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## Is the Communist Ghost Still Alive? Participative Democracy in Eastern Europe after the Fall of Berlin Wall. The Case of Post-Conflict Yugoslavia and East-Central Europe

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze application of the participatory model of democracy in the former communist countries, emphasizing influences of communist legacies. First part of paper covers basic characteristics of the participatory model of democracy and discusses communist heritage that is hypothesized to hamper development of participative democracy. In the third part of the paper goals of the investigation are defined and countries of the former communist block grouped. The last part of research presents analysis of the data obtained by the EVS research conducted on 2008.

**Keywords:** Participatory democracy, Eastern Europe, Communist legacy, EVS



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## **Introduction**

The political changes which occurred in the former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s have arguably led to major social changes within them. The revolution created great expectations marked by the euphoria of freedom and hope for the new life. Freed from the pressure of the regime, people were expecting radical systematic changes, as well as quick democratic and political consolidation. The participation of citizens until that moment in strictly controlled organizations within single-party political systems meant political culture was fragile and civil society underdeveloped.

After 25 years from these changes, the academic community is still interested in the heritage of communism and its potential effect on the today's political and economic conditions.

In the last 25 years the academic community has taken a strong interest in the social heritage created by 40 odd years of communism and its potential effect on the today's political and economic conditions. Before the fall of the Berlin wall, the participation of citizens directed against the state took a form of a protest, it was a way to express the political position of the citizens; on the other hand, after the revolution, any possibility for the citizens to influence the outcome of the political decisions was a complete novelty (Letki, 2004). The studies conducted so far have concluded that the citizens of the former communist countries rarely participate in social organizations (Howard 2003, Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2013), but that they also rarely participate in political activities as well (Bernhard and Karakoc 2007). The reasons may be found in the fact that the citizens have finally reached the point where they are free from participation since participation was mandatory during the communist period (Lewis 1997, p. 447; Barnes 2004, p. 4). While searching for the historical roots of the post-communist political development, the researchers have mostly turned to investigating the communist heritage through the analyses of institutions, political parties (Bunce 1999; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Ekiert and Hanson 2003; Pop-Eleches 2007), whereas the political positions and political behavior of citizens are far less present in the academic discussions.

The expectation at the time of transition towards more democratic structures was that citizens would have a greater involvement in the process of political decision making. Through an analysis of the application of the participatory model of democracy in the former communist countries, this paper will examine the heritage of the communist past and assess the extent of the differences between each of states studied. The first part of the paper discusses the significance and basic characteristics of the participatory model of democracy. The second part of the paper determines the elements from the communist past which may influence the implementation of this model. The third part of the paper defines the goals of the investigation and groups the countries into two blocks: the countries of the former Yugoslavia with the characteristics of the post-conflict area and the countries of the central Europe which have more experience in the implementation of the European values and models of democracy. The fourth part of the paper provides an analysis of the data obtained by the EVS research conducted between 2005 and 2009.

## **Participatory Democracy**

The functioning of the modern society is unthinkable without political participation as numerous theoreticians indicate its significance (Pateman 1970, Barber 1984, Schumpeter 1943, Sartori 1987, Almond & Verba 1963, Inglehart 1997, Norris 2002). It can be claimed it is the very essence, the core of democracy. The participation of the citizens is in the heart of democracy (Verba et al 1995). Modern participatory democracy is based on the idea that periodical participation by voting in national elections is

not a sufficient level of political activity for a person to be fully involved with and influencing the political decision making processes which affect their lives (Pulancas 1978; Macperson 1965, Pateman 1970). Through the implementation of the participatory model of democracy, the political decisions are controlled, and the politics is formed in accordance with the needs and interests of the society it serves. The legal grounds are a precondition for the functioning of the participatory democracy, but the political culture of a society also has significant influence on determining the quality of participatory democracy. It is only responsible, politically mature and informed citizens who are capable of political dialogue and articulating their views who have the skills to hold their representatives in positions of authority accountable (Letki, 2003). When after the fall of the Berlin wall, the participatory democracy is no longer observed as a "luxury" of the rich western societies (Bonine, 2002), the suspicion will be raised on whether the heritage of the past will have a bad influence over its implementation in the former communist countries and whether 50 years of autocratic rule have left a mark on the democratic capacities of these societies.

Since the beginning of the 60s, theoreticians have pointed out the participation of citizens in the decision making process pertaining to the issues which directly influence their lives would have to become a moral value of the modern democratic societies (Bachrach, 1975). The implementation of participatory democracy promotes the independence of citizens by giving them the resources and possibilities for joint participation. Santos (2002) implies the new democratic sovereignty should be based on a strong relationship between the civil society and the political system. For modern participatory democracy to function, the respecting of human rights, the division and balance between various types of power, a pluralistic structure of the media, quality education, etc. are mandatory. A number of texts claim that these are some of the preconditions that have to be met because there is a strong positive correlation between the quality of these attributes and participatory democracy. Almond and Vebra (1993) state the political culture is one of the main factors which influences the low level of political participation of post-communist citizens. The relationship between the political culture and participatory democracy is close. The model of democratic political system helps determine the type of political culture which in turn equally develops the orientation and feeling of political activism and participation. It is indisputable, participatory democracy gives a quality to an order, that it in turn affects the stability (Verba et al. 1995, Schlozman 2002) and consolidation of new democracies (Krishna 2002, Barnes and Simon 1998).

Pateman (1970,71) stated if complete participation allows every member of the community to influence the outcome of the decision, the question is raised about the political potential of the citizens from former communist countries to take part in the political decision making process through various mechanisms and procedures. The burdens created by the past may have a limited influence on whether individuals wish to engage with existing processes. The implementation of participatory democracy in these societies may serve as a tool to once again help people find their values and shape future behaviors. Modern technology has changed the methods by which citizens can get involved compared to the many years of autocratic rule.

During the communist period, the citizens were often forced to join and participate in the organizations established and controlled by the state (Howard, 2002). In Mihajlov's (1986) words, it was the so-called "active anti- freedom" where the individual was forced to support their own slavery through mandatory participation. Fleeing into the safety of family groups and groups of friends, the citizens have developed a private world and some type of private exile from public life (Sztompka, 1996). In such conditions, the civil society is established as a negation, "radical opposition" (Smoar, 1996: 34) of the state. This was the period when the state had predominance over the society via the imposition of constant fear but despite this the forming of social civil structures from below took place over a very short period and

according to Splichala (in Baker 2002: 90-91) managed to replace the old regimes overnight and to establish a parliamentary democracy (in Beker, 2002: 90- 91). For certain authors, the revolution that took place in 1989 represented the victory of the civil society, victory of the good people against the bad system (Smolar 1996, 28). Certainly, the form of the political participation was at that time directed against the state, and thus we cannot contribute the emancipation form to it, but we may presume that the key role played by the civil society in 1989 represents a good base for further development of democracy. Even though, as Andreev (2006) claims, the post-authoritative base is not adequate for democratic upgrade.

It can be claimed that the anti-democratic norms, positions and beliefs learnt during the communist period represented an impediment for the development of participatory democracy. Undeveloped political and social capital, i.e. civil culture of the citizens and a historic atmosphere of distrust are the factors which may decrease the chances for adequate development of participatory democracy on the territory of the former communist countries. It could also be argued the experience from the recent past may be an episode which can be analytically detached from the present by the citizens under the influence of their new experiences during the transition period from communist rule. If this occurs it is possible to establish a civil society that is politically aware, socially self-organized and active in its aims to achieve the common good for the community as a whole.

### **Communist Heritage**

The academic community has been interested in the question of the influence of communist heritage on the shaping of political life in the communities they used to rule as they convert to the values of developed liberal societies for quite some time now. It is possible to observe certain sociological, economic and cultural similarities and differences in the characteristics of the countries which were under the influence of the former Soviet bloc. Based on the review of the existing literature, this paper will isolate those factors which are important for the analysis of how the communist past, is infringing upon the development of participatory democracy since the demise of communism.

The majority of the studies in the 1990s investigated the joint characteristics of the communist regime, for example the closed process of decision making and implementation of the policy, as well as the high concentration of the state powers in the executive authority (Bunce i Csaudi, 1993). According to Mokrzycky (1991), this is the period when the syndrome of homo sovieticus occurred, characterized by the learnt process of helplessness, susceptibility towards paternalism, as well as the confrontational position towards conflict. When speaking about a significant characteristic of the communist past, the authors also point out the strong heritage of authoritarianism (Miller, 1996: 663). This period was characterized by abolishing of all professional associations from sport to ecological organizations, which were under the control of the state and a sustained attack on the philosophy of the communist era. If a society 'celebrates' the state for 50 or more years, where the state is everything and the individual is nothing, where the state controls every organization and activity and protrudes into all spheres of society, the public life becomes a synonym for lies and fear. The people were often warned to be careful what they are saying, which led to the creation of an atmosphere of fear and a servant-master relationship between the authorities and the citizens. Such conditions were dominated by the passivism of the mass instead of by the activities of the citizens. The accent was on plural social values (Tymowski 1993, Weselowsky 1995, Ost 1980), as well as on collective activities as opposed to the activities of the individuals, and thus we may claim that the communist dogma has slowed down or even blocked the development of the ethos at the individual level (Gill 2002). The ideology of class struggle, the non-existence of an adequate alternative to the Soviet hegemony, the use of nationalist- communist ideology for the purpose of justification of the repressive

totalities practices (Ciobanu, 2010) held the satellites of the Soviet rule with ideological bonds (Di Palma, 1991). However, within the communist block itself, there are differences in the institutional form, at the level of economic development, but also the overall social development. For example, Poland and Hungary had different exit routes from the communist period and later they differed in terms of the consolidation of their policies and economies (Seleny, 1999: 448). Furthermore, we have to take into consideration that, even though the countries did not enter the communist phase without a past, communism nevertheless wanted to turn their political history into a *tabula rasa* (Di Palma, 1991). As a result after the fall of the Berlin wall, according to Roberts (2010) there were only limited memories which were not related to the dictatorship. It can be argued that 40-50 years of communist rule has meant the previous pre communist institutional history is now a secondary influence as most citizens have spent the majority or all of their lives under communism, and successor regimes. The younger post-communist generations are now expected to show democratic potential. Sztompka (1996) for example believes that the past of real socialism has a paralyzing effect at the psychological and behavioral level. On the other hand, Laslo Brustzt (1998) believes that the countries of the former communist block have not experienced the transition towards the democracy and economy to such an extent; they have experienced a transformation, the so-called recombination and reconfiguration of various blocks (elements) which formed the order existing until that moment.

The differences within the former communist block itself are numerous. It is evident for example certain countries such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia did not enter the communism from the same socio-economic and democratic level. During the period between the wars, Czechoslovakia had elections and the governments and a better developed industry compared to Tito's Yugoslavia which was primarily oriented towards agriculture. The demonstrations against the communist power were organized in the countries which stood out in terms of degree of development: Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. The differences exist on religious levels as well. The former Soviet Union is primarily orthodox, but also Muslim, compared to the countries of Central Europe which have the tradition of the western Christian church. Certain theoreticians have examined the influence of these heritages on the post-communist political development (Bunce 1999, Horowitz 2003, Pop-Eleches 2007). Poland has experienced relatively quick political and economic reforms, whereas a civil war undermined transition in Yugoslavia. In certain cases, the accession to the European Union has proved to be a powerful incentive for the post-communist societies (Vachudova 2005).

The similarities that exist between former communist countries, can help explain the political participation activities of the citizens today. The first group of heritage pertains to a fragile political culture of the old regime where the state was included in all aspects of the society and was the depository of law, freedom and property of people. It can be concluded the paternalistic obligation towards the state created a paternalist point of view, which results in the expectations of the citizens to approach every problem from above, within the structures of authorities. The second group of heritage was determined as a low degree of development of various types of autonomies (for example, local self-governments). The third group is the level the norms of the civil conduct and culture of mutual trust and solidarity. Furthermore, the analysis which follows, takes into consideration the differences between the former communist countries which pertain to institutional, political, economic and cultural contexts. In the post-communist period it can be claimed it is very difficult to change a person's values because such values have deep roots in the moral autonomy of people. Therefore, the question is whether former communist societies are ready to face the tremendous changes in the level and kind of values required to establish a liberal democracy.



## Research Goal

The study analyses the extent to which European citizens engage in some forms of participatory democracy, and presents the levels of European participation in NGOs and other associations. Part of the study is dealing with respondents' views on interpersonal and institutional trust as a major precondition of any social and political participation.

The former communist countries are placed in a comparative perspective. The first group consists of the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The second group is most of the new post 1989 democracies in Eastern and Central Europe. The final group consists of countries that fall in the advanced European democracies. This country grouping is partly based on Klingemann et al. (2006) analysis. The data used in this study are taken from European Values Study carried out in 2008.

This paper's first hypothesis suggests that longer period of time under democratic institutions and procedures will have a positive influence on citizens adopting participative strategies. Therefore it is assumed that established democracies would have higher levels of citizen's political engagement compared to new democracies. It is also assumed that differences will exist between, the group of former Yugoslavia, set in post-authoritarian and post-conflict context, and the other former communist countries that entered the process of democratic consolidation quicker. The legacy of distrust is also hypothesized to be more prominent in former Yugoslavia than Central Europe.

## Results

### *Civic Engagement*

The existence of an appropriate legislative and institutional framework represents a necessary prerequisite but it can be insufficient if there is no political culture of participation and exercising of the civil rights provided by law. This chapter aims to answer the question of whether citizens are willing to participate and if so to what extent? There are three established levels of indicators or drivers of direct participation by citizens in decision-making process: attending demonstrations, petition signing and joining strikes.

Petition signing can be considered to be a participative mechanism used by citizens in order to influence and pressure their parliament or government to place certain issues on the political agenda. In European countries with developed democratic tradition where more than 60% of citizens have used this mechanism at least once, in comparison the number using this right in the countries of the former Yugoslavia is less than half that, and one third less in countries of the former Communist Bloc. Comparative research has shown among former communist countries, this mechanism was most widely used in Croatia, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic (47%), while 11% and 13% of citizens use petition signing in Romania and Bulgaria respectively.

Different forms of civil disobedience, protest and non-violent action represent a major part of the citizen participation. Potential for protest and strikes is used by citizens in order to call public attention to issues that cannot be solved by means of institutionalized procedures. In relation to this form of participation there was no significant difference between the former communist countries. About 12% of the citizens have participated in demonstrations, but the activity itself was less than half in relative terms to France, Norway and the United Kingdom. Strikes are considered to be extremely unpopular method of participation among former communist countries, only 3.5% of the citizens use this method to express their dissatisfaction or call public attention to some issue. It can be concluded that there is a high degree of reservation toward this methods of collective action. The low uptake of this method and low energy exhibited towards using it in former communist countries imply submission to the expected risks and costs of the conflict. In addition reasons for passivity of citizens can be found in their dissatisfaction with the

changes caused by the transition process, as well as the missing resources of solidarity and trust in other actors, particularly leading political actors.

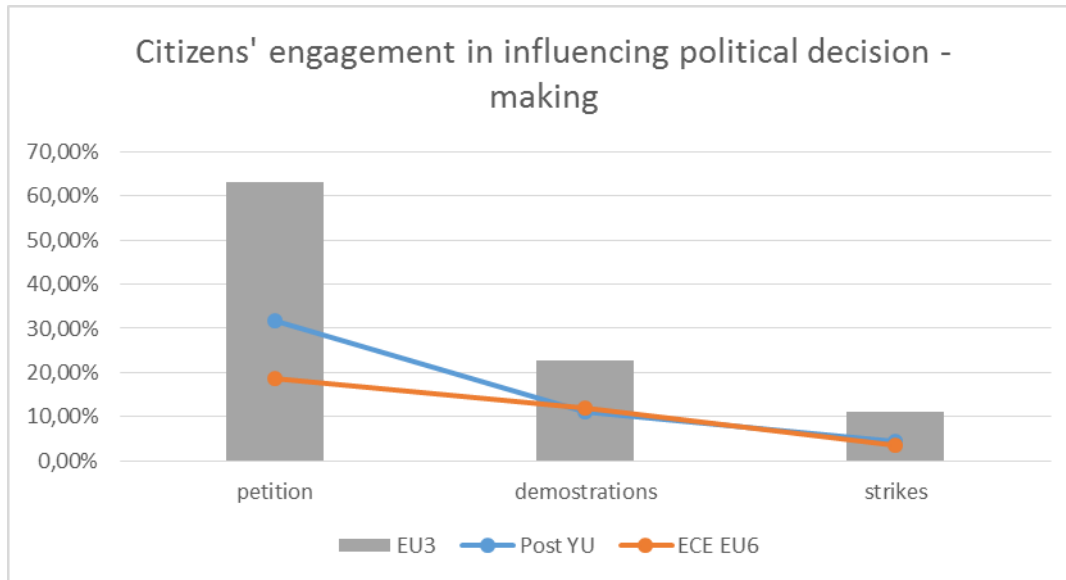


Figure 1.

Petition signing, attending lawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes in three European regions (EU3, ECE EU6, Post YUG group), EVS 2008 (European Value Study 2008)

### Trust

The notion of trust is gaining more importance in modern political debate. Trust is a necessary component of social relations. Sztompka (1999: 15) believes it occurs as a result of a rich social life that facilitates spontaneous participation of individuals into different associations. A society without public trust is considered to be in some sort of vacuum state which in turn can promote other social mechanisms to compensate for this situation. For example "ghettoism" – the retreating into small isolated groups which can reduce complexity and uncertainty of the outside influences and project trust onto God, fate, foreign societies, etc. (Sztompka, 1996). Some authors believe that a society in which trust is being destroyed can collapse (Bok, 1978: 26). This chapter, analysis's trust in terms of assessing competences and performances of authorities (Rothstein, 2005), or the belief that the institutions are motivated to duly implement their promised political programs in a timely manner (Levi et al., 2009). Trust can be placed as an indicator of real or potential cooperation between citizens. A citizen can express their level of trust in institutions by stating how much they agree or otherwise with statements about his or her confidence in their parliament, government, political parties, justice system, armed forces and civil service.

In order to recognize different types of trust, this paper shall use two composite indexes:

1. representing confidence in authorities including confidence in parliament, government, political parties and the justice system, and
2. representing confidence in state institutions: armed forces, police and civil service.

At the second stage the research includes levels of general public trust in other people/citizens, which was assessed by the degree to which respondents agreed with statements on a dichotomous scale.



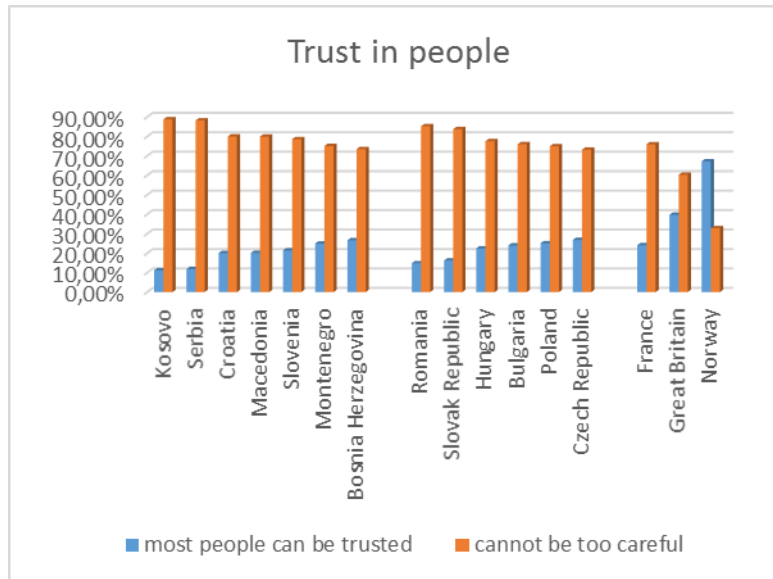


Figure 2.

Public trust in people in three European regions (Post YUG group, ECE EU6, EU3), EVS 2008 (European Value Study 2008)

When it comes to general public trust in fellow people, Serbia and Kosovo are placed in a group of countries with the lowest rate of public trust. Only 11% respondents from these countries believe that other people can be trusted. Apart from Serbia and Kosovo, Romania and Slovak Republic also show high degree of caution when it comes to interpersonal relations. Norway, however, is distinctively different than other countries; it could be claimed the developed social capital in Scandinavian countries represents a reflection of well-being and high degree of equality. The culture of mistrust is somewhat more pronounced in the post conflict atmosphere of former Yugoslav countries in comparison to countries of Central and Eastern Europe, but the level of mistrust is pretty high which leaves the question of how it is possible to make formal connections in order to formulate and implement common goals in such social climate.

Serbia and Croatia are placed in a group of countries with the lowest degree of confidence in the authorities. In terms of confidence in individual instances of power, the lowest degree of public confidence on average was in political parties. There are many differences between former Yugoslav countries, e.g. between Serbia and Macedonia, the difference is 30%. About 20% of the respondents from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania have confidence in above mentioned instances of power. This number is somewhat higher in Poland and Slovak Republic, almost 30% and 40% respectively. About 40% of respondents from former Yugoslav countries of Montenegro, Slovenia and Macedonia have confidence in authorities, which is an interesting observation bearing in mind these countries are not on the same socio-economic level as each other or Slovakia. Kosovo had the highest percentage (63%) of respondents who have confidence in instances of power. In a situation where there is a very low level of confidence in political institutions in Kosovo and the public's assessment is that they do not work hard enough towards satisfying the needs and interests of citizens, it raises questions about the point of application of participatory models of democracy.

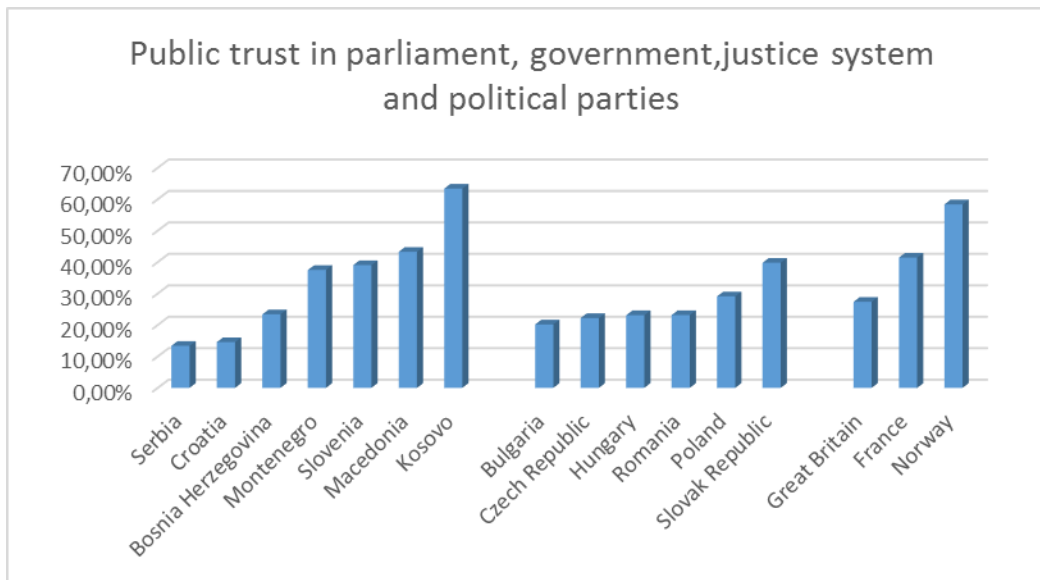


Figure 3.

Public trust in parliament, government, justice system and political parties in three European regions (Post YUG group, ECE EU6, EU3), EVS 2008 (European Value Study 2008)

If the mistrust in political institutions leads to a belief that they cannot be influenced, a question can be raised about whether they can be influenced by participatory models of democracy in order to implement certain policies. Increase in loss of trust in classical models of democracy can lead to citizen passivity and their pronounced retreat from active political life.

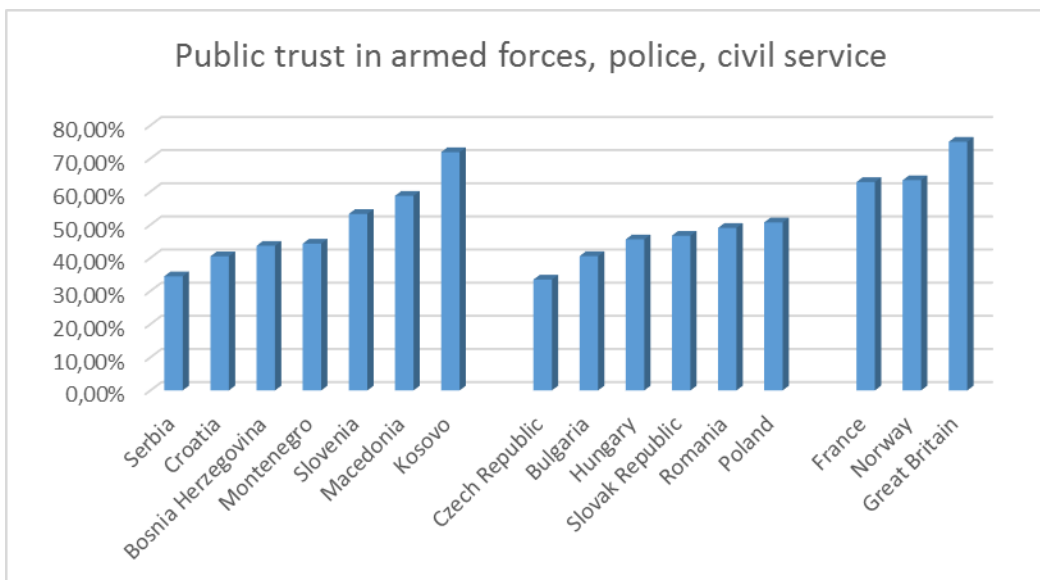


Figure 4.

Public trust in armed forces, police and civil service in three European regions (Post YUG group, ECE EU6, EU3), EVS 2008 (European Value Study 2008)

In comparison to instances of power, confidence in armed forces, police and civil service is much higher in the former Yugoslav countries, confidence in traditional organizations is noted to be 34% in Serbia, 70% in Kosovo, while in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, public confidence is noted to be about 40%. It can be considered unsurprising that the confidence of citizens socialized in a society where the judicial system and the police were agents of the communist party (ECE) is lower than in the former Yugoslav countries. In those countries, public confidence in these institutions is 30-50%. In countries with a longer democratic tradition, the percentage of public confidence is high and noted to be over 60%. Confidence in armed forces, police and civil service is on average almost twice as high in relation to public confidence in instances of power.

#### Non-Governmental Organizations/Associations Membership

Participation in non-governmental organizations or associations can show us the culture within a national context of a state and the types of associations present there. In all three survey groups, there is a low general interest in participation in organizations whose aim is civic activism. The lowest degree of participation, 1.6%, was noted in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In countries of former Yugoslavia, the participation in these organizations is 2.3%. This number is only somewhat higher in Norway, France, and the United Kingdom. In regard to citizen participation in trade unions, except in Norway where this type of association is very common, membership rates are low. In the countries of former Yugoslavia, citizen participation in trade unions is most prevalent in Slovenia (16%). In Croatia, this number is twice as low (8%), while in other countries of former Yugoslavia, the number of members is 5% or below. In the countries of the former communist bloc, the percentage is fairly balanced and is noted to be about 10% in Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania, and approximately 13% in the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, and Hungary. It is interesting to know that countries which have a tradition of citizen participation in trade unions, like the former Yugoslav countries or Poland, do not have significant differences in this regard.

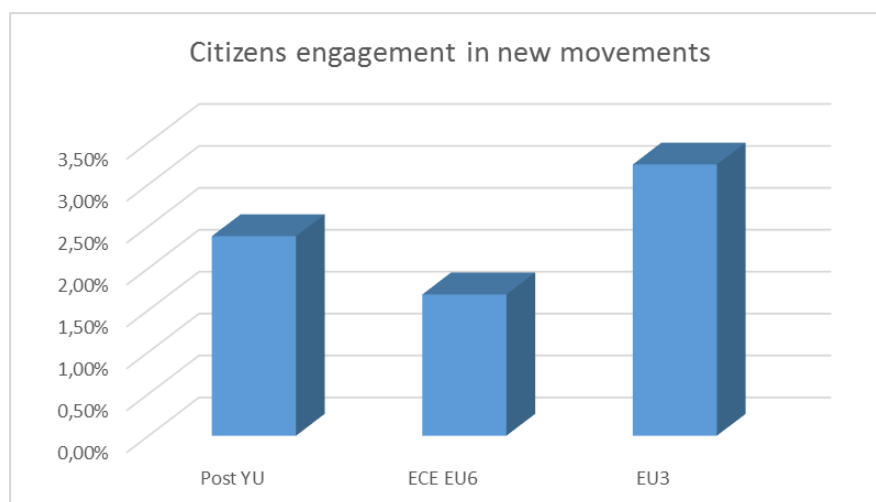


Figure 5.

Citizens engagement in welfare, environment organizations, woman groups, peace movement in three European regions (Post YUG group, ECE EU6, EU3), EVS 2008 (European Value Study 2008)



**Figure 6.**

Members of Trade Unions in three European regions (Post YUG group, ECE EU6, EU3), EVS 2008 (European Value Study 2008)

The number of members of political parties and of participants involved with civic/democratic activities on a local level is presented in **Figures 7** and **8**. In the former Yugoslavia, the citizens of Macedonia have a largest percentage of political party members (11, 4%) whilst Slovenia has the lowest percentage of political party members. In the former communist countries, citizens of Poland and Hungary have the least interest in membership in political parties. Generally speaking people in the countries of former Yugoslavia are engaged in political parties to a higher extent in comparison to the countries of former communist bloc.

In regard to activities on a local level, there is a low rate of participation in general. In the former Yugoslavia, this percentage is noted to be between 1-7%, while the percentage is about 2% in the countries of the former communist bloc.

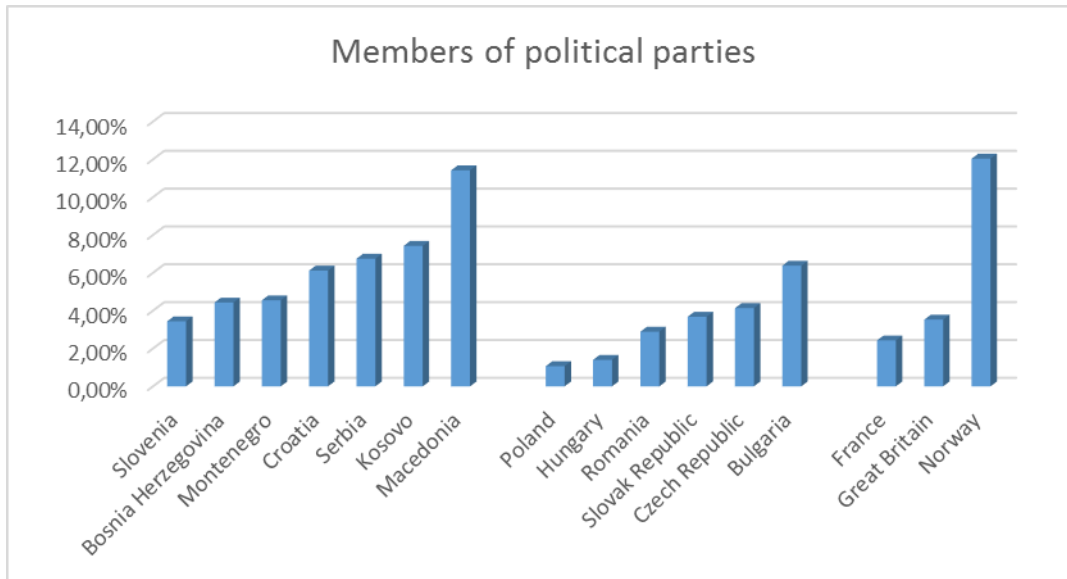


Figure 7.

Members of Trade Unions in three European regions (Post YUG group, ECE EU6, EU3), EVS 2008 (European Value Study 2008)



Figure 8.

Members of local community action (Post YUG group, ECE EU6, EU3), EVS 2008 (European Value Study 2008)

### Discussion and Conclusion

In relation to the former Yugoslavia the key finding of the research is that the Communist legacy of distrust is widespread, more than in Eastern Europe. It can be argued that the general level of trust is hard to establish in post conflict societies faced with destroyed value system. For example in Serbia trust in other people halved from 28 to 14% between 1996 and 2006 (meaning it was greater during the Yugoslav civil

wars). In addition the research data has confirmed there is a strong legacy of distrust in all former communist countries in takes time for the scars of the communist past where people weren't allowed to express themselves freely and openly to heal. Trust in former Yugoslavia is on average lower in political institutions than it is in Eastern Europe. Trust isn't necessarily high in established democracies either so democracy and having the freedom to participate in democratic process is no panacea for trust.

The research data has established that on average across the three survey groups there is a low level of citizen engagement when it comes to influencing political decision making. In particular this paper's hypothesis that petition signing would be greater in the former communist countries which have joined the EU compared to the successor republics of the former Yugoslavia has not been proved to be correct. In reality the number of people signing petitions is relatively low in both groups.

Participation in Non-Governmental Organizations and Associations is low across the board. The development and establishment of a democratic system of government doesn't automatically produce a society where most people wish to express the views vocally via political campaigns or pressure groups. In Slovenia in relative to their fellow former Yugoslav republics involvement with these groups has been higher- this might be a reflection of them being a member of the EU for over a decade. Membership of, and involvement with NGOs isn't necessarily high in established democracies either. This suggests just because the opportunities are now there to join NGOs and become politically active there is not guarantee citizens of new democracies will choose to do so.

Future research should address involvement of younger generations to analyze if the establishment of democratic institutions will lead to greater participation by citizens in the democratic process in the new democracies from Poland to Kosovo.

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