Trust in mature and post-communist democracies

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abstract   This article aims to analyse and theorize the peculiarities of trust in mature and post-communist democracies. First, the article conceptualizes the notion of trust as interpreted by the culturalist and rationalist approaches, and systemizes it into a more coherent theoretical framework. Second, social and political trust are discussed and the relationship between these is analysed. Third, the dialectics of political trust and liberalism is tackled. Finally, trust in the communist regime and aftermath is examined. The main argument is that, at the societal level, social trust in post-communist societies is limited to particularized trust; it is more family-centred as compared to the wider radius of generalized trust in mature democracies. Meanwhile political trust in post-communist societies is less self-reflexive, since, unlike in the older democratic societies, it has evolved in counterpose to fear, rather than to risk.

keywords   fear ◆ generalized trust ◆ institutionalized distrust ◆ institutionalized trust ◆ particularized trust ◆ political trust ◆ post-communism ◆ risk

Introduction

As a concept in political sociology, trust finds its primary expression in the social capital literature. On the other hand, contemporary political research more often refers to the category of trust in the wider context of democratic convergence at the European Union level, in particular, analysing transformation, consolidation and the quality of democracy in post-communist societies. In fact, the focus on the notion of trust marks the turning point from institutional-level explanations to individual-level analysis. This is very important and innovative, keeping in mind that 20 years after the fall of communism it is increasingly difficult to add to the theoretical debate about this region. Carothers (2002) points out that most post-communist research is elite- and institutions-based and lacks insight into sociocultural dimensions that are the preconditions to democratization in the region. Taking this into consideration, the present article aims at analysing specifically the bottom-up dimension of democracy, that is, political and social trust, applying their different conceptualizations as well as the comparative approach of trust in mature and post-communist democracies.

Let me briefly note that in this article I consider only EU countries that are acknowledged as established democracies. Special focus will be placed on the transformation of trust during the communist regime and the post-communist phase, theoretically asserting the shifts within social as well as political trust.

The early stage of the post-communist transformation (until the countries were invited to negotiate on EU membership in 1997–8) was the most chaotic, turbulent and institutionally unstable. I argue that the destructive influence on trust during post-communism and the early transformation period is unchanging and long-lasting. The argument is based on contemporary studies that show that former communist countries tend to be characterized by low levels of generalized and political trust (Bădescu and Uslaner, 2003; Howard, 2003; Kornai et al., 2004; Mierina, 2011; Mishler and Rose, 2001; Sztompka, 1999; Žiliukaitė et al., 2006). The World Values Survey data (2005–7), for instance, indicate that in the recent period in most post-communist societies between 18 and 24% of respondents agreed that most people could be trusted. These levels are depressingly low, if we compare them with some of the Western countries (for instance, in the Netherlands generalized trust is at

the level of 56%). More importantly, as Mierina (2011: 138) observes in her doctoral research, the levels of generalized trust are unchanging and do not reflect the rapid political transformation. Even more shocking is the fact that in some countries, like Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, the level of generalized trust has even been decreasing over time, compared with the immediate aftermath of communism. The studies also prove that these low levels of social trust are matched by political distrust, alienation, inefficacy, scepticism and passivity.

For theoretical reasons, I approach the post-communist region as a complex political category, viewing post-communism as a certain stage in the transformation to democracy (Valantiejus, 2012). On the one hand, it can be treated as a methodologically synthesized category which deals with a set of problems common to the new democracies. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that post-communist countries are diverse with regard to the quality of democracy and institutional development. In their analyses of post-communist transformation, scholars argue that former communist countries such as Estonia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic show attributes of established democracies and are ahead of other countries in terms of institutional performance, efficiently functioning capitalism and democratic culture (Norkus, 2008). However, the more problematic cultural peculiarities, including the sense of trust discussed in this article, are still apparent in all post-communist societies.

Below, I first conceptualize trust as a sociological category in political science, distinguishing the main elements of and approaches to trust. Second, I define the different forms of trust, in particular, social and political trust, its origin and relationship with democracy and causality. Third, I briefly discuss the dialectics of trust and liberal democracy, examining the nature of trust in mature, or older, democracies. Finally, I focus on trust in regard to the communist legacy and regime transformation in post-communist societies. My argument is that the traditions of liberal democracy and politically institutionalized mechanisms of *distrust* (which is the controversial basis of the liberal system) stimulate a generalized (and moralistic) type of trust which sustains a goodwill approach and cooperation at the societal level. Meanwhile, the communist legacy and post-communist transformation have endowed society with a particularized trust, which is both prerequisite and a consequence of inefficacy, corruption and inequality, thus limiting and perverting democracy in post-communist societies.

Conceptualization of trust

The notion of trust

Since trust is a very abstract and rather ambiguous notion, several theoretical frameworks and approaches to conceptualizing trust have been developed. Among the many typologies used, we can identify a key distinction regarding the notion of trust: trust as an inborn or inherited (cultural) trait deriving from a very early socialization phase *versus* trust as a rational response that is learned with a set of normative rules.

According to the first approach, trust as a disposition would seem to hinge on emotions, self-perceptions, as well as ideals and values pursued in social relations (Wolfe, 1976); and it is as much an interpretation of oneself as of the other (Frederiksen, 2011: 8). This approach sees trust as an inevitable and natural feature of every human, which derives from interactions with and interdependence among other humans in society. We create ourselves as human beings through communication and interaction, and trust is a vital prerequisite of being *social* (Markova, 2004: 3–4). In accordance with this approach, we cannot merely exist and survive in a society without a minimum level of trust. As the famous German sociologist Georg Simmel states, trust is an essential feeling for society to function (in Wolff, 1950). Trust facilitates behaviour and actions, as it organizes our choices according to certain habits and cultural norms we are used to and do not need to reflect upon all the time. In other words, trust helps us to leap from ignorance to certain knowledge (Luhmann, 1979; Möllering, 2001).

The second approach would suggest that trust is more of a *rational choice* and it is highly motivated by the rationality of maximizing utility (Coleman, 1990; Misztal, 1996). Placing trust is making a *bet* about the future, uncertain actions of others that are always associated with *risk* (Kollock, 1994: 317). If we define trust as a bet, we believe that placing trust in someone means expecting particular results from him/her though we cannot really control or predict his/her actions (Sztompka, 1999: 31). In this sense, the risk would be realized if the persons we trust behaved contrary to our expectations. Thus trust becomes a cognitive response, because the individual thinks about the risk in the situation (Kee and Knox, 1970). In contrast, trust as an inborn trait of personality refers to the inclination towards general trust in people, despite the risk it may bring (Hardin, 2006: 17).

Following the rational choice approach, we are inclined to take risks and place trust only if the person we are dealing with is perceived as *trustworthy*. Kollock (1994: 318–19) maintains that

to be trustworthy means to become committed to particular exchange partners, and this commitment can be treated as a response to the possible risk of trust. Thus placing trust as making a bet is grounded in the anticipation of mutual utility. It implies a certain level of predictability of social actions: when we trust someone, we organize our actions according to the most probable utility-based behaviour of other actors. This idea is reminiscent of the Pareto-optimum situation of the Prisoner's Dilemma in game theory: the actor is led to trust the other actor presuming that in the future, the latter will be interested in further cooperation (reciprocity). Therefore the mechanism of trust enables confidence in mutual utility in situations where mutual utility cannot be immediately or simultaneously realized. Putnam (1993) describes this situation as a 'short-term altruism' based on 'long-term self-interest'. One may argue that in this sense, trust itself is not something very rational, even if we can define it in rational terms, but it is essential for rational decision-making to function.

Despite the different approaches towards trust, it is impossible to clearly distinguish the nature of trust, defining trust as a rational or an inborn, moral trait, when we take into account any social interaction. These dimensions are usually underpinned within trust. On the one hand, trust may include a rational and moral basis at one and the same time, while the 'weight' of these dimensions may vary depending on different situations: in some situations, it is rationality that becomes a determinant of trust, and in other situations it is morality. At the same time, different people may emphasize different natures of trust as well.

Forms of trust: social (generalized) trust and political/institutional trust

Theoretically, trust can be separated into several forms referring to different foundations and functions of trust. Conceptually, we can talk of *social trust* as trust in people or interpersonal relations, and *institutional trust* as trust in state institutions (institutions and rules as well as politicians, political regimes and political and economic systems). In academic writing, social trust and institutional trust are sometimes conflated within the more abstract notion of *political trust* (Heywood and Wood, 2011: 148).

In this article, I refer to 'political trust' as institutional trust in the more concrete sense of particular institutional arrangements and particular politicians that represent those institutions. 'Social trust', on the other hand, is trust in other citizens as fellows members of the community one belongs to.

When talking about social trust, most scholars emphasize the specific dimension of generalized trust. Usually generalized trust is measured by the question that first appeared in a study in postwar Germany in 1948: 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?' Indeed, the aim of this question is to measure the level of trust between strangers and not particularly within specific groups (Delhey and Newton, 2005: 311).

Generalized trust is a very relevant category in modern, individualized communities as well as in democratic political systems, because it allows other members of the pluralist community to be seen as fellow citizens rather than enemies. Uslaner (2001) argues that generalized trust indeed is more moralistic and less conceived as a rational response. It is faith in people we don't actually know and it does not always depend upon our life experiences. It is also not necessarily related to the expected reciprocity. Coleman (1990) also supports this idea by saying that in modern societies generalized trust cannot be entirely a rational account of human behaviour, because in diverse communities there are no common norms concerning trust. Thus trust becomes less rational and more emotional, perceptive or moral, appealing to the regular honest behaviour of the trustee. It is a belief in the goodwill of the others (Seligman, 1997). Contrary to generalized trust, we can talk about particularized, or intra-group trust, which is mainly reciprocal, more egoist, strategic, emerges in particular groups and usually does not extend beyond the boundaries of the group.

Why is generalized trust important for democracies? It has been argued (Mishler and Rose, 2005; Newton, 1999; Putnam, 1993; Rose et al., 1998; Sztompka, 1999; Uslaner, 2003, 2008) that in democracy, generalized trust encourages the tolerance for pluralism and a variety of lifestyles which is necessary for the implementation of fundamental human rights and freedoms in democratic regimes. Moreover, generalized trust allows for peaceful conflict resolution, compromise and consensus, because when people trust each other, they are committed to the same democratic values and principles (Misztal, 1996; Žiliukaitė, 2005: 87). Where generalized trust persists it is more likely that citizens will obey laws and rules and not abuse the rights of other people. Finally, it is also more likely that a society with higher levels of trust will reject any undemocratic alternatives (Rose et al., 1998). In fact, this insight is very important when talking about the consolidation of democracy. Mishler and Rose (2005: 1053) suggest that from a cultural perspective, distrust in society and

democratic institutions not only undermines their legitimacy, but 'also threatens to increase support for undemocratic regimes'.

It is widely theorized that generalized trust is a fundamental prerequisite of civic engagement and collective action. We live in a differentiated society, but despite our differences, we are obliged to share the same democratic values that inspire us to keep a watch on political institutions. To ensure civic engagement and a common purpose of maintaining democracy, we need at least a minimum level of trust in each other. Comparing various societies, Fukuyama suggests that societies differ in regard to generalized trust. He explains this by using the metaphor of a trust 'radius'. According to Fukuyama (1995), generalized trust means a spill-over of trust from a concentrated trust radius within family circles to the more abstract level of society and people we are not familiar with. He acknowledges that in some cultures, the radius of trust is much wider than in others.

When we talk about trust as a moral value, we cannot avoid discussion about the relationship between social (generalized type of it) and political trust. Many authors believe that social trust and political trust are mutually reinforcing (Burt, 2001; Putnam, 1993; Sztompka, 1999). Some authors (Sztompka, 1999; Warren, 1999) even think that political trust indeed provides an impulse for social trust to emerge. It is argued that trust in a certain system as a set of values empowers us to trust citizens of this system as we all belong to the same setting of normative rules and general morality. Newton (1999: 169–70) assumes that trust in political institutions, as the background to good governance, may create a capacity for trust (with some institutional precautions included) and positively contributes to generalized trust. Farrell and Knight (2003) suggest that institutions create rules and sanctions for people to behave in a trustworthy manner, thereby fostering trust. Similarly, Levi (1996: 51) argues, 'governments provide more than the backdrop for facilitating trust among citizens; governments also influence civic behaviour to the extent they elicit trust or distrust towards themselves'. We can also talk about the positive effect of social trust on political trust. As Putnam (2000) observes, if people are willing to trust strangers, they will also trust politicians and political institutions.

The strong link between social and political trust gleans some criticism as well. For instance, institutional theories argue that social trust has nothing to do with political trust and the latter depends on citizens' evaluations of the political and economic performance of the regime (Mishler and Rose, 2005). On the other hand, the conceptual separation of social and political trust is based on the results of short-term considerations and thus lacks more convincing arguments.

The proponents of the first approach say that the link between social and political trust is a long-term result and outcome of liberalization of the political system. Because of the different political processes, trust in mature and in post-communist countries has developed along different trajectories. Paradoxically, the institutionalized distrust in liberal societies set up the potential for generalized trust, and, vice versa, institutionalized trust in communist societies instilled narrow and particularized (in-group) trust. These processes are explained in the sections below.

The dialectics of trust and liberal democracy

In liberal political thinking, trust is a fairly controversial notion (Hardin, 2006; Rosanvallon, 2008; Warren, 1999). Although sociological theories approach trust and democracy as mutually supportive, according to liberal philosophy, the roots of the liberal system lie, in fact, in *distrust*. French philosopher Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) maintains that distrust is a natural and legitimate component of democracy, and it functions as a protective mechanism, obliging society to control the democratic processes alongside the formal rules.

Historically, the institutionalization of distrust in the political system is tightly related to economic liberalism and, of course, the ideas of Adam Smith. The US Constitution (1787) has institutionalized distrust primarily in the realm of economics: it inscribes protective mechanisms on behalf of economic liberties against the intervention of the state in economic relations. These mechanisms have been transferred to the more abstract sphere of politics, first of all, by means of the concept of the 'division of powers', which means that institutions competing with each other for power will restrain each other's possibilities for systemic usurpation. Moreover, distrust is also institutionalized through additional 'safeguards': a multi-party system, election rules, the right to competition, monitoring and regulation of the time span and periodicity of terms of office (Benn and Peters, 1959: 281). In other words, democracy is enshrined here as *enlightened suspicion* that replaces *blind trust* (Harrison and Innes, 2003: 180).

However, the constitutional rules and formal safeguard mechanisms alone are not sufficient to avoid the abuse of power by institutions. Permanent distrust in the political system expressed by critical citizens in society becomes one of the fundamental dimensions for democracy to truly work. This

ensures precaution, and results in the legitimacy of the institutional system. Hardin (2006: 152) acknowledges that distrust is among the principal preconditions for modern democracy: the power inequality between state institutions and society is too immoderate, yet we have no alternatives to these institutions; consequently, we are dependent on them. Institutionalized distrust creates the background for implicating many 'agencies of accountability' in the system that may enforce trustworthiness. These agencies (courts, police, controllers, examination boards, etc.) put pressure on persons, institutions or systems that are our targets of trust (Sztompka, 1999: 47). Their main function is to keep the regime accountable. But enforcement agencies must be trustworthy themselves. If citizens do not trust these agencies, they will not trust their officials to fulfil their duties (Dasgupta, 1988: 50).

It should be noted that, in legal terms, institutionalized political distrust is not the same as perceived political distrust in concrete political institutions. To avoid confusion, it is expedient to differentiate between *formal* and *substantial* political distrust. Formal political (dis)trust would be expressed in relation to concrete political institutions. Meanwhile substantial political distrust refers to the permanent distrust in institutional politics/the system as such, keeping in mind that those institutions dispose of a larger share of power than society at large. Hence, in this liberal thinking, political participation – voting, writing petitions, demonstrations, boycotts – is the expression of substantial political distrust. We participate in elections in order to control the powers of institutions and express our substantial distrust of them. The more social trust persists in the society, the greater the need for the society to participate in the control of institutionalized power, in other words, to expose substantial institutionalized political distrust.

Exposing substantial institutionalized distrust does not mean that we need to feel formal institutional distrust at the same time: on the contrary, generalized trust, which is one of the prerequisites of substantial institutionalized distrust, together may strenghen formal trust in political institutions/politicians, while it also functions as a safeguard, a precaution against the possible usurpation of power by institutions.

In what way is institutionalized distrust related to generalized trust? Warren (2001) thinks that the liberal tradition and permanent accountability of government are one of the main prerequisites of generalized trust. The different ways of expressing vigilance towards political institutions and systems endow people's actions with self-confidence, a sense of responsibility and common optimism. Efficiency

in controlling institutions and maintaining safeguards motivates us to behave honestly, as we would expect honesty from others. Talking about reciprocal honesty, Uslaner (2001: 6) refers to the Golden Rule, that 'you do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. This rule becomes a foundation for moralistic or generalized trust.

Trust and post-communism

The dialectic of trust becomes even more controversial when speaking about post-communist societies. In post-communist countries, liberal democracy is not the naturally evolved form of the political system; therefore, paraphrasing Rosanvallon, institutionalized distrust is not an aspect of the political consciousness of the citizenry of these societies. On the contrary, post-communist societies are used to an enforced institutionalized trust – as a projection of the relationship between the communist government and the society. It does not inspire activism on the part of society, or efforts to control the powers of the political system. Consequently, imposed (and forced) institutionalized trust did not create the conditions for generalized trust to emerge. Instead, post-communist societies are comprised of fragmented circles of particularized trust.

In order to conceptualize the transformation of trust in a wider political and cultural context, it is expedient to deconstruct the category of trust taking into account the pre-communist past, communist legacies and the transformation phase.

The pre-communist phase
Historically, all post-communist nations were under the rule of despotic governments, which created political distrust in alien rule and social distrust between individuals due to a hierarchical model of society where powerful elites exploited the uneducated peasants and slaves (North, 1981).

Although after the First World War, the newly established nation-states began to develop their (pseudo)democratic systems (with reservations – general and equal elections, electoral competition and peaceful change of governing parties), this process did not reach the consolidation phase and did not become the 'only game in town'. Societies remained mostly traditional; most people continued to live in rural areas, on semi-subsistence farms (in agricultural economies). As Kochanowicz (2004) points out, in such traditional agrarian societies, the number of social contacts was limited; trust was limited to the circle of people with whom one was familiar, while foreigners and strangers were distrusted. Moreover, since farmers lived in

semi-subsistence economies, trust in market institutions was of limited importance as well. Finally, common people did not perceive political trust, or trust in the government, as a relevant issue, since the pre-modern government was a great distance away from individuals. The state mostly relied on coercion, but not on confidence (Kochanowicz, 2004: 69–70). To make a comparison, in Western societies, partial trust was gradually transformed into more generalized trust along with the process of modernization (technological and scientific progress, urbanization and globalization of market systems). But, as will be explained below, this kind of modernization has never really taken hold in post-communist societies.

Communist rule

The establishment of communist regimes in some countries in 1940 and then again after the Second World War was associated with modernization, both politically and economically, but only limited modernization was actually achieved. Kochanowicz (2004) argues that communist societies retained strong elements of the traditional social organization and cultural legacies of the rural society. Roughly speaking, communist modernization just transferred peasant traditions to the cities. Even a large part of urban workers were still commuting from villages, hence the traditional family structure prevailed. Moreover, the pre-war urban culture (leaning towards individualist-based modernization) was also destroyed by the regime (Kochanowicz, 2004: 74). The peasant cultural influence in cities meant that generalized trust did not evolve as it was supposed to evolve in industrial individualist societies where, due to many social contacts, partial morality (particularized trust) would be replaced with more generalized morality (generalized trust). In this peasant culture, the real trust-based contacts remained limited while other social contacts with less familiar people and strangers implied more distrust, as was the case in traditional societies. This restriction of trust created the backdrop to the formation of so-called familialism: trust in the communist society was not generalized, but atomized within small family circles and did not pass beyond these circles. Some authors note that the traditional organization of the family was tightly related to very egoistic attitudes towards what lay beyond the family circle; this behaviour, lacking the perception of the common good, is described as 'amoral familialism' (Tarkowska and Tarkowski, 1991). As Kochanowicz puts it,

> The economics of shortage and the lack of a notion of the common good during Communism legit-

imised a particular understanding of honesty which enabled shirking, cheating, and petty stealing from the workplace as long as it led to supplying the family with things necessarily for survival and functioning in society. (Kochanowicz, 2004: 75)

Amoral familialism erased any trust at a wider societal level and prevented the emergence of civil society, with a strong sense of generalized morality (which includes generalized trust), a perception of social responsibility and the common good.

In terms of political trust, the communist regime presented itself as totally trustworthy, so it was considered an act of disloyalty or even a crime to overtly doubt the trustworthiness of the political system, the Communist Party and state institutions (Markova, 2004: 8). The Communist Party required trust from citizens, placing it in opposition to fear: if the individual did not trust the system, he/she became an enemy of the regime. Methodologically, the institutional system was also organized on the basis of a prescribed 'trust': no checks and balances, no political competition, no fair and free elections, no institutional 'safeguards'. On the other hand, this prescribed political trust (without the institutional safeguards) concurrently generated very high expectations in the state. Substantially, there was low real trust in the one-party communist system among citizens, but there was a high level of expectations in regard to what the state should offer or provide (Kochanowicz, 2004: 72).

Despite the formal requirement of political trust, the communist state emphasized that citizens be suspicious in terms of social trust. An atmosphere of fear of politically disloyal citizens was created. The state aimed at maintaining permanent distrust in social relations and at shattering wider networks of trust within society, since these networks might initiate opposition to the communist regime. There was no real trust in vertical relations (trust in employees, higher party members, professors at universities, etc.), but at the same time, there was dependence on them based on fear. Obviously, communist social engineering was psychologically grounded. The regime understood that the success of historical colonial uprisings and revolutions had been due to the mobilization not only of the masses (at the horizontal level), but also the middle classes and elites (at the vertical level). Therefore, the communist state did everything it could to destroy real trust at the vertical level, thereby preventing social vertical partnerships which might function as an opposition to the formal regime. Based on fear and dependence, these vertical social ties instead functioned as the backbone of the regime and guaranteed its stability (Sztompka, 1999: 152–3).

To sum up, the communist regime generated very

peculiar specifics in regard to trust. Communism contributed to a more pragmatic, calculated substance of *particularized* trust, but not a real, goodwill based *generalized* trust. Following Fukuyama, the trust radius was limited only to the family circle and did not spill over to generalized trust. We might say that at the societal level trust was pragmatic and selfish, in the sense that it was related to expectations for the self; this trust also involved a higher perception of risk of social action, as it was connected with fear and low trustworthiness of unfamiliar people. In contrast, in democratic systems, generalized trust originates in the spill-over of real trust from family circles and is consequently related more to the perceived notion and benefits of the common good, which is at the core of social capital. During the communist regime, political trust was (officially) declared as a necessity of political and social life; it was imposed from above and placed in opposition to fear. Ultimately, in the political realm, trust did not translate into a notion or feeling of any sort. There was no conscious trustworthiness of the subject; therefore, the capacity to build trust in political institutions could not evolve among the citizens.

The transformation phase

Despite the short period of so-called partial solidarity immediately preceding and following the proclamation of political independence and free elections in post-communist societies, the antinomy of trust and fear remained and was even exacerbated due to the traumatic processes during the early transformation. The expectations of citizens were not rewarded by quick results and desired political outcomes; the brief successes of private business were often overturned by economic set-backs, corruption and bribery, since ghost of the old regime still remained omnipresent during the transformation process. Although political and economic reforms took place rapidly, cultural patterns, identities, values and attitudes did not undergo any sudden change and remained reserved, based on suspicion and passivity.

In the early period of transformation, trust among society members became much riskier, in fact, because of the unstable institutional, economic and social conditions. Economically speaking, the projection of trust anticipated much too high a cost not only because of specific cultural legacies but also due to a lack of legal mechanisms that could compensate for associated risks. In the first decades of the transition, the system was heavily corrupt; consequently, legal enforcement of laws and justice was weak. Courts were not functioning properly, political institutions seemed to be nominal and subordinated to certain clans and cliques.

Communist political capital and politics-based social relations were actually transformed into economic capital during the early years of transition; this was made possible by the unfair mechanisms of privatization, which benefited the old *nomenklatura* (Howard, 2003). As a result, some of the old Communist Party members became businessmen or managers of state-owned companies, some of them remained in politics, and these relationships based on the communist legacy created the background for the establishment of influential oligarchic clans in most of the post-communist societies. Alongside the decadent reputation of political, economic and social structures, these new informal political and economic clans also decreased the reputation of the political system and promoted distrust (Kochanowicz, 2004: 79).

Similarly, Sztompka (2004) emphasizes the long-lasting trauma of the social and cultural changes: the previous despotic government and the rapid political, economic and social reforms undermined trust both as a common action and as an organizational ability. These basic aspects of trust transformation have conditioned, according to Sztompka (1997), the formation of a specific culture in the post-communist region – a *culture of suspicion*, or *culture of cynicism*, as he calls it (he actually borrows this term from Stivers, 1994). Like the culture of trust, the culture of suspicion is also a product of institutional and national narratives, and it affects relationships at the political, economic and social levels. At the political level, the culture of suspicion results in distrust in formal institutions and lack of motivation to engage with the political system by any means of political participation. It also means a growing gap between political elites and citizens, the state and the society, as the latter have no motivation or feel powerless to control the actions of the former. At the economic level the culture of suspicion materializes in corruption, bribery and the shadow economy, since people, if they want to achieve their goals, do not trust legal institutions and do not trust other individuals to do their duties without any 'favour' (bribe). At the societal level, suspicion only strengthens particularized trust, or limited trust in one's family or group.

As mentioned before, the mainstream of cultural theories emphasizes the modern substance of trust, creating an antinomy between trust and risk. Risk, in fact, is a self-reflexive notion, since one decides on the trustworthiness of another subject: whether it is expedient to take risks and what gains or losses trust might produce (Coleman, 1990). In the communist regime and later on in post-communist societies, this antinomy between trust and risk makes little sense.

The communist regime and the so-called trustworthiness of the communist regime were grounded in the mechanisms of coercion, terror and fear. The unstable post-communist institutional arrangements also deeply contributed to fear. The unpredictability of the situation did not allow for any reasonably based evaluation of trustworthiness, which is why it precluded any 'making of bets'. Therefore, while trust in democracy is opposite to *risk* as a self-reflexive notion (which also includes responsibility for one's decisions), under post-communist conditions, trust comes in opposition to *fear*, which we cannot control. In this sense, trust is no longer a rational response. Trust becomes not a free choice, but more a voluntary or forced compliance. The dimension of fear utterly erases real trust, as well as precludes common social interaction. Together with the loss of human dignity, it brings about passivity, non-involvement and non-communication (Markova, 2004: 8). Consequently, trust in post-communist societies is barely associated with social commitment or a goodwill attitude. In comparison, in old democracies, political participation is largely based on community networks and a common sense notion of responsibility for social/political actions (though these networks, according to Putnam and Norris, are also waning). Meanwhile in post-communist democracies, the lack of a generalized trust or even a distrust, intolerance, disinterest or suspicion towards society makes political participation apathetic and lacking vibrancy, since common political action is not supported at the societal level.

Empirical evidence

To support the theoretical points above, I refer to the few empirical studies on trust in post-communist societies. As was mentioned in the introduction, the most comprehensive research on trust in post-communist societies has been done by Mierina (2011). She draws on World Values Survey data (2005–7), which shows that only one-quarter of respondents in post-communist societies tend to trust people in general: 22.2% in Bulgaria, 19% in Poland, 20.3% in Romania and 18.1% in Slovenia, for example. It is worth noting that during the democratization period, in some countries generalized trust actually went down: in Bulgaria from 30.4% (1993) to 22.2% (2007), in the Czech Republic from 30.2% (1993) to 23.9% (2001), in Estonia from 27.6% (1993) to 23.9% (2001), in Lithuania from 30.8% (1993) to 24.9% (2001).

In another study, *Undiscovered Power: Map of the Civil Society in Lithuania*, Žiliukaitė et al. (2006: 234) claim to have found a significant difference between generalized trust and particularized trust in

Lithuania. Referring to the results of the fieldwork (Lithuanian Values 2005), the study indicates that out of 1010 respondents only 7.2% express trust in strangers (people whom the respondents have not met before). In comparison, about 75% of respondents trust people they actually know, 59% place trust in neighbours, 84% trust in relatives and almost 98% trust in their family. The numbers illustrate that most people display a particularized trust and rely on the close-knit ties with family and friends which existed in communist societies. Similar findings were also discussed by Bădescu (2003) and Vasilache (2010) in Romania.

When talking about generalized trust in former communist countries, Vasilache (2010: 12) notices that in Romania this type of trust significantly correlates with compliance (the importance of doing what one is told and following rules) and less significantly with tolerance (the importance of understanding different people). This evidence-based insight matches the theoretical premise that in post-communist societies trust is related to fear and less to risk. However, lacking more empirically backed evidence in other post-communist societies, this paradox of trust still remains a subject for further research.

Finally, the recent empirical studies prove that the low levels of generalized trust are accompanied by distrust towards political institutions. According to the Standard Eurobarometer Study (2012), only a few respondents express some level of trust in political parties (14% in Bulgaria, 8% in the Czech Republic, 16% in Estonia, 6% in Latvia, 13% in Lithuania, 9% in Romania and Slovenia). The parliament is trusted by one-fifth of the respondents on average, varying from 9% in the Czech Republic to 30% in Slovakia. On the other hand, almost all post-communist societies are distinguished by a comparatively high level of trust in the president, varying from 30% in Bulgaria to around 70% in Poland and Lithuania. The scholars propose that these tendencies illustrate a longing for authoritarian (or 'strong hand') politics and a willingness by society to follow strong leaders (Ramonaitė, 2006; Rose, 2001; Sztompka, 1999).

To sum up, in his comprehensive studies on post-communist countries, Uslaner (2003, 2008) has gathered empirical evidence to show that the general climate of political distrust and atomized (in-group) societal trust in former communist countries is tightly related to corruption, inequality and expectations for the future. His longitudinal findings show that in almost all post-communist societies generalized trust significantly correlates with perceived corruption of politicians and the shadow economy/inequality. The results of the research

disclose that the more the system is perceived as unequal, the less generalized trust exists in the society. Uslaner explains this by saying that a sense of inequality diminishes a feeling of control and this drives down generalized trust in people. When lacking trust in the system and in the people around, individuals often see only one way of achieving their goals – bribery and corruption. Consequently, a high level of corruption leads to a higher economic inequality (Uslaner, 2008: 11). Obviously, these processes create a long lasting vicious circle, which is very damaging to the quality of post-communist democracy.

Future research

When referring to the present research on trust, we still do not have a comprehensive picture, showing how various forms of trust should be studied. Future studies should set up a clear definition and operationalization of generalized and particularized trust. The latter form of trust is still generic and is measured by a mix of different questions across the various studies (for instance, the questions refer to trust in family members, neighbours, trust in people you know or have ever met, trust in people of same ethnicity, religion, age and so on). These questions clearly display certain levels of particularized trust, but it is unclear how these aspects are related to (or contradict) generalized trust. The task to systemize the measurement of particularized trust is obviously a challenging one, as the operationalization, on the one hand, should encompass the different facets of particularized trust, and, on the other hand, relate to its common characteristics.

Another obvious gap in the current research on trust is the lack of longitudinal research on the communist and post-communist years. Admittedly, although in many countries the data on trust under the communist regime are very limited or not available at all, some rare information for a few countries does exist. Comprehensive longitudinal analysis of the post-communist countries would provide a better insight in trust transformation and the perverse effects of communism as the contextual factor in generalized and particularized trust.

The value of studies of trust in post-communist societies would be undoubtedly generated by qualitative data, showing how trust in particular was and is related to fear and risk in different situations at the individual level. Such qualitative research might help to reveal the perceptions of trust among different age groups and whether the impact of communism on trust is stronger for older citizens than for the young who were socialized after the democratic transition.

The comparative perspective in studies of trust in both post-communist and mature democracies is another insufficiently researched and under-theorized field. First, the operationalizations of trust are still vague and might be less reliable in terms of applying it to different contexts (the problem is already discussed in the literature, see e.g. Bădescu, 2003). It is still not clear whether the question posed of generalized trust ('Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?') is understood equally in post-communist and mature democracies and also across different post-communist countries. The connections between the operationalization and the content of trust would be better revealed by cross-national qualitative research in the former communist countries.

Second, the research on the relationship between social and political trust is underdeveloped. Some studies suggest that social trust promotes political trust, while other studies are more critical of this point (Mishler and Rose, 2005). Thorough comparative research is needed for more evidence-based arguments, taking into account both post-communist and mature democracies and testing the tendencies of a mutual relationship between social and political trust over the decades. In this sense it is also important to separate institutionally recognized democracies (for instance, EU countries) from other so-called 'democracies with adjectives' or semi-authoritarian regimes (e.g. Russia), in order to control variables indicating the institutional settings. The argument that political trust is not related to social trust in the semi-authoritarian or authoritarian countries does not lead to the general conclusions that this relationship is not correlative (people in these societies might not always be honest in answering the surveys), so more accurate methodology for testing trust is needed in future research.

Conclusions

The present article aimed at analysing the notion of trust from different theoretical perspectives and at examining the trajectories of trust transformation in mature and post-communist societies. The theoretical conceptualization of trust displayed competing approaches towards trust, emphasizing a rational, or cultural, moral side of trust. The variety of suggested insights into trust might be useful in defining different forms of trust: generalized and particularized trust at the societal level and political (institutional) trust. The article argues that generalized trust rests on a moralistic foundation, although it also includes some rational elements. Particularized trust, on the

other hand, has less of a moralistic approach and scatters society into atomized, egocentric circles. The generalized type of social trust is tightly related to political trust, which emerges in contemporary society as a result of the institutionalized distrust characterizing the liberal tradition.

To sum up the theoretical considerations on trust in post-communist societies, several remarks should be made. First, scholars analysing communist regimes and their aftermath suggest that social trust in post-communist democracies lacks attitudes based on goodwill and mostly relies on particularized trust. Due to the communist experience, social trust became limited to a 'strategically egoistic' attitude in order to satisfy one's own needs, even if by illegal methods. This perception is gradually transformed into the subconscious; the notion of social trust becomes pervasive, and robustly attached to fear. Trust in strangers is decisively set apart from trust in family. On the contrary, although social trust in Western modernized societies is also related to rational choice, civil society, with its perception of the common good and common action, also requires a non-rational dimension of trust, more specifically, a moralistic and generalized type of trust.

Second, political trust in post-communist societies is weakly associated with self-reflexivity due to the damaged perception of trustworthiness and the antinomy between trust and fear, but less with risk. The exposure to fear restrains post-communist citizens from active political engagement, prompts political alienation and perverts the state–society relationship. Escalation of fear weakens citizens' vigilance towards the political system, the political institutions and rules. It erases the natural willingness of society to use institutionalized levers to expose the *substantive* political distrust and thereby sustain the constitutionally prescribed mechanisms of the liberal democratic regime.

Note

This article is the updated version of the author's article 'Trust: The notion and its transformation in mature and post-communist democracies', published in *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* 2012: 27 : 35 – 60.

Annotated further reading

Bădescu G and Uslaner EM (eds) (2003) *Social Capital and the Transition to Democracy*. London: Routledge. This edited collection presents research on how post-communist countries are adopting the Western models of society. The concepts of social capital and trust have been used to explain civic engagement, support for democracy and the democratization processes in general. The theoretical analysis is supported by detailed case studies.

Fukuyama F (1995) *The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. London: Penguin. This seminal work provides the key insights on trust as a cultural feature. Taking into account cultural and civilizational patterns of societies, trust is assessed as an underlying principle that fosters or restrains social and economic prosperity.

Hardin R (2006) *Trust*. Cambridge: Polity Press. This key book conceptualizes trust in contemporary society and politics. Trust is examined from various perspectives, taking into account wide-ranging aspects of public life. The author also focuses on the phenomenon of distrust in government, as the essential feature of the liberal system.

Kornai J, Rothstein B and Rose-Ackerman S (2004) *Creating Social Trust: Problems of Post-Socialist Transition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. The study focuses on the process of development of trust in post-communist countries. The scholars examine barriers of trust, analysing the interactions of individuals and their social, political and economic environments. Taking into the consideration the historical circumstances, the interpretations of the causality of illegal organizations (like the mafia) and trust are presented.

Markova I (ed.) (2004) *Trust and Democratic Transition in Post-Communist Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This book is concerned with theoretical and empirical analyses of trust and distrust in post-communist Europe. The notion of trust is conceptualized and reconstructed in accordance with the communist legacies and post-communist transformation. Its historical interpretation of trust formation in the different political regimes and economic systems is very valuable.

Rosanvallon P (2008) *Counter-democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This popular monograph deals with the phenomenon of protest politics in liberal democracies and concentrates on the reasons for the steady erosion of confidence in government. The paradox of trust and liberalism is widely discussed from historical and philosophical perspectives.

Sztompka P (1999) *Trust: A Sociological Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The monograph presents a comprehensive theoretical study of trust as a fundamental component of human actions. The study provides conceptual and typological clarifications of the notions of trust, its foundations and functions. The special focus is placed on the transformation of trust in the aftermath of communism.

Warren ME (ed.) (1999) *Democracy and Trust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This edited collection of articles analyses relationship between democracy and trust. Different theories of social and political trust are presented and connected, and 'healthy distrust' in democratic institutions is discussed.

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résumé   Cet article vise d'abord à analyser et à montrer théoriquement les particularités de la confiance envers les démocraties mûres et postcommunistes. Il conceptualise la notion de la confiance comme interprétée par le culturalisme et les approches rationalistes, et la systématise dans un cadre théorique plus logique. En second lieu, la confiance sociale et politique est discutée, et le rapport entre ces catégories est analysé. Troisièmement, dans une perspective théorique plus large, la dialectique de la confiance politique et le libéralisme sont abordées. En conclusion, la confiance envers le régime communiste et sa conséquence sont examinées. L'argument principal est que, en général, la confiance sociale envers les sociétés postcommunistes manque d'une bonne intention originelle et demeure plus centrée sur la famille comparé au plus large *radius* de la confiance aux démocraties plus anciennes. En même temps la confiance politique envers les sociétés postcommunistes est moins encline à la remise en question et moins basée rationnellement depuis que, contrairement aux anciennes sociétés démocratiques, elle a évolué en opposition à la crainte plutôt qu'en opposition au risque.

mots-clés   confiance généralisée ◆ confiance institutionnalisée ◆ confiance particularisée ◆ confiance politique ◆ crainte ◆ méfiance institutionnalisée ◆ post-communisme ◆ risque

resumen   El objeto de este artículo es analizar y mostrar teóricamente las peculiaridades de la confianza en las democracias maduras y post-comunistas. Primero, en el documento se conceptualiza la noción como interpreta los enfoques racionales y culturales, y se sistematiza en una estructura teórica y más coherente. Segundo, se discute la confianza social y política, y se analiza la relación entre estas categorías. En tercer lugar, se aborda la dialéctica de la confianza política y el liberalismo en una perspectiva teórica y más amplia. Por último, se examina la confianza en el régimen comunista y post-comunista. El argumento principal es que, a nivel generalizado, la confianza social en las sociedades poscomunistas carece de origen afable y está más centrado en la familia, en comparación con el *radio* que es más amplio de la confianza en las democracias maduras. Mientras tanto, la confianza política es menos auto-reflexiva y racional-basada en las sociedades poscomunistas, ya que, a diferencia de antiguas sociedades democráticas, se ha desarrollado como la antítesis al miedo en lugar de al riesgo.

palabras claves   confianza generalizada ◆ confianza institucionalizada ◆ confianza particularizada ◆ confianza política ◆ desconfianza institucionalizada ◆ miedo ◆ post-comunismo ◆ riesgo