <http://csf.ceetrust.org>
- CBOS (2010a) Raport: Dzialalnosc spoleczna Polakow, Warszawa (styczen).
- CBOS (2010b) Raport: Dobroczynnosc w Polsce, Warszawa (luty).
- CBOS (2010c) Raport: Aktywnosc Polakow w organizacjach obywatelskich 19989-2010, Warszawa (luty).
- Dahrendorf, Ralph (1990) *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Warsaw*, Random House.
- Dahl, Robert (1961) *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dalton, Russell (2006). 'Social Modernization and the End of Ideology Debate: Patterns of Ideological Polarization', *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 7:1:1-22.
- D'Anieri, Paul., 'Explaining the Success and Failure of Post-Communist Revolutions,' *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* vol.39, no.3 (September 2006), pp. 331-350.
- Diamond, Larry. (1999). *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 218-260.
- Ely, John (1994) Libertarian Ecology and Civil Society, *Society and Nature*, 2, 3: .
- Ekiert, Grzegorz (1991) Democratization Processes in East Central Europe: A Theoretical Reconsideration, *British Journal of Political Science*, 21, 3: 285-313
- Ekiert Grzegorz and Jan Kubik, (1998) Contentious Politics in New Democracies, *World Politics* 50, 4, 547-581.
- Ekiert Grzegorz and Jan Kubik (1999) *Rebellious Civil Society*, Michigan University Press.
- Ekiert Grzegorz and Stephen Hanson eds. (2003) *Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe: Assessing the Legacy of Communist Rule*, Cambridge University Press.
- Ekiert Grzegorz, Jan Kubik and Milada Anna Vachudova (2007) Democracy in Postcommunist World: An Unending Quest," co-authors), *East European Politics*

- and Societies*, Vol. 21, 1: 1-24.
- Fish, M. Steven. (1994). Russia's Fourth Transition. *Journal of Democracy* 5, 31-42.
- Fric, Pavol (2008) The uneasy partnership of the state and the third sector in the Czech Republic, in: Stephen P. Osborne ed. *The Third Sector in Europe*, London: Routledge, 230-255.
- Gasior-Niemiec, Anna and Piotr Glinski (2007a) Polish Tradition of Self-organization, Social Capital and the Challenge of Europeanisation, Fran Adam ed. *Social Capital and Governance*, Berlin: Lit Verlag 2007, 237-66.
- Gasior-Niemiec, Anna and Piotr Glinski (2007). Europeanization of Civil Society in Poland. *Rev. Soc. Polit.* 14(1), 29-47.
- Gaskin, Katharine and Smith, Justin Davis (1997) A new civic Europe? 3rd Edition. London: The Volunteer Centre.
- Gawin, Dariusz (2006) European Civil Society – the Citizens' or Eurocrats' Project? In: *Civil Society in the Making*, Dariusz Gawin and Piotr Glinski eds. Warsaw: IFiS Publishers, pp. 77- 88.
- Giza-Poleszczuk, Anna (2009) Third Sector, Public Institutions and Home-made Civil Society, paper presented at the conference Poland after 20 Years of Freedom, Warsaw University, Institute of Sociology, May 22-24.
- Gumowska, Marta Jan Herbst and Przemyslaw Radecki (2009) Podstawowe fakty o organizacjach pozarządowych. Raport z Badan 2008, Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor.
- Hadzi-Miceva, Katerina (2007) Prawne i instytucjonalne mechanizmy współpracy organizacji pozarządowych i administracji państwowej w Chorwacji, w Estonii i na Węgrzech, in: Marek Rymsza ed., *Organizacje pozarządowe, dialog obywatelski, polityka państwa*, Warszawa: ISP 2007, 21-62.
- Hale, Henry, 'Democracy or autocracy on the march? The colored revolutions as normal dynamics of patronal presidentialism,' *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol.39, no.3 (September 2006), pp.305-329.
- Hankiss, Elemer (1989) "Demobilization, Self-Mobilization and Quasi-Mobilization in Hungary, 1948-1987," *East European Politics and Societies*, 3(1), pp. 105-151.
- Havel, Vaclav et al. (1985) *The Power of the Powerless. Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, Armonk: Sharpe.
- Howard Mark (2002) *The Weakness of Civil Society in Postcommunist Europe*, Cambridge University Press.

- Inglot, Tomasz (2008) *Welfare States in East Central Europe, 1919-2004*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jawłowska Aldona and Jan Kubik (2007) Dyskusja redakcyjna "Societas Communitas": Rozmowa o aktualnym stanie i perspektywach rozwoju aktywności zbiorowej w Polsce, *Societas/Communitas* 2(4) 2007 – 1 (5) 2008
- Judt, Tony R (1988) "The Dilemmas of Dissidence: The Politics of Opposition in East-Central Europe," *East European Politics and Societies*, 2, 2: 185-240.
- Keane, John ed. (1988) *Civil Society and the State*, London: Verso.
- Kopecky, Petr and Cas Mudde (2003) *Uncivil Society: Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Kozlicka, Renata (2004) Unia Europejska wobec organizacji pozarządowych: konsekwencje dla trzeciego sektora w Polsce, in: Piotr Głinski, Barbara Lewenstein, and Andrzej Sicinski, eds. Samoorganizacja Społeczeństwa Polskiego: III sektor i wspólnoty lokalne w jednoczącej się Europie, Warszawa: IFiS PAN. Pp. 41-56.
- Kubik, Jan (2000) Between the State and Networks of 'Cousins': The Role of Society and Noncivil Associations in the Democratization of Poland, in: *Civil Society before Democracy*, edited by Nancy Bermeo and Philip Nord, Rowman and Littlefield 2000, pp. 181-207.
- Kurczewski, Jacek ed., (2003) *Lokalne społeczności obywatelskie*, OBS Warszawa.
- Kurczewska, Joanna (2004) Tradycje w przestrzeni lokalnego społeczeństwa obywatelskiego, in: Piotr Głinski, Barbara Lewenstein, and Andrzej Sicinski, eds. *Samoorganizacja Społeczeństwa Polskiego: III sektor I wspólnoty lokalne w jednoczącej się Europie*, 302-332, Warszawa: IFiS PAN.
- Kuti, Eva, (1999) Different East European Countries at Different Crossroads, *Voluntas*, 10, 1: 51-60.
- Kuzio, Taras, 'Civil Society, Youth and Societal Mobilization in Democratic Revolutions', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol.39, no.3 (September 2006), pp.365-386.
- Les, Ewa (2004) Działalność dobroczynna w Europie i Ameryce. Tradycje i współczesność, Centrum Informacji dla Organizacji Pozarządowych BORDO, Warszawa.
- Lomax, Bill (1997) The Strange Death of Civil Society in Post-Communist Hungary,"

*Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 13, 1: 41-63.

- Mansfeldova, Zdenka et al. (2004) Civil Society in Transition: Civic Engagement and Nonprofit Organizations in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, in: Zimmer, Annette and Eckhard Priller eds. (2004) *Future of Civil Society. Making Central European Nonprofit-Organizations Work*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 99-121.
- McFaul, Michael ed. (2002) Special issue of *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 10. No. 2.
- Minkenberg, Michael (2002). 'The Radical Right in Post-Socialist Central and Eastern Europe: Comparative Observations and Interpretations', *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 16, No. 2, pp.335-362.
- Nalecz, Sławomir and Jerzy Bartkowski (2006) Is there organizational base for civil society in Central Eastern Europe, in: Sven Eliasson ed. *Building Democracy and Civil Society East of the Elba*, London: Routledge, pp. 163-195.
- Neier, Aryeh and Leonard Benardo (2006) Russia: The Prosecution of Civil Society, *The New York Review of Books*, April 27.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo, Philippe Schmitter, Laurence Whitehead (1986) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- OECD (1994) The emergence of business associations and chambers in the economies in transition: examples from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and the Slovak Republic. Paris.
- Paxton, Pamela (2002). "Social Capital and Democracy: An Interdependent Relationship", *American Sociological Review*, 67, 254-77.
- Pehe, Jiri, (1989) Annotated Survey of Independent Movements in Eastern Europe', Radio Free Europe, Background Report/100, Munich, 13 June.
- Ramet, Sabrina (1999). *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe Since 1989*. University Park: Penn State Press.
- Randma-Liiv, Tiina, Daimar Liiv and Ulle Lepp (2008) Institutionalizing relations between government and the third sector, in: Stephen P. Osborn Ed., *The Third Sector in Europe*, London: Routledge, 256-75.
- Rose, Richard (1999). "What Does Social Capital Add to Individual Welfare? An Empirical Analysis in Russia", SCI Working Paper No. 15. Washington DC: The World Bank.

- Richard Rose, William Mishler and Christian Haerpfer, "Getting Real : Social Capital in Post-Communist Societies." Conference on The Erosion of Confidence in Advanced Democracies. Brussels, November 7-9, 1996.
- Rosenblum, Nancy L. and Robert C. Post. (2002). In Nancy Rosenblum and Robert Post (Ed) *Civil Society and Government* (pp. 1-25). Princeton University Press.
- Rupnik, Jacques (2007) From Democratic Fatigue to Populist Backlash, *Journal of Democracy* 18, 4: 17-25.
- Rymsza, Marek (2008) State Policy towards the Civic Sector in Poland in Years 1989-2007, *Trzeci Sektor*, Special edition, 53-62.
- Schmitter, Philippe C. (1997). Civil Society East and West. In Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, Yun-han Chu, and Hung-mao Tien (Eds), *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*, 239-262. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Selznik, Philip (1952) *The Organizational Weapons: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics*, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Shils, Edward (1991). The Virtue of Civil Society. *Government and Opposition* 26, 1: 3-20.
- Sielawa-Kolbowska Ewa, (2002) Niezależne inicjatywy społeczne w Polsce końca lat osiemdziesiątych, in: *Samoorganizacja społeczeństwa polskiego: Trzeci Sektor*, Piotr Gliniski, Barbara Lewenstein and Andrzej Sicinski eds. Warszawa IFiS PAN, 80-92.
- Simone, Karla W (2004) Tax Laws and Tax Preferences, in: Zimmer, Annette and Eckhard Priller eds. (2004) *Future of Civil Society. Making Central European Nonprofit-Organizations Work*, Wisbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 147-168.
- Skilling, Gordon H (1988) *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, Ohio State University Press.
- Staniszki, Jadwiga (1999) *Post-communism: Emerging Enigma*, Warszawa IPS 1999.
- Stark, David (1996) [Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism](#)." *American Journal of Sociology*. vol. 101, no. 4 pp. 993-1027.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de (2004) *Democracy in America*, Library of America.
- Tokes, Rudolf L, ed., (1979) *Opposition in Eastern Europe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Visser, Jelle (2006) "Union Membership Statistics in 24 Countries", *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 129, No. 1.

Wedel Janine (1994) US Aid to Central and Eastern Europe, 1990-1994: an analysis of aid model and responses, East Central European Economies in Transition: Study papers submitted to Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States, Washington, US Printing Office, 299-335.

Zimmer, Annette and Eckhard Priller eds. (2004) *Future of Civil Society. Making Central European Nonprofit-Organizations Work*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.