

# Civil Society and Public Sphere in Central and Eastern Europe

## *A Polish Case Study*

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"In countries where democratic reforms are doing relatively well, the media are, too" (*East European Media*, 1996). This simple journalistic verdict is enlarged upon by Charles Gati (1996) who in an overview of the situation in post-Communist countries, distinguishes three groups of countries in the region:

- the 7 leaders (i.e. the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) where, despite popular backlash, both political and economic reforms continue to be carried out, for now;
- the 12 laggards (i.e. the semi-authoritarian regimes of Slovakia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus) where reorganization and retrenchment coexist. Leaders reluctantly pursue modest market reforms, tolerate a press that is partly free and legitimate their rule in seemingly fair but manipulated elections;
- the 8 losers (authoritarian, though no longer totalitarian dictatorships of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus), an area that is essentially unreformed and oppressive.

Accordingly, says Gati, at least 20 of the 27 post-communist states are facing the prospect of neither democracy nor totalitarianism:

The transition to democracy has lost its early popular appeal and therefore its early momentum. Radicals have yielded to minimalists, the liberal impulse has yielded to a quest for egalitarianism, and demands for freedom have yielded to demands for order [...] Most people in the post-communist world have already made a choice between freedom and order and their preferred choice is order. Though approving a role for market forces, large majorities are nonetheless so nostalgic for the benefits of the communist welfare state, however meager, that they

are prepared to do away with what they see as the cumbersome, dissonant, and chaotic features of democratic politics. With rule by the few the familiar alternative, what they are rejecting is not merely a leader of a party but the very system and values of Western-style democracy (Gati, 1996:6).

A similarly gloomy view is advanced by Daniel N. Nelson (1995) who maintains that since the transformation of political life away from one-party authoritarianism toward a plural, participatory democracy ultimately depends on citizenship, that transformation is threatened by the feeling of personal insecurity pervading much of Central and Eastern Europe. That stems from inequality in benefitting from the gains of "mutant capitalism" and may have a deleterious effect on citizen participation and commitment to tenets of tolerance, pluralism, competition. Democracy cannot exist where the public political sphere is weak or collapsing. Without a participatory ethos, government is neither responsive nor accountable to citizens. Therefore, the future of the nascent democracies in the region, says Nelson, is "security dependent":

Civil society begot an expanded public political realm and the dawn of public legitimation in Communist-ruled Europe. That achievement is now endangered by the costs of transition and external perils – threats that make people feel insecure, thereby undercutting their commitment to change and their patience with transition processes. Trying to protect themselves and their families from increasing insecurity, they withdraw from public life. Once that begins to happen, the political sphere is left to neo-authoritarians or to the people who inhabited prior regimes, reborn with different labels (Nelson, 1995:15).

These appraisals are no doubt premature and refer to the "laggards" and the "losers", rather than the "leaders". Considering recent developments in Belarus, one of the "laggards", where the despotic personal rule of President Lukashenko is finally being opposed by a growing wave of official and popular resistance, accelerating the development of civil society, they are certainly too hasty in jumping to conclusions. Fundamental social and political change does not happen overnight. The effects of decades of totalitarian/authoritarian rule, precoded by

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centuries of underdevelopment, foreign rule and a variety of upheavals cannot be undone in a few years.

Still, it is important to bear these views in mind as we consider the record and prospects for the future as regards the emergence of civil society and the public sphere in Central and Eastern European countries. We will concentrate on the Polish case here which should offer some indication of the situation in this regard in one of the "leader" countries.

The aim here is not so much to provide a full factual account of the process, but to suggest a possible framework for its analysis.

## **Civil Society and Public Sphere: A Convergence of Problematics?**

Consideration of these two closely associated problematics is made difficult by the fact that definitions of these two concepts are becoming blurred, the very existence of aspects of social reality denoted by them is sometimes questioned, and there is also evidence of a growing overlap between them in the approach taken by some writers.

To begin with the public sphere, there are those, like Garnham (1993), who point out that the development of an increasingly integrated global market and centers of private economic power with global reach are steadily undermining the nation-state, i.e. the framework within which the question of citizenship and of the relationship between communication and politics has been traditionally posed. Therefore, says Garnham, the question becomes what new political institutions and new public sphere might be necessary for the democratic control of a global economy and polity? Others argue that "the public sphere is altogether phantom in an electronic environment" (Nerone, 1995:173).

From another angle, Taylor (1996) maintains that in the interest of the proper functioning of democracy, it is no longer enough to think of the public sphere as the bulwark which contains the expansion of potentially ubiquitous state power. The public sphere, in his view, should be a crucial element of the process of democratic decision-making, a forum for public debate central to the process of self-government, serving to provide a hearing for all groups of society and to promote the development of a common will, subsequently translated into common decision and action.

In this approach, the notion of the public sphere goes beyond the traditional understanding of the concept, encompassing civil society and the democratic process in general.

On the other hand, in a reconsideration of the concept of the public sphere, Habermas questions the need for the concept of civil society altogether, preferring in its place that of the "political public sphere", or "public sphere operating in the political realm" which he describes as:

the quintessential concept denoting all those conditions of communication under which there can come into being a discursive formation of opinion and will on the part of a public composed of the citizens of a state (Habermas, 1993:446).

Seen in terms of the traditional definitions of these concepts, Taylor's view of the public sphere seems to be too all-embracing,

while Habermas' view of civil society as too constraining. Nevertheless, this even stronger coming together of two already related research problematics is very interesting. Developments in Poland may be seen as providing some evidence that they are sometimes hard to distinguish clearly also in social reality

## **Civil Society in the Ascendant: the Polish Dissidents**

Polish dissidents and other critics of the regime long sought to reason with, and persuade the Communist authorities to change their way, hoping to promote a gradual evolution of the system. Finally, despairing of chances to change or overthrow<sup>2</sup> Communist rule, they decided in the mid-1970s to develop a platform of "new evolutionism", convinced, in the words of Adam Michnik (1984:84), that

the real addressee of the evolutionist programme should be not the totalitarian authorities, but independent public opinion. The programme should not seek to tell the authorities how to reform themselves, but give society an indication of what it should do. Nothing concentrates the mind of the authorities better than grassroots pressure. "New evolutionism" is based on the fundamental conviction of the strength of the working class whose tough and consistent stand has already forced the authorities to make spectacular concessions.

That approach proved to be a breeding ground for human rights movements and organizations serving the defence of persecuted opponents of the system, for underground publishers and periodicals, independent educational and artistic institutions, religious and ecological movements as well as fledgling political parties. This social space was given different names in different countries, such as "a parallel polis", "independent society", "independent culture", "counter-society", etc. In short,

these independent movements sought to recreate what might be called bedrock civil society, i.e. to undertake collective action capable, with greater or lesser success, of protecting society against the invasion of arbitrary party and state power. Equally important was the fact that these movements developed models of responsible civic attitudes which held attraction for wide segments of society (Smolar, 1991:18).

Seligman (quoted in Dahlgren, 1995) believes that the term "civil society" may have been used in Central and Eastern Europe prior to the collapse of Communism largely as a neutral synonym for the general concept of democracy, rather than representing a new analytical turn in thinking about "civil society" as such. However original or derivative the analytical thinking itself was, this thesis is not really supported by evidence. Charles Taylor (1994:54) is closer to the mark when he says that the term, as used in Central and Eastern Europe, was meant to describe what those societies had lost and what they were now trying to recreate: "a network of institutions that are independent from the state, which unite citizens around issues of common concern and which by their very existence, or by their activities, can bring influence to bear on policy". This

strategy of long-term political change was clearly one of self-organization of society serving the goal of "build[ing] up a pluralist structure" within the Communist state (Kuro, 1981:95). As Geremek explains, the prospect of creating democratic society was seen as a remote one:

The civil society project was a form not just of mass resistance to the Communist system, but also of openly isolating the authorities society was organizing itself to oppose. By opposing the delegitimated State in this way, we hoped ultimately to enclose this unwanted creation in a kind cocoon, and promote the gradual alienation and finally marginalization of state structures (Geremek, 1994:237)

When "Solidarity" became a 10-million strong social movement in 1980-1981, the ultimate goal of social and political reform it was planning was the transformation of Poland into a "Self-governing Commonwealth". This has been described as a "direct self-managing form of democracy". Holzer (1984:195) calls it "one of a long string of freedom-oriented socialist utopias", but Smolar (1991:22) seems closer to the mark when he calls this "apotheosis of self-management from top to bottom" a "utopia of the third way ... practically speaking *a civil society liberated from the state*" (emphasis added). When there was no way of telling when the Communist state would disappear, the goal was clearly, as Arato (1981) points out, that of gradually reconstituting civil society through the re-establishment of the rule of law, an independent public sphere and freedom of association.

It was thus an effort to reverse the the Communist strategy of remodelling social organization with a view to eliminating the private sphere and filling the void with the values and patterns of the public (i.e. government-controlled) sphere. That strategy had been unsuccessful and was rejected by society with such vehemence that one of the many concessions the system had to make was to respect the relative inviolability of a growing expanse of the private sphere. "Communist authorities became reconciled not only to the permanence of an uncontrollable private sphere, but also to the fact that it would be the domain of what they considered to be alien values. They insisted that these values should be held and articulated in the private sphere alone ... while the public one was to remain purely 'socialist' in nature" (Szacki, 1994:108). In the final stages of the system's existence, as efforts to create a space for free self-organization of society (i.e. some forms of civil society) operating within the Communist state gained real momentum, the Communist government was concerned solely with preserving its hold on the shrinking public sphere and protecting it from being invaded by the values of the private one. Thus, the thrust of marginalization had been reversed and dissident civil society was in the ascendant at that time.

Over time, the concept of civil society was used by Polish dissidents in a number of meanings (Ogrodziński, 1991):

- the original, classical model as developed in Western social thought;
- the "defective model" constituted by the private sphere, resisting the encroachments of the totalitarian/authoritarian public sphere;

- the "ethical model" developed by the anti-Communist opposition and perceived mostly in abstract, moral terms as an expression of the unity of "society";
- and the "transformative model", a fairly confused set of ideas emerging after the collapse of Communism, combining those features of the idealistic ethical model which retained their vitality after the rude awakening of post-Communist transformation with those of the classical model.

Given the origin of the "ethical model" of civil society and the authoritarian context in which attempts to create it were undertaken, it is hardly suprising that ideas and values animating it were antithetical to those of the then prevailing system: justice, equality, solidarity, access, participation. This is very much in line with Ralph Dahrendorf's definition of the operational core of civil society, seen as consisting of

a set of legitimate claims which can be described as civic rights. Civic rights provide the compass which helps us steer the right course between the Scylla of the state with all its competence of power, and the Charybdis of the corporate cartel of organizations and institutions which in some circumstances can be equally dangerous to freedom. As a set of legitimate claims, civic rights create a certain public situation: the protection the people's *right to participation* against government interference on the one hand and the variable impact of the market on the other" (Dahrendorf, 1994:236; emphasis added)

However, can this "ethical model" be regarded as that of a full and complete model of civil society? That depends on how we define civil society. The answer is positive if we accept Arato and Cohen's view that civil society consists of "the institutionalized dimension of the lifeworld. composed of family, associations and the public sphere" (Cohen, 1996:42), and that this is civil society against (i.e. separate from) the state (Arato, 1981).

Other approaches are possible, however. Seligman (quoted in Dahlgren, 1995) distinguishes two basic ways of perceiving civil society:

- at an institutional-organizational level, thus encompassing the general institutional and legal requirements for a democratic society with full-fledged citizenship;
- at the level of beliefs and value systems, with a Durkheimian stress on universalistic moral bonds as a foundation of solidarity.

There is little doubt that the "ethical model" of civil society as developed in Poland represented this second perspective. Dahlgren (1995) argues that both aspects, appropriate institutional conditions and value systems, are necessary for civil society to exist, and that civil society and the state constitute the conditions for the other's democratization. What emerges, says Dahlgren – in line with John Keane's views – is the need for "double democratization" of a democratic state and civil society. In short, civil society must according to this view exist in the context of a democratic state: separate from it, but also organically linked to it.

This view is shared by Dahrendorf who points out that civil society must, in addition to a requisite legal and political framework, have a foundation in a mature democracy and a

mature political culture in which "the legitimate claims which can be described as civic rights" will be respected. It can be built only if there is widespread determination on the part of society to demand respect for, and observance of, individual civic rights, and popular will to hold to account anyone, or any institution, which violates them. This can hardly be done without the support of the institutions of the State.

Since that was impossible in Communist Poland, civil society was seen as a way for the Poles to organize outside the structures of the Party-state, with self-organized social groups and movements gradually expanding the areas of negative liberty and self-determination open to citizens (Ash, 1991). However, Arato (1981:27) – though enthusiastic about developments in Poland – doubted that that would lead to the creation of a true civil society, given the need for some compromise with existing state power: "Can a social movement – asked Arato – achieve a workable model of civil society alone, through structural reforms from below? And if so, what kind of civil society will result, given a formally intact, authoritarian state?"

Very importantly from our point of view, however, Arato (1981) points out that given the absence of the two potential agencies for the constitution of civil society (that is the capitalist logic of industrialization and statist logic of modernization from above), the social movement in Poland at the time could make an emancipated public sphere far more central in this nascent civil society than anywhere before. To all intents and purposes, the oppositional public sphere was the dissident civil society.

The public sphere in its proper sense is seen as a "space for rational and universalistic politics distinct from both the economy and the state" (Garnham, 1986:41), or as a situation in which "all voices hav[e] equal access to a neutral public sphere, where their unfettered rational discourse ... culminate[s] in the articulation of popular will" (Dahlgren, 1987:25). As with civil society in general, the public sphere, as projected by the dissidents, was to be based on the principle of inclusion, in line with Jean Cohen's (1996:34) view that

The legitimacy of the public sphere is tied up with its potential for inclusion, and the existence of the public sphere as the central context of democratic access calls for programs of inclusion ... Thus the formal legal guarantees (legal rights) together with mechanisms for the facilitation of equality of access to the public sphere ... become all the more important in relationship to a functioning public sphere.

Again, the question has to be asked whether this was a true and complete public sphere. Dahlgren (1995) distinguishes four analytical dimensions of the public sphere:

- media institutions;
- media representation;
- social structure (one public sphere for all, or a plurality of different public spheres?)
- and socio-cultural interaction.

One could say, without going into too many details, that the oppositional public sphere in Poland (Jakubowicz, 1990) en-

compassed all of these elements, including underground print media (periodicals and books), and even underground radio broadcasts. Of course, there was also the official public sphere, with a different set of the same elements.

Dahlgren (1995:7) points out that civil society constitutes the sociocultural precondition for a viable public sphere. Such was certainly the case with the dissident civil society and oppositional public sphere in Poland, though of course both operated within the context of an authoritarian state.

In short, then, the energy and determination in creating a dissident civil society and an oppositional public sphere were rooted in resistance to the Communist state and were an expression of that resistance in the face of a seemingly all-powerful enemy whom there was no real hope of defeating or overthrowing. It is important to remember that all this happened in the context of an authoritarian state – apart from, but also in some form of dialogue with, that state. The concept of civil society was based on

a conviction of considerable social import, namely that attitudes and behaviour patterns leading to significant changes in the socialist State and its economy were to be found in an extra-State infrastructure of social life ... of its own initiative, this civil society entered into many qualitatively different types of interaction with the state ... The features of this civil society allowed its individual members and even more so organized collectivities to undertake many different actions (including many carefully planned and coordinated ones) with a view to the socialization of the state. These grassroots initiatives, entering directly into the domain of the state, made a ranking contribution to deforming the fundamental political goals and economic structures of the socialist State. It was thanks to them, and not just to pressure from the West, that governments of socialist countries superficially accommodated to the organization of Western parliamentary democracies (Kurczewska, 1995:80).

The features that Kurczewska mentions refer to the concept of civil society not just as a force which merely negated the communist state, but one – and this is clear from everything that has been said about it so far in this paper – which had a positive programme of building an "independent and self-governing Commonwealth" and constituted an internally coordinated societal entity which placed great stock on the ability to organize, gain individual and collective subjectivity and freedom. Not just freedom *from* the Communist state as freedom *to* organize and undertake collective action to change that state.

In this sense, says Kurczewska, the Polish dissident civil society evolved from an associational to a corporatist model – somewhat in line with Taylor's understanding of the public sphere. It derived its identity from struggle against the state (Kurczewska, Staszyńska and Bajor, 1993).

## After the Fall: What Prospects for Civil Society and the Public Sphere?

We noted above that the energy driving the creation of a dissident civil society and oppositional public sphere in Poland derived from anger, resistance and opposition to the communist regime. But what after the collapse of that regime? Where is

the energy to create a civil society and a public sphere to come from in a democratic society, or one in which a democratic system is being created? Exactly this question is asked by Dahrendorf:

How can we guarantee that political institutions which make possible a change of government without bloodshed will be rooted in social structures founded upon universal civil rights? How can democracy and civil society be created together and combined in such a way that democracy will be something more than a constitutional promise and civil society something more than just a resistance movement, even if it is organized resistance? (Dahrendorf, 1994:228).

Dahrendorf offers two types of answers to this question. First, that citizenship – which is the foundation of civil society – must become a reality in the minds and hearts, and above all in the habits of individuals. It must, he says, become an institution in the full sense of the word, i.e. a norm observed without any external sanctions, observed as a component of people's social behaviour. That, of course, requires time. But, says Dahrendorf, what it also requires is that citizenship be *introduced* by a dual effort: that of the authorities, and that of the people. He sees the need for an active agency on the part of the authorities in introducing and respective civil, political and at least elementary social rights and the creation of institutions which safeguard exercise of these rights (an independent judiciary, political parties and a free press, as well as a liberal economic system). And he, too, sees the need for

many courageous and determined people to create conditions in which substantive civic rights will be respected and exercised. They must be constantly active in many areas. Some must be active in trade unions and political parties, others as lawyers and journalists, others still will set up independent organizations, and many will simply seek to maintain their enterprises, institutions or associations as autonomous elements of public life ... Civil society is a complex matter and many helpful hands are needed to create it (Dahrendorf, 1994:234).

This view is supported by Habermas (1993:453) who points out that "a public sphere which functions politically" (his term for civil society) "requires more than the institutional guarantees of the constitutional state; it also needs the supportive spirit of cultural traditions and patterns of socialization, of the political culture of a population accustomed to freedom".

In the conditions of Central and Eastern Europe or indeed any societies in transition, it is very important for this dual agency in favour of civil society to exist and work together, with the liberal democratic state playing a crucially important role in the process. We have already noted Dahlgren's view of the need for double democratization of the state and civil society:

Each side [...] is a precondition for the democratization of the other [...] If the state is too weak, it cannot foster democratization of civil society. If it is too strong, it becomes too interventionist; without a viable civil society, the state becomes too all-encompassing. The democratization of civil society has

to do with the development of a democratic culture or mentality within the context of everyday life (Dahlgren, 1995:6).

It seems clear, therefore, that for civil society fully to achieve its aims, it must have the ability not only to resist the state's expansionist claims, but also successfully to bring pressure to bear on state power to achieve effective democracy. Crucially, this assumes that if civil society is to be able to hold its own in constant confrontation with an expansionist state, the two should be relatively evenly matched, even if conceptualization of that "even match" between them might present considerable difficulties. Also, the relationship between the two is of a dialectical nature in the sense that however much they may complement and indeed support each other, there is also a potential in-built conflict between them, stemming primarily from the inherent expansionist tendency of any state apparatus.

It is probably with this in mind that both Dahlgren and Dahrendorf note the great vulnerability of civil society. Dahlgren (1995:6) notes that "in the face of the state, civil society remains relatively powerless". Dahrendorf (1994:234) goes even further and says that "one determined individual in power can jeopardize the tradition of civil society".

All this is highly pertinent in the Polish context. There is no doubt that after the collapse of the communist system there was a clear clash between the budding civil society and the newly emergent state and in the first few years at least this dual agency was missing.

Leszek Balcerowicz (1995) notes that the sequence of changes taking place in Central and Eastern European countries has a number of specific features as compared with other cases of major societal transition (classical, neoclassical, non-communist economic reform, the Chinese form of post-communist transition).

#### Post-communist transition in Eastern Europe

|                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Scope</b>                    | Both political and economic system                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Speed</b>                    | Rapid shift from non-democratic to the pluralist political arrangements, speed of economic reform differs                                                                                                       |
| <b>Sequence</b>                 | First mass democracy or at least political pluralism then – capitalism?                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Extent of violence</b>       | Largely peaceful so far                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Role of mass media</b>       | Large increase in the role of all mass media, especially radio and TV (visibility effect)                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Role of external factors</b> | Very important for countries other than the former USSR; without the collapse of the Soviet empire, the transition in those countries would have been impossible. In addition: democratic capitalism as a model |

In view of what has been said of the importance of the existence of a democratic state for the emergence of civil society and the public sphere, it is interesting that Balcerowicz places mass democracy at the beginning of the sequence of change. He explains this as follows:

It is misleading to speak of "simultaneous transitions" in post-communist Europe. It takes more time to privatize the bulk of the state-dominated economy than to organize free elections and at least some rudiments of political parties. Given the largely simultaneous beginning of the political and economic transitions, this asymmetry in speed produces a historically new sequence: mass democracy (or at least political pluralism, i.e. some degree of legal political competition) first, and market capitalism later (Balcerowicz, 1995:146).

On the other hand, Rychard (1993) argues that the actual orientation of the process of transition in Central and Eastern Europe is often far removed from that normative state of "transition to market and democracy". Also Geremek (1994:245) points out that "the overthrow of Communism and recovery of freedom is not tantamount to the rebirth of a democratic order. Democracy is created in a long process of development".

There is no real contradiction between Balcerowicz and the other two scholars, of course. What he is describing, of course, is transition to democracy, or indeed just to some degree of legal political competition. This is only the first stage of the process which must be followed by consolidation of democracy, adaptation and reinforcement of democratic structures and norms. According to Leonardo Morlino (cf. Gruszczak, 1995), this process encompasses such areas as structures and procedures of decision-making; structural relations within the organization of the state; parties and party systems; structures of interests; mediation structures in relation to civil society as it gains autonomy, identity and ability to affect the state; mediation structures in relation to the state, expressed in its legitimacy and integration, growing social order and consensus. Such features of developed democracy as procedures of conflict resolution, effective representation and realization of interests, civil society and political representation of social interests must become established. Then political culture will begin to favour respect for democratic institutions and negotiations rather than conflict. The real trick, therefore, is not just to introduce conditions of legal political competition, but to ensure consolidation of democracy – a much more difficult proposition.

## Political, not Civil Society

For the time being, though consolidation of democracy is happening in Poland, the country's political culture prevailing is still closer to that of the conflict-ridden, highly polarized and ideologized societies it was in the authoritarian era, than to that of mature democracies. As a result, what emerged was not civil society but "a political society" (Korboński, 1994).

Faced with the need to guide the nation through a difficult period of economic shock therapy and seeking to prevent the outbreak of social discontent, the early Polish post-Communist governments pursued a deliberate policy of discouraging social participation in public and political life, i.e. of mobilizing

the population for the purpose of elections or other short-lived campaigns, and dampening their enthusiasm at other times. The very same dissident and opposition leaders who had insisted that Communist regimes accept, or reconcile themselves to, the development of civil society which "would populate the wilderness separating the individual from the [Communist] state" (Smolar, 1991:15), "now – after they had gained power – abandoned that language in favour of the classic concerns for the state and the market" (Smolar, 1993:40). They argued that the development of a full-fledged party system would be premature and that society should remain as united in facing the new challenges as it was in resisting the Communist system. Therefore, they hoped to maintain Solidarity as a mass social movement providing a focus for popular backing for the process of transformation and delay as much as possible the emergence of political parties, with all the political differentiation and power struggles that would bring in its wake. That policy involved effectively stifling some of the grassroots movements (such as the "civic committees" created to conduct the election campaign of Spring 1989) which could have provided a foundation for an active and self-confident civil society (Frączak, 1992).

Grabowska (1995:197) argues that an important factor in this regard was what she calls the authoritarian rule of post-Solidarity governments (caused by the fact that the "post-Solidarity political elites underestimated society and overestimated themselves"). According to Grabowska, this "authoritarian" style brought about the indifference of society, leading many people to opt out of public life, discouraged by lack of progress in solving the particular countries' problems and by what it perceived to be the interminable power struggle of politicians concentrating on issues without relevance to the everyday life of the people.

Writing a few years ago, Kurczewska, Staszyńska and Bajor (1993) concluded that in Poland the full development of civil society had been prevented until then by the fact that a weak society was interacting with a weak state.

Civil society was weak because:

- the number of new organizations and associations was not adequate to social needs;
- many institutions and organizations were relics of the past;
- the expectation that "the State would provide", i.e. would satisfy the needs of society, was still very strong.

Accordingly, society did not take full advantage of existing possibilities of activity and development.

In turn, the state was weak because:

- government structures remained largely unchanged;
- the legal and regulatory framework also remained largely unchanged, while at the same time a great many new laws and regulations were issued, sowing confusion and uncertainty;
- excessive segmentation of political parties led both to the instability of successive governments and fragmentation of civil society, lowering its ability to articulate its interests and translate them into effective electoral action;

- it was difficult, for a number of reasons, to create a new doctrine of a democratic and liberal state which would respect the independence and autonomy of civil society;
- the democratic system being created involved primarily procedural democracy, without effective channels of communication and negotiation between the state and basic interest groups emerging out of civil society.

Kurczewska, Staszyńska and Bajor (1993) list a number of barriers to the emergence of civil society that are either exogenous (to do with the relationship between the state and society) or endogenous (stemming from the characteristics of society itself).

The exogenous barriers were as follows:

- Central authorities single-handedly developed a doctrine describing the new social order<sup>3</sup>, and then proceeded to define ways of putting into effect also at the regional and local level, leaving little room for civil society to contribute to the process;
- Old local government structures blocked new local economic, cultural or political initiatives;
- Legislation dealing with local government did not favour emergence of civil society
- Political conflicts among political parties at the national level were reflected at the local level, leading to politicization of many local issues, lack of cooperation even on practical matters of importance to the local community;
- Distribution of competence between national and local authorities on the one hand and self-governing local entities on the other was unclear, full of conflicts;
- Social bonds among inhabitants of housing estates and city neighbourhoods had atrophied, undermining prospects for development of communities capable of joining in common action.

The endogenous barriers included:

- Survival of the dependent mentality of the socialist welfare state, discouraging local initiative and breeding an expectation that the state had the duty to look after the citizens;
- Preference for negative rather than positive institutionalization, i.e. self-organization to fight against something rather than to strive for something. This leads to short-lived forms of common action, usually quite aggressive, lack of will to negotiate, and finally the dissipation of social energy once the cause for common action had disappeared;
- A tendency for civil society groups to coalesce around political, religious or other similar identities, leading to the emergence of autarchic groups closed to others, claiming unreserved and total support from their members and treating other similar groups as potential enemies;
- A process whereby the elites of civil society, both at the national and local levels, had been drawn into institutions of power, depriving their communities and associations of leaders;

- A tendency that is deeply rooted in Polish social life, to perceive social values and institutions in macro-social, collectivistic terms, i.e. in terms of the nation as a whole, rather than local or regional communities. Hence individuals and collectivities are predisposed either to organize spontaneously at the level of minimal strategy, around a particular issue requiring a burst of energy to deal with, or as part of a large community (society or the nation) and its goals, usually divorced from the realities of life around them.

This last tendency is the result of a long period of statelessness and foreign rule, when the Poles naturally thought first of all in terms of national liberation and were united in defence of their national and cultural identity. That promoted a particular type of approach which put a premium on thinking in terms of the whole nation. Kurczewska (1995) points out that this tendency is still very strong today. While intellectuals think in terms of civil society, most other people still adopt the national frame of reference and unity around that cause. This discourages thinking in terms of local communities, associations, interest groups, etc., i.e. thinking in "divisive" and potentially conflict-generating terms. Among other reasons for difficulties with the full emergence of civil society are the following:

Polish society in the 1990s is relatively inactive for a number of different reasons. If there is mass participation by individuals and larger groups of importance in the process of modernization it usually happens in the context of organizations and initiatives which are directly initiated and promoted by the authorities. The social activities of most people are often confined to the private sphere, at the level of the family or small group. Individuals are only infrequently active in the public sphere. When they are, this usually means participation in protests and ad hoc drives to obtain immediate impact on state authorities. It could be said that individuals do not know how to act within their own institutions oriented to the protection and amelioration of the everyday life of the citizens. Also larger groups, whose activity is more important in terms of democracy, are usually quite passive. Many [sociological] analyses concluded that civic group identities are not well developed and participation in various movements and organizations is meagre [...] The Poles lack preparation for forming and running institutions placed in social space between the individual and society and the nation as a whole (Kurczewska, 1995:86-87).

Nevertheless, it is sometimes argued that successful local government reform and empowerment of local authorities has created at the grassroots level "active citizenship needed for civil society ... [citizenship which involves] pride and the comfort of being in control of one's home" (Pędziwol, 1996:86) and that democracy is strong at two levels in Poland: in parliament and in the communities, the lowest administrative level of the country, where local government has been given considerable autonomy in political, economic and legal terms. The problem is the intermediate levels where there has been little administrative reform and where bureaucracy, rather than civil society, is in control.

After 1989, thousands of voluntary associations and other NGOs sprang up in Poland. By the end of 1994, the number of registered organizations stood at over 47 000. That, too, is a sign that civil society has a foundation on which to grow. However, Jacek Kuroń, the original ideologue of civil society among the dissidents, is probably right in his assessment that:

In Poland today, we have "desocialized" politicians, who conduct great historical disputes above the heads of society, and depoliticized social activists who fear becoming involved in those disputes and fights (Skipietrow, 1996:5).

In different language, much the same point is made by Teresa Sasińska-Klas (1996:18):

Society proved sufficiently strong to liberate itself from an authoritarian state and a political party, but not strong enough to take advantage of new possibilities offered by the process of political democratization. Post-communist Polish society still expects politicians to take initiative and introduce regulations, also as regards change in particular segments and subsystems of society. Thus, the political system still continues to play – at least so far as societal expectations are concerned – the role of the main force of modernization. Contrary to expectations, the emergence of post-communist societies does not galvanize other fields of social life to an extent conspicuous at the macro level.

## Emergence of the Public Sphere: An Incomplete Process

The question of the public sphere is made complex by the fact that, as Garnham writes, the original public sphere identified by Habermas

was destroyed historically by the very forces that had brought it into existence. The development of the capitalist economy in the direction of monopoly capitalism led to an uneven distribution of wealth, to rising entry costs to the Public Sphere and thus to unequal access to and control over that sphere ... In addition, the growth of the state's role as a co-ordinator and infrastructural provider for monopoly capitalism led to the massive development of state power ... Thus the space between civil society and the state which had been opened up by the creation of the Public Sphere was squeezed shut between these two increasingly collaborative behemoths (Garnham, 1986:41).

Accordingly, says Garnham,

the concept of the Public Sphere and the principles it embodies is an Ideal Type against which we can judge existing social arrangements and which we can attempt to embody in concrete situations in the light of the reigning historical circumstances (Garnham, 1986:43).

In the context of the post-communist period, the issue of social communication is certainly one of great importance, considering the very recent memory of censorship and information monopoly. Of the four dimensions of the public sphere mentioned by Dahlgren (1995) – media institutions; media representation; social structure; and socio-cultural interaction – we will concentrate here on the first two.

In general terms, communications and information are central to the exercise of full and effective citizenship. Murdock and Golding (1989) point out that this adds another dimension to T.H. Marshall's classic analysis of the three basic aspects of citizenship – civil, political and social – in that communication rights must be seen as an indispensable extension of social rights. They identify three main kinds of relations between communications and citizenship:

First, people must have access to the information, advice and analysis that will enable them to know what their rights are in other spheres and allow them to pursue these rights effectively. Second, they must have access to the broadest possible range of information, interpretation, and debate on areas that involve political choices, and they must be able to use communications facilities in order to register criticism, mobilize opposition, and propose alternative courses of action. And third, they must be able to recognize themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations offered within the central communications sectors and be able to contribute to developing their representations.

Murdock (1996) develops this line of argument in considering the evolution from "simple" to "complex" citizenship, as the concept of civil rights have been progressively extended and the nature and distribution of the resources required to render them substantial rather than nominal have been matters of continual argument. Full citizenship, he argues, is now seen as requiring satisfaction of full cultural rights, i.e.:

- Rights to Information;
- Rights to Experience: rights of access to the greatest possible diversity of representations of personal and social experience in fictional media genres (especially television ones), aiding efforts to answer fundamental questions which invariably spring up in people's lives;
- Rights to Knowledge: rights to explanations of patterns, processes and forces shaping the present and of its links with the past, helping translate information and experience into knowledge and develop personal and social strategies;
- Rights to Participation.

For these and other rights to be safeguarded, and for full citizenship to be made possible, public communicative activity must, argues Murdock, meet the following conditions:

- It must provide a relatively open arena of representation, including barriers against cooperation by the two major centres of discursive power – state and government and the corporate world;
- It must demolish the accepted divisions and develop forms of representation and participation and scheduling that promote encounters and debates between the widest possible range of identities and positions;
- It must balance the promotion of diversity of information and experience against citizens' rights of access to frameworks of knowledge and to the principles that allow them to be evaluated and challenged;

- It must ensure that the full range of its services remains equally available to all.

Observance of these "cultural rights" and implementation of the goals of public communicative activity could be seen as criteria for evaluating the contribution of the media to the operation of the public sphere and development of civil society.

Originally, Polish dissidents advocated the ideal of participatory communication as a way of dealing with these issues. The solutions they sought were largely in line with John Keane's views on the role of the media in civil society:

There is need of ... a new constitutional settlement which ensures that political power is held permanently accountable to its citizens... It is also the reason why the undermining of both state power and market power from below requires the development of a dense network or "heterarchy" of communication media which are controlled neither by the State nor by commercial markets. Publicly funded, non-profit and legally guaranteed institutions of civil society, some of them run voluntarily and held directly accountable to their audiences through democratic procedures, are an essential ingredient of a revised public service model (Keane, 1993:10; see also Keane, 1991).

Keane sees a need for a plurality of non-state (and indeed non-market) media of communication which serve as the primary means of communication for citizens situated within a pluralistic civil society and safeguard both freedom and equality of communication. This necessitates the regulation and maximum feasible reduction of private corporate power over the means of communication, the maximum feasible decommodification and "re-embedding" of communication media in the social life of civil society is a vital condition of freedom from state and market censorship.

Keane proposes a system of widespread public interventionism in the media market-place which should always attempt to "level-up" rather than "level-down" citizens' non-market powers of communication. It should, in his view, seek the creation of a genuine variety of media which enable little people in big societies to send and receive a variety of opinions in a variety of ways. It should aim to break down monopolies, lift restrictions upon particular audience choices and to popularize the view that the media of communication are a public good, not a privately appropriable commodity whose primary function is to produce and circulate corporate speech for profit. It presupposes the establishment of media enterprise boards to fund alternative ownership of divested media, and to support and subsidize public access to the media, and media access to the market, by use of public funds.

If the right to participation is at the core of civil society, then in the media field it must be understood as the right to communicate – and this is precisely what Keane insists on as a fundamental tenet of the new system of media serving civil society.

Dahlgren (1995) calls this approach romantic radicalism, or a Utopian concept of direct participatory democracy in communication. Rather, he says, we should have a blend of direct and representational mechanisms. Also in Poland (as well as in other Central and Eastern European countries; see

Jakubowicz, 1994), the original approach of the dissidents was rejected after 1989.

After the collapse of the Communist system, there was a first press boom, as political parties obtained existing newspapers (as part of a policy of rearranging the press scene so that major new parties should be allotted or allowed to buy some newspapers in order to develop a pluralistic press system) or founded new ones in order to gain publicity, popularity and voters. Also many organizations of civil society, long denied access to social communication, seized on new publishing opportunities. Soon, however, most of the new politically or socially oriented newspapers went out of business for lack of sufficient interest on the part of the readers.

The second press boom which followed about a year later, sprang from the introduction of many new titles by commercially-oriented publishers, seeking to exploit different market niches. This had little to do with creating or enriching the public sphere.

As a result, it was remarked in 1994 that

the media do not reflect or articulate the needs, interests and opinions of huge segments of society. The dailies in most cases speak for and are addressed to the intelligentsia. There is really no national newspaper or periodical that the largest social group, i.e. the workers, could call their own. Even left-wing newspapers are those of the left-wing intelligentsia. Also small businessmen, regarded as the core of the 'new Polish middle class', have no press of their own ... It is debatable whether the farmers have newspapers that really speak for them (Jerschina, 1994:13).

Rather than represent segments of society, newspapers represent political orientations. Even though many party newspapers properly so called went out of the business, the Polish press system has still been described as a "pluralistic system of party-oriented newspapers", with particular newspapers committed to promoting a set of political interests or views. That helps air divergent opinions and views, but usually of party elites, rather than their rank-and-file members or social constituency.

What further reduces the representativity of media content is the fact that many journalists regard freedom of speech as freedom to express their own views or biases, or continue to define themselves as "guardians" or "leaders" of society, called upon (by virtue of their superior access to information and understanding of the situation) to be in the forefront of political developments. The journalists's inability to separate their political views from their profession is a heritage of the past both in the "old guard" of journalists once employed by official media and in the "new guard". The view of journalism as politics conducted by other means dies hard.

In consequence,

Journalists – the great majority of whom were committed politically – have been far from objective. The "civic attitude" inherited from the past [when under the Communist system that one had to take sides in the struggle between communism and democracy – K.J.] led editors and journalists to do their utmost to promote the cause of their own political camp and its ver-

sion of reality, than to inform objectively and provide a cold and dispassionate (such an attitude was wholly out of the question) analysis of the situation. As a result, the Polish press market has become dominated by politically affiliated journalism masquerading as objective. That was particularly obvious during election campaigns (Zakowski, 1996:205).

According to some observers, what reduces the ability of the media to ensure adequate representation of society in media content is the process of their privatization and commercialization, leading to the replacement of old party censorship by "media capital censorship" (Becker, 1995:307), with the result that what prevails in such media is "corporate speech" (Keane, 1991).

All this should not detract from the fact that the media system in Poland today (for a general overview see Kopper, Rutkiewicz, Schliep, 1996) does constitute an element of the public sphere, in however imperfect a manner. While failing to provide conditions for the exercise of some of the cultural rights listed by Murdock, most notably the rights to experience (neither film nor television have been able to find a way to provide an account of the recent past or an adequate fictional representation of contemporary reality) and participation, they do satisfy the right to information and, to some extent, knowledge, and do serve as a forum for public debate. Especially the development of the local press has meant a major change in the way the media serve society.

## Velvet Restoration, or the Morning After?

This discussion of the slow emergence of civil society and public sphere in post-1989 Poland would be incomplete without some mention of the fact that the general election of 1993 returned to power a coalition of the Democratic Left Alliance (a grouping of nearly 30 parties and movements, led by the Socialdemocratic Party of the Polish Republic, born after the dissolution of the old Communist Party) and the Polish Agrarian Party, a successor to the United Peasant Party, once a client of the Communist Party and a part of the system of government in Communist times. This was followed in 1995 by an even more stunning event: a narrow victory in the presidential election by Mr. Aleksander Kwaśniewski, leader of the Socialdemocratic Party of the Polish Republic and once a Communist official, over Mr. Lech Wałęsa, the legendary Solidarity leader and the country's first popularly elected President.

Interpretations of these developments – seen by some as a breakdown of Polish democracy and the first step to the reinstatement of some form of authoritarian rule (see Gati's comment at the beginning of this paper) – differ considerably.

Adam Michnik, a leading ideologue of the Solidarity movement and commentator of events after 1989, ascribes the Velvet Restoration to, among other things, the weaknesses and failures of post-Solidarity parties ("it is not so much that the post-Communist parties won, as that the post-Solidarity parties lost" – Michnik, 1994:4) and to a "fear of change" among the general population. Marcin Król (1995) lists what he calls the three really important causes<sup>4</sup> for the victory of post-communist parties in the 1993 election:

1. The post-1989 Solidarity governments proved unable to create an ethos of transformation which would at least to some extent keep alive and adapt to new conditions the old ethos of Solidarity.
2. In their fascination with liberal economic theory the new leaders forgot that the working class employed in big industrial complexes had been an important partner in overthrowing communism and perceived it as the main problem to be overcome in promoting restructuring of the economy.
3. There was no democratic justification and explanation for unavoidable political decisions: transformation was a top-down operation, with little involvement on the part of the general population or efforts to win its support.

Jerzy J. Wiatr (1995), a Marxist sociologist, one of the leaders of the Socialist Left Alliance claims that the term "restoration" should properly be applied not to the return of former Communists (among others) to power, but to the "Solidarity" victory of 1989 which he sees as the restoration of capitalism after the hiatus of the Communist period.

This "restoration", he says, was bound to be short-lived for the following reasons:

1. At the symbolic level, it aimed at total rejection of the last 50 years and their obliteration from Polish history and people's memories. The extreme nature of this undertaking, which involved the expectation that individuals would deny their own past and regard their own lives under the Communist system as worthless provoked opposition and resistance.
2. At the political level, a strategy of ostracizing left-wing political forces and denying them legitimacy and the moral right to participate in democratic mechanisms, misfired and proved unrealistic when those forces proved to enjoy popular support and led right-wing forces to propose extreme policies (decommunization) and anti-democratic ways of maintaining power.
3. At the socio-economic level, the monetarist shock therapy, oriented towards the reinstatement of the free market without consideration for the social costs and inequalities which result from it, met with the most vehement rejection of the population.

Wiatr recalls the Hegelian triad and says that after the "thesis" of the Communist state and the "antithesis" of Solidarity governments with their neoliberal economic and social policies, the time has come for the "synthesis" – a balanced political system.

Some see the victory of left-wing parties as a major setback in the process of building democracy and civil society. There is, however, also another potential way of looking at it. Another aspect of consolidation of democracy apart from those mentioned so far is the process of elite settlement and elite convergence. Elite settlement involves the attenuation of conflicts, acceptance of the rules of the political game, weakening of the desire to challenge and subvert the system. Elite convergence happens when an opposition elite assumes power accor-

ding to the procedures laid down by that which governed previously, and then honours, in the process of running the country, existing political institutions and norms. This is what has happened in Poland. While the new elites do seek to bend the rules of democratic governance a little, their victory also serves to mobilize their fragmented opponents into creating more viable political alliances and a more effective political force with a view to doing better in the next general election in 1997.

As we have said, both civil society and the public sphere develop in opposition to, and apart from, the state. After 1989,

the fact that the state was personified by former dissident leaders and the Solidarity-led government was generally recognized as "our government" served to deprive forces involved in the creation of civil society and the public sphere of a focus. Now that focus is back, with parts of the public sphere and many of the elements of civil society united in their opposition to the governing coalition, with some of the old energy of resistance is running through them. From this point of view, the "Velvet Restoration" (or "anti-Restoration") may yet have a salutary effect on their development in Poland.

## Notes

1. The present paper is a revised version of a lecture under the same title presented during the Nordic-Baltic Course on Contemporary Theory and Methods of Communication Research, July 29-August 8, 1996, Pühajärve, Estonia.
2. As Bronisław Geremek (1994) puts it, the mindset of the dissidents involved a sense of the hopelessness of their endeavour. Writing in 1976, Michnik made that very clear: "The 19th-century dilemma of left-wing movements: 'reform or revolution?' is not the dilemma of the Polish opposition. The idea of a revolutionary overthrow of party dictatorship and deliberate organization of action to this end is both unrealistic and dangerous. It is unrealistic to hope to overthrow the regime in Poland if the political structure in the USSR remains unchanged. It is dangerous to seek to engage in underground activities. ...Resolute and uncompromising efforts to promote reform, an evolutionary extension of civil liberties and human rights are in my opinion the only option open to Eastern European dissidents ... this assumes slow, gradual, partial change" (Michnik 1984:83)
3. Michał Kulesza, a promoter of decentralization of the state and local government reform in Poland after 1989, has pointed out that Solidarity governments "proceeded from the assumption that the situation was so dramatic that transformation [...] should be carried out on a top-down basis, with a strong hand. And that only after that was achieved would there be progress in establishing local democracy" (Pedziwol, 1996:87)
4. He discounts some of the stock explanations for it. In his opinion they are as follows: "Society was sick and tired of difficulties caused by the process of economic transformations"; "Squabbling within the democratic camp undermined its legitimacy"; "The twists and turns of the Church's policies were harmful to the post-Solidarity governments"; "The policies of post-Solidarity governments were addressed to too narrow segments of society"; "The authorities were arrogant and disregarded public opinion".

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