

(DIS)TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS: COMPARISONS BETWEEN NEW DEMOCRACIES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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After the collapse of the non-democratic regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, new democratic states emerged in Central and Eastern Europe and began their state building on the wave of democratic enthusiasm by the general public. Majority of those countries entered into European Union a decade ago as consolidated well-working democracies, although public trust in democratic political institutions has been on the slow decline since gaining independence, only to drop substantially more after global economic crisis hit countries of Central and Eastern Europe in 2009. Authors are analysing trends in (dis)trust levels in key political institutions in Central and Eastern European EU member countries, and comparing the results with other EU member states.

Key words: democratisation, trust, politics, institutions, Central and Eastern Europe.

1 INTRODUCTION

In all post-socialist countries, democratisation was a process that resulted in the establishment of a democratic political system similar to that of Western European countries. It is a process of changing the regime from the beginning to the end and includes the concepts of transition and consolidation. The consolidation of democracy is a process that encompasses the complete establishment of new democratic institutions, the adoption of democratic rules and procedures, and the general acceptance of democratic values. Political changes that stem from the top can also play an important role in accelerating democratic processes, yet they can also repress the political socialisation of citizens.

For countries in transition, transforming the political institutions is particularly important, because the positive outcome of the whole democratisation effort largely depends on how these institutions are seen to be successful in the

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eyes of the public. The transition itself is a unique process. For a successful transition towards a more effective society, every country first has to define two elements and then define a third one. Since every country has its own tradition, the realisation of its success lies, on the one hand, on the starting point of its development and the development of its surroundings and, on the other hand, on the capacity to understand the development of the society. The understanding and steering of these 'society flows' lies within the competence of public administration systems that are, in comparison to the established systems, under greater stress, since they have to adapt and reorganise the public administration institutions.²

When thinking of the legitimacy of democratic systems, we cannot avoid a discussion regarding the trust in political institutions. Since they focus on the institutionalisation of society's actions – which become more efficient, stable, and predictable under their influence – they represent the core foundations of society. Citizens rely on political institutions since there is a belief that not all of our fellow citizens can be trusted. Institutions act as mediators that, within the legal framework, force all citizens to respect certain legal and ethical norms, which consequently results in a higher level of trust. The greatest threat to the trust established between institutions and citizens is the systematic misuse of democratic principles. According to Sztompka,³ citizens who live in a democracy develop trust in democracy that is the highest form possible for the system. When this basic trust is misused, the level of trust in all other ideals connected to democracy decreases. Our standpoint is that trust in political institutions and the legitimacy of the democratic system are closely dependent on each other.

Elster, Offe, and Preuss⁴ point out that the concept of democratic consolidation is not identical to economic success, because economic effectiveness is also possible in non-consolidated democracies or even in non-democracies. Political scientists therefore focus above all on political indexes of democratic consolidation. Gasiorowski and Power⁵ offer three basic criteria of successful democratic consolidation: successful execution of second parliamentary elections, successful swap of the executive branch with the usage of constitutional means (peaceful exchange of political power), and successful survival of the democratic system for twelve straight years. Additional criteria are frequently added: for instance, the relationship of citizens with democratic institutions, wide concordance on the rules of the political game, and trust in democratic political institutions and political elites.⁶ We will emphasise the latter in this paper, locating new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe among older, well-established EU democracies from Western and Northern Europe according to public opinion surveys concerning public (dis)trust in key political institutions. This will allow the authors to assess Central and Eastern European new democracies' position on the scale of the relationship of the dimensions of societal trust in political power.

² Marjan Brezovšek, "Uprava in demokratični prehod," in *Demokratični prehodi I*, eds. Danica Fink Hafner and Miro Haček (Ljubljana: Založba FDV, 2000), 239.

³ Piotr Sztompka, *Trust: a sociological theory* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴ Jon Elster, Claus Offe and Ulrich K. Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-communist Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 307.

⁵ Mark J. Gasiorowski and Timothy J. Power, "The Structural Determinants of Democratic Consolidation," *Comparative Political Studies*, 31, 6 (1998), 740–771.

⁶ Danica Fink Hafner, "Teoretske premise proučevanja demokratičnih prehodov," in *Demokratični prehodi I*, eds. Danica Fink Hafner and Miro Haček (Ljubljana: Založba FDV, 2000), 13–14.

2 POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AS MEDIATORS OF TRUST

Political institutions should act as the representatives of certain values of society or, what is more, they sometimes even create a new set of norms and values. According to Offe,⁷ the trust we have in others also generates the trust we have in institutions. He defines values that generate trust in institutions through two parameters: truth and justice. Consequent actions of both are categorised by their use: passive or active (see Table 1). Institutions generate trust based on interactive truth-telling, which means that the institutions create an assumption that they express only the truth (in contacts with citizens). When reacting actively, institutions change the truth-telling into promise-keeping, which is most profoundly expressed through jurisdiction or by realising a political programme. If we observe the role of institutions as representatives of justice in society, then institutions passively express justice when treating all individuals equally (fairness) and actively when they express some solidarity to marginalised individuals.⁸

TABLE 1: VALUES THAT GENERATE TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

| | TRUTH | JUSTICE |
|---------|-----------------|------------|
| PASSIVE | truth-telling | fairness |
| ACTIVE | promise-keeping | solidarity |

Source: Mark E. Warren (ed.), *Democracy and Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 73.

If trust is generated through the trust we have in individuals who work in an institution, there are two options: either we trust every individual working for the institution that they will act according to the preset rules of the institution and in accordance with the law, or we trust that the rules and procedures within the institution will, in a way, force all employees (especially those in high ranking positions) to be trustworthy. None of the abovementioned options is possible in the trust relationship between citizens and modern administrative and political institutions. The complexity and number of employees in the institutions is too big for the first possibility, while the other option would require individuals' great knowledge of all administrative structures, their procedural rules and sub-structures, which is highly unlikely. The only legitimate reason for the citizens' systematic mistrust is evidence of the misuse of administrative power in institutions. When institutions are deliberately misusing their power or merely overseeing malfunctions in the administrative process, one can conclude that they are unable to fulfil their mission and are consequently not trustworthy.⁹ Trust is closely linked to the phenomenon of (political) responsibility.

No government in the world enjoys the absolute trust of its citizens. Since the power of every government dwarfs that of any individual citizen, even the most benevolent government represents a threat to individual freedom and welfare. Still, for a government to operate effectively, it must enjoy a minimum of public confidence.¹⁰ Gamson¹¹ argues that trust in political and administrative institutions is important, because it serves as the "creator of collective power," enabling government to make decisions and commit resources without having to resort to coercion or obtain the specific approval of citizens for every decision. When trust is extensive, governments "are able

⁷ Mark E. Warren (ed.), *Democracy and Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 71.

⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁰ William Mishler and Richard Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Scepticism: Popular Evaluations of Civil and Political Institutions in Post-Communist Societies," *The Journal of Politics*, 59, 2 (1997), 418–419.

¹¹ William A. Gamson, *Power and Discontent* (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1968), 42.

to make new commitments on the basis of it and, if successful, increase support even more", ¹² creating, in effect, a virtuous spiral. When trust is low, governments cannot govern effectively, trust is further undermined, and a vicious cycle is created. ¹³ Trust is especially important for democratic governments because they cannot rely on coercion to the same extent as other regimes and because trust is essential to the representative relationship. ¹⁴ In modern democracies, where citizens exercise control over government through representative institutions, it is trust that gives representatives the leeway to postpone short-term constituency concerns while pursuing long-term national interests. ¹⁵ For example, when inflation is severe, citizens must have sufficient trust in economic and political institutions to accept temporary economic pain in return for the promise of better economic conditions at some uncertain future date. ¹⁶ Trust is necessary so that individuals may participate voluntarily in collective institutions, whether in political institutions or in civil society's institutions. Trust in civil institutions does not diminish democracy but completes it, enhancing the effectiveness of political institutions, creating what Dahl ¹⁷ refers to as the "social separation of powers," which checks the emergence of an overly strong state. Trust, however, is double-edged sword. Democracy requires trust but also presupposes an active and vigilant citizenry with a healthy scepticism of government and a willingness, should the need arise, to suspend trust and assert control over government by replacing the government of the day. ¹⁸

3 (DIS)TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN CEE

In the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, excessive trust was never a real concern. The immediate problem is overcoming the abiding cynicism and distrust that are the legacies of the half-century long non-democratic rule. Citizens in Central and Eastern Europe have good reason to distrust political and social institutions. Most have lived their entire lives under authoritarian regimes, some more totalitarian than others, but all inclined to subjugate individual interests to those of the Communist Party. ¹⁹ The communist system created a variety of civil institutions, but as Shlapentokh ²⁰ has emphasized, "such organizations as the trade unions, the Young Communists' League could be regarded as pertaining to civil society, but in fact they are parts of the state apparatus". ²¹ Instead of voluntary participation, citizens in CEE were forced to make a hypocritical show of involvement or at least compliance. ²² The consequence was massive

¹² Ibid., 45–46.

¹³ Edward N. Muller and Thomas O. Jukam, "On the Meaning of Political Support," *The American Political Science Review*, 71, 4 (1977), 1561–1577.

¹⁴ William T. Bianco, *Trust: Representatives and Constituents* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

¹⁵ William Mishler and Richard Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Scepticism: Popular Evaluations of Civil and Political Institutions in Post-Communist Societies," *The Journal of Politics*, 59, 2 (1997), 419.

¹⁶ Stephen M. Weatherford, "Political Economy and Political Legitimacy: The Link Between Economic Policy and Trust," in *Economic Decline and Political Change*, eds. Harold D. Clarke, Marianne C. Steward and Gary Zuk (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984).

¹⁷ Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 83.

¹⁸ William Mishler and Richard Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Scepticism: Popular Evaluations of Civil and Political Institutions in Post-Communist Societies," *The Journal of Politics*, 59, 2 (1997), 419.

¹⁹ John Clark and Aaron B. Wildavsky, *The Moral Collapse of Communism: Poland as a Cautionary Tale* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1990).

²⁰ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 9.

²¹ See also Giovanni Sartori, "Totalitarianism, Model Mania and Learning from Error," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 5, 1 (1993), 5–22.

²² William Mishler and Richard Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Scepticism: Popular Evaluations of Civil and Political Institutions in Post-Communist Societies," *The Journal of Politics*, 59, 2 (1997), 420.

alienation and distrust of the communist regime and a lingering cynicism toward both political and civil institutions.

The new democratic regimes of Central and Eastern Europe have not existed long, but they have existed long enough for many citizens to differentiate contemporary institutions from those of the past and to form at least preliminary judgments about the differences. This, by itself, can create a measure of trust or, at least, a tempering of distrust. In the short term, popular trust in government may be inherited. In the longer term, however, trust must be earned; it must be performance-based. The extent of public trust in the post-communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe is clearly important for democratic consolidation. It also is an empirical question, about which the supply of speculation greatly exceeds that of systematic research. Even less is known about the sources of trust and distrust in post-communist societies, although an understanding of underlying causes is vital for assessing the prospects for establishing civil society and consolidating stable democratic rule.²³ This paper draws upon survey data from the European Social Survey and Eurobarometer to examine the structure and determinants of public trust in Central and Eastern Europe and in older EU member states.

In European Union, the most periodical public opinion survey, that includes all EU member states, is the Eurobarometer. The research focuses on opinions on the work of different political institutions as well as on general assessments of the quality of life in the each EU member state. In connection to this, the main goal of the Eurobarometer is to present average assessments of the satisfaction of citizens with democratic institutions, personal finances, and economic conditions in the EU member country and averagely in the whole EU. If we compare the surveys over the years, then, some changes in satisfaction with democracy in each individual EU member state can be detected. In general, one of the most common observations is that in all new democratic systems there is a high level of dissatisfaction with democracy itself. Similarly, in Central and Eastern European member states, more than half the citizens are not satisfied with democracy in the country (see Table 2). We can also observe negative trends in each of ten CEE countries over the last eight years. In 2012 not even one of the ten CEE countries managed to reach the majority of citizens, satisfied with democracy; admittedly, even more dramatic effect can be observed in southern EU member states (Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal), where world economic crisis had most dramatic effects over the last few years. The question remains as to how much of such dissatisfaction fragile post-socialist regime can withstand before this dissatisfaction changes into a denial of the legitimacy of the whole political system and legitimacy of various political and administrative institutions.

²³ Ibid.

TABLE 2: SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY IN THE EU MEMBER STATES (TOTAL SATISFIED; IN PERCENT)

| EU Member State | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| AUSTRIA | 71 | 68 | 75 | 80 | 76 | 78 | 73 | 70 |
| BELGIUM | 70 | 65 | 68 | 66 | 62 | 56 | 61 | 57 |
| BULGARIA | / | / | / | 26 | 21 | 25 | 27 | 24 |
| CYPRUS | 63 | 68 | 63 | 61 | 60 | 54 | 44 | 33 |
| CZECH REP. | 45 | 48 | 58 | 51 | 48 | 45 | 31 | 30 |
| DENMARK | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 92 | 90 |
| ESTONIA | 45 | 44 | 43 | 53 | 41 | 45 | 46 | 38 |
| FINLAND | 83 | 77 | 78 | 77 | 69 | 69 | 77 | 78 |
| FRANCE | 57 | 53 | 45 | 65 | 51 | 54 | 53 | 60 |
| GERMANY | 61 | 53 | 55 | 66 | 68 | 62 | 68 | 70 |
| GREECE | 68 | 53 | 55 | 63 | 49 | 31 | 17 | 11 |
| HUNGARY | 37 | 27 | 46 | 24 | 23 | 35 | 30 | 29 |
| IRELAND | 77 | 71 | 75 | 69 | 56 | 57 | 57 | 50 |
| ITALY | 46 | 44 | 53 | 40 | 44 | 47 | 34 | 27 |
| LATVIA | 45 | 44 | 41 | 43 | 21 | 32 | 38 | 42 |
| LITHUANIA | 34 | 24 | 23 | 24 | 18 | 17 | 23 | 21 |
| LUXEMBURG | 83 | 82 | 83 | 73 | 90 | 83 | 88 | 84 |
| MALTA | 48 | 48 | 48 | 53 | 49 | 45 | 50 | 49 |
| NETHERLANDS | 71 | 71 | 75 | 80 | 72 | 75 | 75 | 75 |
| POLAND | 30 | 29 | 38 | 48 | 44 | 54 | 59 | 48 |
| PORTUGAL | 39 | 41 | 30 | 36 | 40 | 29 | 29 | 25 |
| ROMANIA | / | / | / | 36 | 18 | 20 | 22 | 13 |
| SLOVAKIA | 25 | 26 | 25 | 35 | 40 | 36 | 33 | 29 |
| SLOVENIA | 57 | 56 | 54 | 48 | 37 | 38 | 31 | 26 |
| SPAIN | 64 | 67 | 71 | 77 | 58 | 53 | 45 | 32 |
| SWEDEN | 76 | 71 | 74 | 80 | 81 | 84 | 87 | 86 |
| UNITED KINGDOM | 63 | 60 | 60 | 62 | 58 | 59 | 60 | 60 |
| EU 25/27 AVERAGE | 58 | 55 | 57 | 57 | 51 | 51 | 50 | 47 |

Sources: *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 62 (Autumn 2004)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb62_en.htm (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 63 (September 2005)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63_en.pdf (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 65 (January 2007)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb65/eb65_en.pdf (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 68 (May 2008)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb68/eb68_en.pdf (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 72 (Autumn 2009)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb72/eb72_anx_vol1.pdf (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 73 (November 2010)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb73/eb73_anx_full.pdf (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 76 (December 2011)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb76/eb76_anx_en.pdf (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 78 (November 2012)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb78/eb78_anx_en.pdf (February 2013).

Nevertheless, this dissatisfaction could also be connected to the outcomes of the democratic transition and consolidation processes and not democracy as a type of social-political relations itself. In this case, dissatisfaction can also be expressed through the existing mechanisms like elections, referendums and so forth. As we see in *Table 2* from 2004, when we can already speak of the consolidated democratic systems in CEE, the trust in democracy never reached levels comparable to older, established EU democracies; the highest levels were noted in Slovenia in 2004 (57 percent) and Czech Republic in 2006 (58 percent). After global economic crisis hit Europe in 2008/2009, dissatisfaction with democracy has been growing steadily, peaking in 2011 and 2012.

Sometimes, the distrust does not apply solely to the democratic system but the personification of democracy – the key political institutions (parliament, government, and political parties). Besides dissatisfaction with political institutions, another very important factor is the economic climate in the

country. After the end of socialism, the safety net of social care has more or less been deteriorating, leaving many marginalised. However, in some CEE countries like Slovenia, economic stability prevented any greater dissatisfaction with democracy all the way until 2009, when consequences of the global economic crisis hit the country and the safety net of social care started to crack.

General trust in politics is also reflected in the trust in major political institutions (*Table 3*). We can observe that the levels of trust in three major political institutions are very low across the whole EU, with the partial exception of northern EU member states. The lowest levels of trust can be in all five measurements observed towards the political parties, where EU average from 2004 to 2012 sits between 17 and 24 percent; the highest levels of trust can be observed in national parliaments, where EU average from 2004 to 2012 sits between 29 and 42 percent. There is some minor deviation in the measurements between the years, but it is not very significant all the way until 2010–2012, when the level of trust in all three major political institutions drop even further. However, if we observe average levels of trust in ten CEE member states, we can quite clearly see that those levels are lower at every single measurement compared to average levels in EU 25/27. The drop of public trust in all three political institutions we can notice in 2010 and 2012, is not so dramatic compared with previously analysed distrust in democracy, but still clearly visible, especially in certain CEE countries (Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic) and southern EU member states (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy).

TABLE 3: TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS (TEND TO TRUST; IN PERCENT)

| EU MEMBER STATE | POLITICAL PARTIES | | | | | NATIONAL GOVERNMENT | | | | | NATIONAL PARLIAMENT | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|------|------|------|------|---------------------|------|------|------|------|---------------------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 |
| AUSTRIA | 23 | 38 | 38 | 40 | 33 | 45 | 55 | 50 | 54 | 49 | 51 | 56 | 54 | 52 | 50 |
| BELGIUM | 23 | 29 | 25 | 20 | 23 | 38 | 47 | 36 | 22 | 38 | 46 | 50 | 40 | 28 | 40 |
| BULGARIA | / | / | 7 | 15 | 14 | / | / | 15 | 43 | 25 | / | / | 8 | 25 | 18 |
| CYPRUS | 26 | 20 | 29 | 23 | 9 | 65 | 56 | 65 | 43 | 16 | 63 | 44 | 63 | 40 | 15 |
| CZECH REPUBLIC | 10 | 15 | 12 | 12 | 8 | 27 | 34 | 20 | 32 | 11 | 18 | 22 | 16 | 12 | 9 |
| DENMARK | 39 | 49 | 54 | 49 | 36 | 56 | 56 | 60 | 50 | 42 | 70 | 75 | 75 | 72 | 63 |
| ESTONIA | 17 | 21 | 19 | 20 | 16 | 47 | 54 | 48 | 53 | 35 | 41 | 41 | 37 | 39 | 29 |
| FINLAND | 26 | 36 | 36 | 30 | 36 | 67 | 65 | 68 | 49 | 62 | 68 | 69 | 71 | 55 | 66 |
| FRANCE | 13 | 10 | 13 | 14 | 12 | 29 | 20 | 31 | 25 | 30 | 38 | 31 | 36 | 36 | 32 |
| GERMANY | 13 | 22 | 22 | 19 | 21 | 33 | 39 | 42 | 32 | 41 | 39 | 40 | 41 | 39 | 46 |
| GREECE | 17 | 25 | 14 | 9 | 5 | 50 | 43 | 23 | 25 | 7 | 61 | 56 | 32 | 23 | 9 |
| HUNGARY | 18 | 29 | 8 | 29 | 18 | 40 | 48 | 16 | 40 | 27 | 38 | 47 | 16 | 41 | 29 |
| IRELAND | 18 | 32 | 23 | 17 | 12 | 39 | 42 | 33 | 21 | 18 | 40 | 44 | 36 | 22 | 18 |
| ITALY | 20 | 26 | 16 | 18 | 8 | 28 | 34 | 26 | 25 | 17 | 31 | 40 | 27 | 26 | 11 |
| LATVIA | 6 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 26 | 25 | 16 | 13 | 17 | 21 | 21 | 9 | 6 | 13 |
| LITHUANIA | 16 | 10 | 10 | 6 | 13 | 38 | 21 | 16 | 13 | 21 | 23 | 14 | 11 | 7 | 13 |
| LUXEMBURG | 35 | 41 | 39 | 40 | 22 | 67 | 65 | 60 | 66 | 57 | 64 | 58 | 56 | 52 | 48 |
| MALTA | 28 | 25 | 34 | 25 | 20 | 46 | 38 | 50 | 33 | 34 | 44 | 40 | 57 | 33 | 29 |
| NETHERLANDS | 34 | 42 | 51 | 45 | 33 | 38 | 42 | 66 | 47 | 47 | 49 | 55 | 64 | 54 | 53 |
| POLAND | 5 | 9 | 7 | 15 | 17 | 13 | 22 | 20 | 28 | 23 | 8 | 13 | 13 | 24 | 20 |
| PORTUGAL | 17 | 19 | 17 | 15 | 17 | 27 | 34 | 31 | 20 | 22 | 43 | 41 | 38 | 28 | 23 |
| ROMANIA | / | / | 14 | 10 | 9 | / | / | 25 | 12 | 20 | / | / | 19 | 10 | 13 |
| SLOVAKIA | 9 | 10 | 16 | 25 | 19 | 22 | 21 | 46 | 38 | 32 | 25 | 27 | 41 | 38 | 30 |
| SLOVENIA | 17 | 19 | 17 | 11 | 9 | 35 | 38 | 36 | 27 | 15 | 36 | 37 | 34 | 23 | 12 |
| SPAIN | 28 | 31 | 30 | 14 | 6 | 51 | 44 | 44 | 20 | 11 | 48 | 41 | 40 | 21 | 9 |
| SWEDEN | 24 | 23 | 34 | 37 | 35 | 41 | 36 | 56 | 57 | 59 | 56 | 56 | 64 | 66 | 68 |
| UNITED KINGDOM | 15 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 12 | 32 | 30 | 29 | 26 | 25 | 37 | 36 | 30 | 24 | 26 |
| EU 25/27 AVERAGE | 20 | 24 | 23 | 21 | 17 | 40 | 40 | 38 | 34 | 30 | 42 | 42 | 38 | 33 | 29 |
| CEE 8/10 AVERAGE | 12 | 16 | 12 | 15 | 13 | 31 | 33 | 26 | 30 | 23 | 26 | 28 | 20 | 23 | 19 |

Sources: *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 62 (Autumn 2004)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb62_en.htm (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 65 (January 2007)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb65/eb65_en.pdf (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 70 (Autumn 2008)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_full_annex.pdf (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 73 (November 2010)*. Public opinion in the

European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb73/eb73_anx_full.pdf (February 2013); *Table of results. Standard Eurobarometer 78 (November 2012)*. Public opinion in the European Union. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb78/eb78_anx_en.pdf (February 2013).

If we compare public trust in institutions measured in selected European countries in 1995 and 2010 in European Social Survey research, the conclusion is that the level of trust is much lower in new democracies of CEE than the level of trust in established democracies of Western Europe. The survey covered a range of questions, and in *Table 4* we can see the level of trust in national parliaments, political parties, and politicians in all of the observed countries. Even among CEE countries, there is a significant difference in levels of trust. In Slovenia, for example, the level of trust is among the lowest in the region. This indicates that the variations in levels of trust show how different the political systems are and that the level of trust in the region is much lower than in other Western European countries, probably because of the change in the regime.²⁴

If we compare trust levels in the national parliament from data sets of 1995 and 2010, we can clearly ascertain that levels of trust have fallen quite significantly, except in Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands, where trust in the national parliament was actually higher in 2010 than in 1995. The average level of trust was 4.63 in 1995 and 4.32 in 2010; the level of trust was measured on a scale from 1 to 10. Only two of the observed countries' parliaments scored a lower level of trust in 1995 than in Slovenia (Poland and the Czech Republic), with two such examples again in 2010 (Bulgaria and Portugal). Besides that, we can see that the Scandinavian countries, on average, have a much higher level of trust, which could also be linked to their high levels of social capital that could play some role in their relatively high trust levels in general.

TABLE 4: TRUST IN POLITICIANS, POLITICAL PARTIES, AND NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS IN EUROPE (1995 AND 2010)

| COUNTRY | TRUST IN POLITICIANS (2010) | TRUST IN POLITICAL PARTIES (2010) | TRUST IN THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT (2010) | TRUST IN THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT (1995) |
|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| BELGIUM | 3,86 | 3,85 | 4,46 | 5,0 |
| DENMARK | 5,04 | 5,17 | 5,83 | 6,2 |
| FINLAND | 4,43 | 4,54 | 5,38 | 5,8 |
| FRANCE | 3,19 | 3,07 | 4,15 | 4,5 |
| GERMANY | 3,29 | 3,26 | 4,18 | 4,5 |
| ISRAEL | 2,95 | 2,95 | 3,64 | 4,7 |
| NEDERLANDS | 5,22 | 5,23 | 5,34 | 5,2 |
| NORWAY | 4,96 | 4,93 | 6,03 | 5,7 |
| PORTUGAL | 2,01 | 2,02 | 2,91 | 4,4 |
| SPAIN | 2,72 | 2,70 | 4,30 | 4,8 |
| SWEDEN | 5,04 | 5,11 | 6,28 | 5,9 |
| SWITZERLAND | 5,01 | 4,81 | 5,81 | 5,8 |
| UNITED KINGDOM | 3,40 | 3,50 | 4,05 | 4,7 |
| BULGARIA | 1,99 | 2,01 | 2,38 | - |
| CZECH REPUBLIC | 2,63 | 2,69 | 3,27 | 3,6 |
| ESTONIA | 3,62 | 3,43 | 4,24 | 4,4 |
| HUNGARY | 3,12 | 3,14 | 4,22 | 5,0 |
| POLAND | 2,66 | 2,55 | 3,44 | 3,5 |
| SLOVENIA | 2,25 | 2,24 | 2,98 | 4,0 |

Source: *European Social Survey*. Available at <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org> (January 2012). The question was as follows: "Tell me on a scale from 0 to 10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions. 0 means you do not trust institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust."

²⁴ Max Kaase, Kenneth Newton and Niko Toš, *Zaupanje v vlado* (Ljubljana: Liberalna akademija, 1999).

TABLE 5: VOTER TURNOUT DATA (IN PERCENT)²⁵ FOR EU MEMBER STATES –PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

| EU MEMBER STATE | YEAR | PERCENT | DIFFERENCE |
|-----------------|------|---------|------------|
| AUSTRIA | 1990 | 86.14 | - 4,43 |
| | 2008 | 81.71 | |
| BELGIUM | 1991 | 92.71 | - 3,49 |
| | 2010 | 89.22 | |
| BULGARIA | 1991 | 83.87 | - 23,23 |
| | 2009 | 60.64 | |
| CYPRUS | 1991 | 94.31 | - 15,51 |
| | 2011 | 78.80 | |
| CZECH REPUBLIC | 1990 | 96.33 | - 33,73 |
| | 2010 | 62.60 | |
| DENMARK | 1990 | 82.85 | + 4,89 |
| | 2011 | 87.74 | |
| ESTONIA | 1990 | 78.20 | - 14,67 |
| | 2011 | 63.53 | |
| FINLAND | 1991 | 68.39 | - 1,02 |
| | 2011 | 67.37 | |
| FRANCE | 1993 | 68.93 | - 13,53 |
| | 2012 | 55.40 | |
| GERMANY | 1990 | 77.76 | - 6,98 |
| | 2009 | 70.78 | |
| GREECE | 1993 | 82.95 | - 20,48 |
| | 2012 | 62.47 | |
| HUNGARY | 1990 | 44.14 | + 2,52 |
| | 2010 | 46.66 | |
| IRELAND | 1992 | 68.49 | + 1,56 |
| | 2011 | 70.05 | |
| ITALY | 1992 | 87.44 | - 6,90 |
| | 2008 | 80.54 | |
| LATVIA | 1990 | 81.20 | - 21,71 |
| | 2011 | 59.49 | |
| LITHUANIA | 1992 | 75.22 | - 39,31 |
| | 2012 | 35.91 | |
| LUXEMBURG | 1994 | 88.30 | + 2,63 |
| | 2009 | 90.93 | |
| MALTA | 1992 | 96.04 | - 2,74 |
| | 2008 | 93.30 | |
| NETHERLANDS | 1994 | 78.75 | - 4,19 |
| | 2012 | 74.56 | |
| POLAND | 1991 | 43.20 | + 5,72 |
| | 2011 | 48.92 | |
| PORTUGAL | 1991 | 68.18 | - 10,15 |
| | 2011 | 58.03 | |
| ROMANIA | 1992 | 76.29 | - 34,53 |
| | 2012 | 41.76 | |
| SLOVAKIA | 1990 | 96.33 | - 37,22 |
| | 2012 | 59.11 | |
| SLOVENIA | 1992 | 85.90 | - 20,30 |
| | 2011 | 65.60 | |
| SPAIN | 1993 | 77.05 | - 8,11 |
| | 2011 | 68.94 | |
| SWEDEN | 1991 | 86.74 | - 2,11 |
| | 2010 | 84.63 | |
| UNITED KINGDOM | 1992 | 77.83 | - 12,06 |
| | 2010 | 65.77 | |

Source: *Idea*. Country view. Available at <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=-1> (February 2013).

One additional indicator of public trust in politics and political institutions is voter turnout at general elections to the representative assembly. Given the

²⁵ The voter turnout (of the only or final round) as defined as the percentage of registered voters who actually voted.

fact that most of EU member states are parliamentary democracies with national parliament as the most important decision-making body, we have analysed and compared voter turnout at the parliamentary elections in all EU-27 member states at the first parliamentary elections in 1990s, when democratic changes in most CEE countries took place, and most recent parliamentary elections.²⁶ Our goal was to compare the beginning of 1990s, the period of most intensive democratic movement and the highest levels of public enthusiasm towards democracy as the new societal system in large part of Europe at the time, and most recent period of deep global economic crisis, where public enthusiasm towards reigning democratic political system is certainly not on the highest point. In *table 5* we can observe the differences between voter turnout in older, more established democracies of Western, Southern and Northern Europe, and new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. We can see that in none of the older established democracies of the EU voter turnout at the parliamentary elections is below 50 percent, but in new democracies there are quite some figures below 50 percent. Second ascertainment is that negative difference between voter turnout at both analysed parliamentary elections is much higher in new democracies of CEE compared to older EU democracies, in some countries difference is almost 40 percent; only in five out of 27 EU member states the difference between both analysed parliamentary elections is positive, and two out of those five cases are Poland and Hungary, with very low (below 50) turnout already in the beginning of 1990s. All findings are just another indirect indicator that levels of trust in political institutions, especially in the CEE, are currently on much lower scale compared to the beginning of 1990s, when democratic awakening took place.

4 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The definite answer to the question of why trust in political institutions is decreasing in modern democratic systems, and especially in new democracies of the Central and Eastern Europe, remains elusive, although we can search for at least partial answers in the recent events, above all in the global economic crisis and its impacts in the EU. One can also wonder if this means that trust in democratic values, in general, is not seen as important as it once used to be. Instead of an answer, we can offer the opinion of Ronald Inglehard, who claims on the basis of empirical research that societies that are increasingly critical of hierarchical authorities are at the same time more participative and claim a more active role in the policy-making process. Political leaders are interacting with ever more active and more informed and educated citizens, who are simultaneously more critical of their actions. An alternative approach reveals that sympathy does not necessarily mean trust, but it can also be interpreted as some sort of obvious predictability, meaning that citizens do not *a priori* trust the political institution but, since we can foresee its reactions and behaviour in the future, which should be consistent with those in the past, we trust the bureaucratic processes instead. The dimensions of trust between citizens and political institutions cannot be measured only through the parameter of trust–mistrust, but at best as a relationship of “inductive anticipation”.²⁷ We can conclude that the legitimacy of the system increases with the level of trust in political institutions. However, is complete trust in favour of democracy, or could it be

²⁶ We are quite aware, that different EU member states have different political systems with different electoral systems used for parliamentary election, some even with obligatory voter turnout. The comparisons presented are therefore for reference only and not absolute in terms.

²⁷ Mark E. Warren (ed.), *Democracy and Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

that a constant ongoing critique and sober judgment of the everyday actions of administrative and political bodies is, in fact, in the best interests of a consolidated democracy?

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