

*Transactional and Participatory Activism in The Emerging European Polity:
The Puzzle of East-Central Europe*

Tsveta Petrova and Sidney Tarrow
Cornell University

Keywords: activism; civil society; contentious politics; NGOs; political participation; protest

Paper Abstract: In this paper, we examine the potential for concerted collective action in the societies that emerged from state socialism in East-Central Europe after 1989. While scholars have found strong individual-level evidence that protest potential is weaker here than in other parts of the world, we question whether individual-level data adequately tap all the dimensions of activism that are relevant to contentious politics. We propose a differentiated model of civil society consisting of a) internal potential for citizen action and b) relational aspects of social activism and argue that some forms of the latter – and in particular, what we call “transactional activism” – are more robust than what evidence at the individual-level suggests. We also examine some local and transnational-level data from the region and speculate about the capacities for collective action we find there and its potential for contributing to the construction of a transnational Europe.

How, and in what ways, do citizens of new democracies engage in contentious politics? And how well do the methods that scholars have employed to examine mass participation tap the practices of activism that citizens of East-Central Europe have developed since the fall of state socialism? Those are the questions we consider in this paper. Building on both case study and survey results from the region, we investigate the familiar claim that civil society emerged from state socialism with a weak potential for concerted collective action. While there is strong evidence that individual participation is weak in this region, we question whether all the relevant dimensions of social and political activism have been tapped in the tradition of research that has developed since 1989. We argue that while some forms of activism are indeed feeble in the new states of East Central Europe, there is evidence to suggest that other aspects – and particularly what we call “transactional activism” – are more robust.

Many authors have worried about the quality and the resilience of “civil society” in East Central Europe, by which they mean *the quality and magnitude of citizen participation of various kinds*. This body of work raises three important questions, which we hope to revisit in this paper:

- is it true that citizen participation in this region is too weak to influence political communication, to produce sufficient levels of participation, and serve as a check on elites?
- if there are signs of a stirring of citizen participation, what forms is it taking?
- what implications do these emerging patterns suggest about the region’s integration into the broader arena of participation in the European Union?

In Part One, we review findings from the literature on citizen participation in East Central Europe that document a very low level of individual citizens’ capacity for concerted collective action. In Part Two we distinguish between what we call the “relational” dimensions of participation from the magnitude of individual participation. In Part Three we present a process analysis we have carried out of a case of local/national/supranational activism in Hungary that illustrates what we call “transactional”

activism. In Part Four we summarize evidence about this form of activism from different Central and Eastern European countries. In our conclusions we speculate about the implications of the typology for the region's participation in the transactional politics of the European Union.

I. A Weak Civil Society?

Ever since the fall of Communism brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets in 1989-1991, both East European dissidents (cited in Raiser et al., 2001) and western observers (Ekiert, 1991; Arato, 1991; Rose, 1993; Bernhard, 1996; Smolar, 1996; Nelson, 1996) have been struck by the "relative weakness" of the post-socialist East European civil societies, whether compared to other regions or to the high expectations of 1989-1991. Indeed, much of the literature on the region emphasizes "weakening," "demobilization," and even the "disintegration" of civil society, the increasing "political apathy" of post-socialist citizens, and "radical" or "egotistic" individualism, "social anomie," "amoral cynicism," "paternalism," and "distrust," as predominant characteristics of the mass level of these polities.

Scholarly assessments of individual participation within Eastern Europe's societies have been mostly pessimistic. For example, Rose (2001) found that between 80 and 90 percent of Russians do not belong to any voluntary association (excluding trade unions). Crotty has suggested that for the most part advocacy groups are ineffective and citizens rarely know about the activities of civic groups (Crotty, 2003). And Rose-Ackerman (2001) finds not only that volunteering appears to be relatively unimportant in the region but that the formal civil society sector employs only about 2% of the East European populations, compared with 7.8% in the USA and 5% in France and Germany.

Howard (2003) documents that post-socialist countries have consistently low levels of organizational membership, both in absolute terms and relative to other regions. The post-socialist mean of 0.91 organizational memberships per person is exactly half of the post-authoritarian average of 1.82,

and well under older democracies' mean of 2.39. Moreover, the difference between the older democracies and post-authoritarian averages is relatively small when compared to the large gap between post-authoritarian and post-socialist countries.

Even when different types of organizational participation are reviewed separately, the post-socialist mean is much lower than that of older democracies and of post-authoritarian countries for all types of participation, except for labor unions, where East European countries rank higher than post-authoritarian ones. Howard shows that post-socialist states have particularly low membership levels in organizations of a political and religious nature but vary more widely in membership in leisure and charitable organizations. Finally, Howard presents convincing data to suggest membership rates have been dropping consistently since the collapse of the state-socialism, even in the once mandatory unions.

Raiser, Haerpfer, Nowotny, and Wallace (2001) confirm Howard's conclusion that participation in civic organizations is significantly lower in transition countries than it is in OECD countries, but with an interesting qualification. When asked about their attitudes towards the needs of others, post-socialist citizens did not differ that much from citizens in OECD countries; yet, when asked to record the frequency with which they engaged in activities that implied a regard for the common good, East Europeans recorded significantly lower frequency of civic involvement than OECD citizens (established also by Ockenfels & Weimann, 1996). Similarly, citizens in transition countries are not less interested in politics than are citizens of more developed countries; but unlike the case in OECD states, in East-Central Europe political interest does not correlate with participation. Lastly, these authors document the generally lower levels of inter-personal trust in transition countries than in the average OECD country and a prevalence of smaller and more closed social circles in the region, with both inferences being robust over time. Howard (2003) also finds that people in post-socialist societies have remained extremely invested in their private circles and argues that bridging the wide gap between private and

public spheres by participation in voluntary organizations is retarded by the widespread suspicion and mistrust towards most public organizations (see also Ledeneva, 1998).

The lack of interpersonal trust in the region has become a focus of much research (Crawford & Lijphart, 1995; Nichols, 1996; Osgood & Ong, 2002). An apparent oversupply of greed and envy (Theesfeld, 2004) is found to be coupled with a lack of trust in the new states and in the majority of their civil and political institutions (Rose, Mishler, & Haerpfer, 1997; Miller, Grodeland & Koshechkina, 1998; Crotty, 2003; Carnaghan, 2001). EuroBarometer surveys also show that citizens of the region have little trust in their leaders. For example, an average of 72 percent of East Europeans believe that their new regimes are more corrupt than their predecessors (Rose, 2001; Rose-Ackermann, 2001). Yet others have qualified those findings by pointing out that trust in acquaintances is relatively high (nearly 60 percent) and trust in members of one's social network is even higher – an important finding to the extent that political cooperation does not take place among perfect strangers (Gibson, 2001). Gibson also finds not only that post-socialist countries are characterized by broad, porous, and politically relevant interpersonal networks but also that such networks could serve the diffusion of democratic ideas, since East-Central Europeans embedded in extensive social networks are more likely to support key democratic institutions and processes.

When civic groups are used as the units of analysis, the results are equally ambivalent. The early and then mid-1990s witnessed a surge in the creation of new voluntary and nonprofit organizations. Some of those groups grew out of the remnants of the "moral civil societies" that had opposed state socialism before its collapse. Even though many of these movements suffered severe defections after 1989, as their activists moved en masse into government and business (Smolar, 1996), as a result of favorable changes in the laws governing non-governmental organizations, many new civic groups came into being (Smolar, 1996). Many were the successors of issue-oriented community groups from the

socialist era, including veteran unions, welfare groups, women's circles, fishing, hunting, and soccer clubs. But these groups found it hard to advance significant social demands (Narozhna, 2004), primarily due to a lack of resources and despite a high degree of public confidence (Carson, 2001).

The "third sector" groups, which have come to dominate East-Central European civil societies, are believed to be divided between the "haves" and "have nots" of international assistance – a rift that has splintered NGO movements across the region, accentuating the new–old hierarchies and privileges, and forcing aid-dependent groups, which might otherwise work together, into a competitive relationship (Henderson, 2002; Evans, 2002; Baker & Jehilicka, 1998). Attention has been drawn to the high turnover of single-issue organizations, established to apply for a specific grant or to obtain tax advantages, frequently to the exclusion of pursuing community causes, generating support locally or engaging the wider population (Richter, 2002; Narozhna, 2004; Henry, 2001; Jancar-Webster, 1998; USAID, 1999). However, there is some evidence that third sector organizations have won official and societal acceptance as legitimate social actors that have sought to establish new democratic channels with political elites for input and the articulation of interests and have also learned to take advantage of transnational civil-society networks (Glenn & Mendelson, 2002; Weinthal, 2002; Klose, 2000).

In other words, the post-socialist era may have produced a broad spectrum of NGOs, interest groups, voluntary associations, and politically relevant interpersonal networks, but East Europeans have developed few of the "civic skills" that are believed to be important for supporting a democratic system (Mendelson & Gerber, 2005) and overall, post-communist citizens' voices have remained poorly represented in the political decision-making process.

Is the glass half empty or half full? We revisit the question of the "weakness" of East European civil societies by conceptualizing civil participation in two dimensions – *individual* and *relational*. We see signs of the development of a civil society that is stronger in the development of lateral ties among civil

society groups and vertical ties between these groups and public officials than it is in the potential for broad citizen activism. We call this dimension of participation “transactional activism,” and find evidence of it in a variety of settings and relationships at the local, national and transnational levels.

II. Transactional and Participatory Activism

Most surveys and much of the case study literature on the weakness of civil society in East-Central Europe tends to frame activism as a property of individuals or of individual civil society organizations. But we think that this places undue emphasis on the magnitude of individual and group activism and too little on the actual relations among civil society groups, between them and political parties and in relations with public officials. As we see it, collective action has at least two dimensions, individual and relational:

- *Individual* participation is the dimension that is most directly measured by the survey evidence we have summarized above – whether people vote, whether they join voluntary associations, whether they turn out for demonstrations or protest meetings.
- But there are also *relational* aspects of activism – whether and how voluntary associations and advocacy groups interact with one another, with political parties, and with power-holders. For example, do they coalesce around interests of common concern? Form loose networks that communicate regularly and share information? Combine for joint pressure on policy-makers? And do they reach upward from the local level to the national and international levels of decision-making? Are civic associations engaged in *transactional* as well as *participatory* activism?
- By *participatory activism* we mean the potential and actual magnitude of individual and group participation in civic life, interest group activities, voting and elections.

- By *transactional activism* we mean the ties – enduring and temporary – among organized non-state actors and between them and political parties, powerholders, and other institutions.

We think that while there is a logical affinity between the magnitude of participation and the relations among publicly-organized actors, the two dimensions should be kept analytically distinct and may vary independently of one another.

For a variety of reasons, the societies that emerged from state socialism after 1989 seem to possess a higher level of transactional activism than the individual levels of participation that have been measured in surveys and in studies of individual civic groups. Let us first be clear: we do not think that the evidence others have gathered of a low level of individual participation in Central and Eastern Europe is mistaken. And there are bound to be negative consequences from the low levels citizen participation that these scholars have uncovered. But such a weakness does not necessarily imply a lack of societal capacity for weaving relations among civil society groups, and between them and political parties and power-holders – all of which may flourish in the face of a low level of mass participation. We see a richer picture of transactions consisting of coalition formation around single issues, network formation, and negotiation with elites, on the part of civic groups in Central and Eastern Europe than would be predicted from the levels of individual participation that have been observed.

A high level of inter-group transactions in the presence of low levels of mass participation may be creating political systems of a decidedly elitist cast. But powerholders confronted by organizational elites with weak followerships are nevertheless more constrained, and may be more responsive, than powerholders faced by inert or alienated citizenries. As occurred in western countries in their on periods of political development, relations among groups and between them and parties and policy makers may be laying the foundation for vigorous civil societies in the future. We illustrate these relational aspects of collective action in the case study developed in Part Three. In Part Four we present some survey

evidence to examine the strength of transactional activism, before turning to the implications of our proposal for East Central Europe's participation in the European Union in Part Five.

III Closing the Ring in Budapest

Well before Central and East European countries entered the European Union, the European Council and the Pan-European Transport Conferences, supported by the European Investment Bank (EIB), decided to finance the building of a ring road – the M0 – around Hungary's capital city. But according to the original plans for the northern section of the M0, the road would pass within 250 meters of a housing estate inhabited by 5,000 people, within 150 meters of a nursery school, and within 400 meters of apartment buildings in the area and in connecting to the M2 - through a nature protection area (CEE Bankwatch, 1998). A sequence of, first local, and then transnational activities was triggered by

Opposition first emerged from among local government officials. Even though two Budapest district municipalities and three towns near the city refused further construction of the M0 on their territory, construction of the Northern section began in 1998 (CEE Bankwatch, 1998). The public was to be informed of the project at a hearing but as the hearing was poorly publicized, none of the affected citizens or environmental groups were aware of the plans until construction work began (CEE Bankwatch, 1998). Opposition turned to protest when local residents organized themselves into the Kaposztasmegyer Environmental Protection Association (KEPA), and shortly thereafter asked for professional assistance from a national federation of non-governmental environmental organizations, called the Clean Air Action Group (CAAG). CAAG and KEPA also received legal assistance from the Environmental Management and Law Association (EMLA), a national environmental service provider, and from a lawyer resident in Kaposztasmegyer (CEE Bankwatch, 1999). As a result, CAAG prepared a report in which the Group argued that the exhaust and the noise generated by the increased traffic on the Ring Road would exceed Hungarian air and noise standards by 25-30% and would thus violate key

public provisions of the Hungarian Constitution, of the Regional Planning and Development Act, and of a Hungarian Constitutional Court decision (CEE Bankwatch, 1998). CAAG and KEPA proceeded to organize a demonstration in front of the Ministry of Transport.

While KEPA was entrusted with ensuring good protester turnout, CAAG was instrumental in managing the rally logistics from choosing the time and location to supplying the protest signs. At the end of the protest, a petition demanding an end to the M0 construction project was handed to the Minister of the Transport (CEE Bankwatch, 1998). In July of 1998, KEPA and CAAG, with the legal assistance of EMLA took the Hungarian State to court. On 21st July 1999, the Capital Court of Budapest issued an injunction to halt construction of the northern section of the M0 motorway, stating that it would worsen the local environment, endanger the health of tens of thousands of local citizens, and cause economic damage to area residents. But in spite of the Court decision, the M0's northern section was constructed (CEE Bankwatch, 1999).

Failure at the local level did not end the campaign. CAAG had woven a tight and extensive network of partnerships -- not only with Hungarian government officials but also in the EU and with other (mostly East and West European) environmental groups and competent officials, a network that facilitates its work by adding to the federation's own political weight and to its technical and political knowledge. CAAG sought the assistance of the CEE Bankwatch Network to protest the M0 construction at the European level. Even before the Budapest Capital Court had issued its decision, in October 1998, on behalf of KEPA and CAAG, the CEE Bankwatch and one of its US partners, the New York-based Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, were petitioning the European Investment Bank, which was partially financing the project, to withdraw its funding. Again, through the Bankwatch, CAAG sent letters to the European Commission protesting the project (CEE Bankwatch, 2002).

This was a significant scaling up of the level of conflict but the Bank's president denied the

request, stating that any project financed by the EIB had been subject to detailed national environmental studies and had received the necessary legal clearances (CEE Bankwatch, 1999). Then CAAG and the CEE Bankwatch turned to the EU Ombudsman for legal redress. The Secretary General of the European Environmental Bureau agreed to submit a complaint on behalf of the Bankwatch to the EU Ombudsman against the M0 construction. The complaint states that by failing to adhere to the EU's Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, the EIB appeared to have violated its policy to conform to EU Directives when lending outside the EU (Council Directive 85/337/EEC) (CEE Bankwatch, 1998). In its defense, the Bank argued that the environmental impact of the project had been fully investigated by the Hungarian government and appropriate environmental impact reduction measures were included in the project design. The Bank also challenged the Ombudsman's request to investigate its decision to finance the project. (European Ombudsman, 2001).

In his ruling, the Ombudsman did not find that his inquiries revealed maladministration on the part of the Bank in the M0 case (European Ombudsman, 2001). He *did*, however, maintain that the Ombudsman's prerogatives do not allow for the kinds of exceptions from Community law that the EIB claimed for itself. He also concluded that when granting a loan it is the Bank's responsibility to check whether a proper environmental impact assessment or other sufficient environmental studies have been carried out for the project and that the appropriate requirements set by European Community legislation should also be taken into account.

We do not claim that this case study is typical or representative of civil society in Eastern Europe in general. However, it seems to us that the episode tells us a lot about the kinds of contentious political processes that can be observed throughout the new democracies of the region. Recall what happened in that episode:

- *first*, a new and inexperienced neighborhood group emerged to challenge what seemed to be a *fait accompli* on the part of the European Investment Bank in collusion with local elites who had not bothered to consult the local population;
- *second*, these local protesters were rapidly able to bring in expert opinion and to involve national and transnational NGOs, which then were able to scale the conflict upward by making an effective presentation to the EU Ombudsman;
- *third*, both CAAG and Bankwatch served as repositories for technical and political knowledge, thus compensating for the inexperience of the grassroots group by serving as brokers who mediated between individuals temporarily mobilized around an issue of particular concern to them and the Hungarian state and the relevant EU institutions.

While the campaign was not successful in securing what the local protesters demanded, it had two indirect effects at the European level: the redefinition of EIB prerogatives and the birth of a second campaign, when CEE Bankwatch joined with four other international NGOs (Transport and Environment, World Wildlife Fund, BirdLife International, and Friends of the Earth Europe) to raise awareness about the contradictions between EU transport policy and EU nature conservation law.

We have little evidence that the grassroots association that started this process of protest and advocacy either enjoyed mass support or survived the end of its campaign. The real strength of the campaign was relational – it triggered complex horizontal and vertical *transactional* processes. But was this campaign atypical of the low level of civil activism in East-Central Europe in general? There is evidence that it is in fact representative of a combination of low citizen activism and high levels of transactional activism elsewhere as well.

IV Transactional Activism in Central and Eastern Europe

There have been few efforts to collect comprehensive data on civic campaigns in East-Central Europe, which would be the only way to allow for meaningful cross-country and longitudinal comparisons of what we have called transactional activism. A step, albeit quite imperfect, in that direction has been taken with the NGO Sustainability Index studies for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, prepared by USAID from 1998 to 2004. The Index is based largely on the understandings of both local and international donor experts and is collected, in part, through field-based focus groups. As such it might be somewhat optimistic. Still, it illustrates NGO coalition formation practices and advocacy capacity (along with other characteristics) of the third sectors in each country of the region¹. In examining the evidence, we limit our investigation to the new members of the EU, because we are also interested in discussing the implications of activism patterns for the region's integration into the broader arena of participation in the Union. For each country we examined the USAID annual civil society report to evaluate transactional activism in the region – i.e., the strength and frequency horizontal and vertical interactions of civic actors.

Despite their fragmentary and contested nature, the USAID studies reveal that civil society/government relations document the existence of a few transparently governed and capably managed NGOs as well as a supply of professional cadres of local experts and consultants across a variety of sectors. The data also suggest some ability and capacity of the NGO sector in Central and Eastern Europe to respond adequately to changing needs, issues, and interests of their communities. “Though many advocacy campaigns continue to be initiated by international donors, local NGOs are increasingly identifying their own advocacy issues and messages, forming issue-based coalitions, and educating the public on key issues of reform” (USAID, 2001).

Moreover, there is ample evidence that NGOs in the region have begun to form coalitions to pursue issues of common interest and to monitor and lobby legislatures and executive bodies. Indicative of their overall strength and importance is Toepler and Salamon's (2003) finding that advocacy and political activities of Central and East European NGOs comprise twice the share of total nonprofit activity of similar organizations in the West. Some examples that demonstrate the sectoral breadth and number of successful advocacy and coalition formation campaigns at the national level in just one year (2003) are summarized respectively in Box One and Box Two in the Appendix.

[Box One and Box Two here]

It should be noted that there is some variation in the advocacy and coalition formation capacity of third sectors across the ten new members of the EU. As Table One demonstrates civil societies in Poland and the Baltic countries stand out as of 2004 in their ability to mobilize coalitions to respond to changing needs, issues, and interests as well as to monitor and work with the different levels of government. In contrast, the third sectors in Hungary but especially in Romania and Slovenia have less experience in information sharing and networking within the sector to then inform and advocate within the government.

[Table One here]

To get a more concrete sense of the frequency and impact of civil society/government interactions, we looked at a 2004 UDNP survey study of local and regional governance in Bulgaria – not generally thought of as a robust modern civil society.ⁱⁱ According to the USAID Index (please refer to Table One), the third sector in Bulgaria is closest to the “average performer” out of the ten new members of the EU. If there is evidence of effective civil society/government interactions in this case, it would be safe to suggest that similar processes are unfolding in the other East European countries as well.

Although the findings are limited, the survey reveals that faced with the challenges of decentralized governance, many Bulgarian subnational authorities draw upon their relations with NGOs, whose experience, expertise, and resources have proven valuable to them. For example, in the process of drafting their local development strategy, which details annual government commitments in the realms of economic, social, civil society, infrastructural, and environmental policies and is the foundation of municipal budgets, 51% of all Bulgarian local governments report extensive or moderate cooperation with social and economic actors. Additionally, 53% of the local authorities organized public hearings to collect proposals for projects under the strategy, 34% organized focus group discussions, 34% set up advisory councils, 18% held public meetings, and only 12% conducted none of these. Likewise, after having drafted the strategy and its constituent projects, 56% of Bulgarian municipalities consulted NGOs to help them improve these programs, 48% consulted businesses, and 25% the local citizenry. In the policy implementation stage, only 17% of local governments reported that they neither joined nor assisted a local civil society organization project. However, 32% of Bulgarian municipalities assessed their cooperation with local NGOs as poor and 43% saw their cooperation with local businesses as unsatisfactory but 63% were eager to improve their cooperation with social and economic actors and the public in general.

The Bulgarian findings regarding civic participation in regional policy-making are consistent with these findings about local governance. Local social and economic actors are involved in 58% of district policy planning. In drafting district development strategies and the programs under them, 17% of district authorities organized public hearings, 42% held focus group discussions, 33% created advisory councils, and 8% held public meetings but 25% conducted none of those. The picture is mixed: while 21% of all district governments reported poor interactions with local NGOs, 38% with regional NGOs, and 42% had unsatisfactory relations with local businesses, and 50% of Bulgarian district governments

seek to improve their cooperation with local social and economic actors.

In terms of the impact of civil society involvement in municipal policy-making on local governance, the UNDP data reveal that partnerships with social and economic actors increase the degree of local development strategy implementation. For example, 75% of all municipalities that developed their local strategies in cooperation with the local citizenry (either directly or through intermediary civil society organizations) fulfilled more than 50% or all of their commitments, compared to 50% of local authorities who fulfilled more than 50% or all of their commitments but used external consultants or advice by national government officials in the development of their strategies. Such a difference is both statistically significant and practically meaningful (see also Petrova, 2005).

None of this evidence, of course, tells us much about the quality and quantity of mass participation in voluntary activity or of political participation in general in these new democracies. But this is precisely our point: while individual measures of participation tap the potential of a society for mass politics, by focusing only on this dimension we may miss a peculiar characteristic of activism in the region, its predominantly transactional character, with all that this implies about its potential for coalition building and problem-solving negotiation with elites, on the one hand, and certain isolation from those it claims to represent, on the other.

V. Discussion

Students of contentious politics in the West will find nothing very new here. Many studies have detailed how collective action has both transactional and participatory aspects (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). Other scholars have underscored the importance of contextualizing findings about individual orientations towards politics (Anderson et al., 2005). If the Central and Eastern European countries have a low level of participatory activism – that is, if these societies are producing more NGO “generals” than “professional soldiers” – that may be the result of contingent political factors rather than

of a deep-seated weakness in civil society.ⁱⁱⁱ But a low level of individual civic participation does not necessarily imply a lack of capacity for transactional activism, which may flourish as the result of incentives for and constraints on civic and political elites and their international allies, even in the face of a weak mass participation.

We do not maintain that a thriving civil society has already emerged from state socialism. We only suggest that when we examine the actual relations among challengers and authorities, we find a more variegated and richer mix of activism than either the individual level data or case studies of civil groups reveal. As our story of the M0 Motorway in Budapest and our review of Central and East European coalitions and campaigns suggests, nonstate actors in the region are developing a transactional capacity that seems to outstrip their capacity to mobilize large numbers of citizens in enduring organized collective action.

Of course, there is another side to the coin: If Central and East Europeans do not develop a participatory activism potential, then NGOs, interest groups, and social movements that claim a popular mandate will lack the legitimacy to convince officials to take them seriously. They may also veer in the familiar direction predicted for professional movement organizers by Michels a century ago: officers without armies whose goals may drift away from the needs of those they claim to represent. And they may lack the impulsion of popular pressure to empower them vis-à-vis higher levels of authority, like the European Union (Michels, 1962).

What are the implications of these observations for East-Central Europe's integration into the European Union? We often assume that institutions with participatory structures are governed by a logic of mobilization (e.g., the greater the mobilization of opinion around a given issue, the more likely are decision-makers to respond). But the European Union, with its glaring democratic deficit, is hardly the paradigm of participatory politics that Western scholars who criticize East-Central Europe seem to

implicitly assume. Where major legislation is proposed by a non-elective supranational Commission, where major legislative power is held by the Council of Ministers, and where citizen activism is distant from the centers of decision making, the possession of expertise and the development of the skills of negotiation and lobbying may be far more important than the mobilization of opinion (Marks & McAdam, 1999). In the current crisis of European integration, Easterners accustomed to the thrust and parry of transactional elite politics in systems in transition may have an advantage over their more institutionally-constrained and popularly accountable Western counterparts.

Appendix

Box One

Coalition Formation in Eastern Europe: National Level Campaigns in 2003

While Central and East European civil society organizations are not always eager to form coalitions in order to influence policy-makers, organizations with a common objective, regional location, or those working in the same field often do reach agreements. Some examples:

Successful, large-scale advocacy campaigns in 2003 were implemented by the **Estonian** Students Union (loans for student families), the Movement for the Estonian Child, and for preserving trees in Jamejala National Park.

The **Bulgarian** Media Coalition coordinated a group of 55 NGOs in fighting proposed amendments to the penal code that would unreasonably expand the definition of classified information, making it virtually impossible for journalists to remain “the fourth power in the country.” Again in 2003, other Bulgarian NGOs have also successfully formed coalitions around the environment, youth issues, the amendments to the penal code, and local elections.

A coalition of six **Romanian** NGOs closely monitored the 2003 drafting of a new law on the establishment of political parties, and influenced the outcome to reduce the number of required members for registration of a new party. Another positive example was the coalition of NGOs and trade unions that created a human chain around the parliament building, successfully protesting government attempts to block public access to the files kept by the former Romanian secret police.

Some examples of successful **Slovene** NGO issue-based coalitions from 2003 include Trust, Program Partnership for Environment, Coordination of NGO networks, different coalitions for helping the refugees, asylum seekers, and homosexuals, which all operate on national level.

Czech NGOs have already established several regional and sector based coalitions such as SKOK (health and social care), Green Circle (environment), Spider’s Web (environmental education), the Centre for Community Organizing (community development) and the Donors’ Forum (foundations). Environmental NGOs are especially unified in their cooperation, which has enabled them to successfully advocate for some changes in regional development plans and other local development projects.

In **Hungary** the National Civil Fund and its environmental twin the National Civil Representation initiative were organized in the early 2000s. Moreover, many Hungarian NGOs have sought participation in the Hungarian Association of NGOs for Development and in the ECOSOC.

Polish NGOs are also continuing to form cross-border partnerships within the region including on-going mentorships and collaborations with NGOs in Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania, and throughout the former Yugoslavia. Additionally, some Polish NGOs have a permanent delegation in Brussels – the Polish NGO Representative Office. There are currently a number of coalitions and umbrella groups working on issues such as children’s rights, the rights of the disabled, human rights, and environmental protection. Furthermore, in every big Polish city there is an NGO council or similar structure.

Slovak NGOs often create small coalitions to lobby for legislative changes and have had some major successes, including a new law on waste, highway construction, the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman, and a broadly supported campaign against racial discrimination, all in 2001.

Source: USAID, 2003

Box Two

Civil Society - Government Interactions in Eastern Europe: National Level Campaigns in 2003

Hungarian NGOs advocating for the rights of the disabled are cited by international observers as “an outstanding example of successful advocacy capacity.” (USAID, 2001)

Slovak NGOs too demonstrated a certain level of sophistication during the 2003 discussion on the ban on abortions, which was controversial both in society and within the NGO community. Two NGO coalitions – one for and one against – were formed around this issue, proving different NGO groups can work and advocate for their own constituency.

Czech NGOs have had the opportunity to comment on new legislation as it is being drafted largely due to the growing willingness of public authorities to communicate and cooperate with NGOs.

In **Poland**, there have already been several dozen “social dialogue institutions,” in addition to NGO representatives, often invited to participate in various consultative bodies such as the Forum for Non-Governmental Initiatives Association, which was took part in the preparation of the National Development Program. An example of the visible improvement in the ability of NGOs to conduct popular campaigns on particular issues is the campaign “Children Protected by Law,” which led to significant changes in the way children are heard before courts. In general, campaigns and lobbying activities by issue organizations in ecology, human rights, gender equity, and disabled persons have continued to occur even more frequently in Poland since the beginning of the 2000s.

In **Romania**, NGOs have also increasingly been engaging – even if not always successfully – in advocacy campaigns, including issues of domestic violence, child protection, anti-corruption, environment, constitutional revisions, and political party activities.

Bulgarian NGOs have had success in opposing and supporting legislative proposals in Parliament. For example, the 2003 lobbying efforts by the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria resulted in the adoption of the first legislative step in fiscal decentralization, providing municipalities with the discretion to decide how to spend a small portion of their municipal budgets.

In **Estonia**, NENO, the Estonian Fund For Nature, the Movement of Estonian Villages and Small Towns and others have done well in helping to develop legislation, in the creation of the National Development Plan in the framework of the European Union's funds structure, and policy-making in the educational and environmental domains.

Lobbying of **Slovene** NGOs has been successful in issue areas such as rights to free legal aid, Humanitarian Organizations Law, Disabled Organizations Law, a little less at new Societies Act, Asylum Act, but absolutely unsuccessful at Freedom of Information Act.

It should be noted, however, that barriers to civil society-government partnerships still exist on both sides. Some of the ties between government officials and NGOs remain personal rather than institutional. In addition, public officials often distrust the mandate and / or competence of NGOs. Finally, many, especially young, civil society organizations are not always sufficiently familiar with lobbying methods and do not always have enough information about existing possibilities under the law or about the issues discussed.

Source: USAID, 2003

Table One
Advocacy Capacity of Eastern European Civil Societies: 1998-2004

Country / Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Bulgaria	2.8	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.5	2.5	2.5
Czech Republic	-	-	2.0	1.8	1.8	2.0	2.2
Estonia	-	-	2.0	1.8	2.1	2.0	2.0
Hungary	1.0	1.5	3.0	3.5	3.5	3.3	3.3
Latvia	4.0	-	3.0	2.2	2.0	2.0	2.0
Lithuania	2.0	1.5	2.0	2.0	1.8	1.6	2.0
Poland	2.0	2.5	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.2	1.9
Romania	3.5	4	3.5	4.5	4.0	3.8	3.6
Slovenia	-	-	-	-	-	3.0	3.8
Slovakia	2.0	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.6	2.2

Source: USAID

Legend:

The USAID “Advocacy” index measures: 1) the extent to which coalitions of NGOs have been formed around issues is considered, as well as whether NGOs monitor party platforms and government performance; 2) the prevalence of advocacy in different sectors, at different levels of government, as well as with the private sector is analyzed; 3) NGOs' record in influencing public policy. This dimension does not measure the level of NGOs' engagement with political parties.

- **Consolidation (1-3):** The NGO sector demonstrates the ability and capacity to mobilize citizens and other organizations to respond to changing needs, issues and interests of the community and country. As NGOs secure their institutional and political base, they begin to 1) form coalitions to pursue issues of common interest, including NGO legislation; 2) monitor and lobby political parties; and, 3) monitor and lobby legislatures and executive bodies. NGOs at this stage of development will review their strategies, and possess an ability to adapt and respond to challenges by sector.
- **Mid-Transition (3-5):** Narrowly defined advocacy organizations emerge and become politically active in response to specific issues. These organizations may often present their concerns to inappropriate levels of government and weakness of the legislative branch might be revealed or incorrectly assumed, as activists choose to meet with executive branch officials instead. Beginnings of alternative policy analysis are found at universities and think tanks. Information sharing and networking within the NGO sector to inform and advocate its needs within the government begins to develop.
- **Early Transition (5-7):** Broad umbrella movements, composed of activists concerned with a variety of sectors, and united in their opposition to the old regime fall apart or disappear. Some countries at this stage might not have even experienced any initial burst of activism. There may be an increase in passivity, cynicism, or fear within the general public. NGO activists may be afraid to engage in dialogue with the government, feel inadequate to offer their views and/or do not believe the government will listen to their recommendations.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, C. J., Blais, A., Bowler, S., Donovan, T. & Listhaug, O. (2005). *Losers' Consent: Elections and Democratic Legitimacy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Arato, F. (1991). *Revolution, Civil Society, and Democracy*. In Rau, Z. (Ed.), *The Reemergence of Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (pp. 161-76). Boulder: Westview Press.
- Baker, S. & Jehlicka, P. (1998). Dilemmas of Transition: the Environment, Democracy and Economic Reform in East Central Europe- An Introduction. *Environmental Politics*, 7, 1-26.
- Bernhard, M. (1996). Civil Society After the First Transition: Dilemmas of Post-communist Democratization in Poland and Beyond. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 29, 300-330.
- Carnaghan, E. (2001). Thinking about Democracy: Interviews with Russian Citizens. *Slavic Review*, 60, 336-364.
- Carson, T. (2001). Attitudes Toward Change, the Current Situation, and Civic Action in Ukraine. [Online]. Available: http://www.ifes.org/reg_activities/Pdf/Final_aug8.pdf.
- CEE BANKWATCH. (1998). Protest Against M0 Ringroad- Choking Ring around Budapest Tendered by EIB. [Online]. Available: <http://www.bankwatch.org/press/1998/press9.html>
- CEE BANKWATCH. (1999). EIB's Poor Transport Project Under Investigation by EU Ombudsman. [Online]. Available: <http://www.bankwatch.org/press/1999/press9.html>
- CEE BANKWATCH. (2002). Billions for Destroying the Environment? M0 Ring road, Hungary... [Online]. Available: <http://www.bankwatch.org/project.shtml?apc=-307250--1&x=161946&d=r>

- Crawford, B. & Lijphart, A. (1995). Explaining Political and Economic Change in Post-Communist Eastern Europe: Old Legacies, New Institutions, Hegemonic Norms, and International Pressures. *Comparative Political Studies*, 28, 171-199.
- Crotty, J. (2003). Managing Civil Society: Democratization and the Environmental Movement in a Russian Region. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 36, 489- 508.
- Ekiert, G. (1991). Democratization Processes in East Central Europe: A Theoretical Reconsideration. *British Journal of Political Science*, 21, 285-313.
- European Ombudsman. (2001). The Annual Report. [Online]. Available: http://www.euro-ombudsman.eu.int/report01/pdf/en/rap01_en.pdf
- Evans, A. B. (2002). Recent Assessment of Social Organizations in Russia. *Demokratizatsiya*, 10, 322-341.
- Gibson, J. (2001). Social Networks, Civil Society, and the Prospects for Consolidating for Russia's Democratic Transition. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(1), 51- 68.
- Glenn, J. & Mendelson, S. (Eds.). (2002). *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Eastern Europe and Eurasia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Greskovits, B. (1998). *The Political Economy of Protest and Patience : East European and Latin American Transformations Compared*. New York: Central European University Press.
- Henderson, S. (2002). Selling Civil Society: Western Aid and the Nongovernmental Sector in Russia. *Comparative Political Studies*, 35(2), 139-167.
- Henry, L. (2001). The Greening of Grassroots Democracy? The Russian Environmental Movement, Foreign Aid and Democratization. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies.

- Howard, M. M. (2003). *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jancar-Webster, B. (1998). Environmental Movements and Social Change in the Transition Countries. *Environmental Politics*, 7(1), 69-90.
- Klose, L. (2000). Lets Help the River: Volga NGO Builds Links with Local Government. *Journal on Civil Society in Eurasia*, 3, 7-8.
- Ledeneva, A. V. (1998). *Russia's Economy of Favors. Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marks, G. & McAdam, D. (1999). *On the Relationship of Political Opportunities to the Form of Collective Action: The Case of the European Union*. In della Porta, D., Kriesi, H. & Rucht, D. (Eds.), *Social Movements in a Globalizing World* (pp. 97-111). New York: St. Martin's Press.
- McAdam, D., Tarrow, S. & Tilly, C. (2001). *Dynamics of Contention*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mendelson, S. E. & Gerber, T. P. (2005). *Local Activist Culture and Transnational Diffusion: An Experiment in Social Marketing among Human Rights Groups in Russia*. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C.
- Michels, R. (1962). *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Miller, W., Grodeland, A. & Koshechkina, T. (1998). Are People Victims or Accomplices? The Use of Presents and Bribes to Influence Officials in Eastern Europe. *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, 29, 273-310.

- Narozhna, T. (2004). Foreign Aid for a Post-Euphoric Eastern Europe: the Limitations of Western Assistance in Developing Civil Society. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 7, 243-266.
- Nelson, D. (1996). Civil Society Endangered. *Social Research*, 63, 345-368.
- Nichols, T. M. (1996). Russian Democracy and Social Capital. *Social Science Information*, 35, 629-642.
- Ockenfels, A. & Weimann, J. (1996). Types and Patterns: An Experimental East-West Comparison of Co-operation and Solidarity. *Journal of Public Economics*, 71(2), 275-287.
- Osgood, M. & Ong, B. N. (2002). Social Capital Formation and Development in Marginal Communities with reference to Post-Soviet Societies. *Progress in Developmental Studies*, 1, 205- 219.
- Petrova, T. (2005). *From State Officials Turnover to State Capacity Turnaround*. Paper presented at the South East European Studies Association, Columbus, Ohio.
- Raiser, M., Haerpfer, C., Nowotny, T. & Wallace, C. (2001). *Social Capital in Transition: A First Look at the Evidence*. London: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
- Richter, J. (2002). Promoting Civil Society? Democracy Assistance and Russian Woman's Organizations. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 49, 30-41.
- Rose, R. (1993). Rethinking Civil Society: Postcommunism and the Problem of Trust. *Journal of Democracy*, 1, 18-29.

- Rose, R., Mishler, W. & Haerpfer, C. (1997). *Getting Real, Social Capital in Post Communist Societies*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Strathclyde, Studies in Public Policy.
- Rose, R. (2001). How People View Democracy: A Diverging Europe. *Journal of Democracy*, 12(1), 93-106.
- Rose-Ackerman, S. (2001). Trust, Honesty and Corruption: Reflection on the State-building Process. *European Journal of Sociology*, 42, 526-570.
- Smolar, A. (1996). Civil Society After Communism: From Opposition to Atomization. *Journal of Democracy*, 7(1), 24- 38.
- Theesfeld, I. (2004). Constraints on Collective Action in a Transitional Economy: The Case of Bulgaria's Irrigation Sector. *World Development*, 32(2), 251-271.
- Toepler, S. & Salamon, L. M. (2003). NGO Development in Central and Eastern Europe: An Empirical Overview. *East European Quarterly*, 37(3), 365- 378.
- UNDP. (2004). *Oценка na Obshtinskia I Oblastnia Kapacitet za Usvoiavane na Sredstvata ot Strukturnite Fondove I Fonda za Socialno Sblizhavane na Evropeiskia Suuz* [Evaluation of Municipal and District Capacity for EU Structural Funds Absorption]. Sofia: UNDP Bulgaria.
- USAID. (1999). *Lessons in Implementation: the NGO Story: Building Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe and the New Independent States*. [Online]. Available: www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/pdfs/lessonsnew.pdf
- USAID. (2001). *The 2001 NGO Sustainability Index: For Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*. [Online]. Available: www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/dem_gov/ngoindex/2001

USAID. (2003). The 2003 NGO Sustainability Index: For Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. [Online]. Available:

www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/dem_gov/ngoindex/2003

Weinthal, E. (2002). *State Making and Environmental Cooperation: Linking Domestic and International Politics in Central Asia*. Cambridge: MIT.

ⁱ Seven different dimensions of the NGO sector are analyzed in the Index: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, NGO infrastructure and public image. The Index database can be found at http://www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/dem_gov/ngoindex/ (April 17, 2006).

ⁱⁱ The survey was administered to all municipalities in Bulgaria by UNDP officials or their assistants from the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria and from the Foundation for Local Government Reform. The majority of the answers were provided by high-ranking municipal officials – a deputy mayor or a senior expert – and were validated through focus group discussions (UNDP, 2004).

ⁱⁱⁱ It is beyond the scope of this paper to speculate on the factors affecting low individual participation; however Howard (2003) and Greskovits (1998) among others have focused particularly on this issue.

Tsveta Petrova is a PhD student at the Department of Government at Cornell who is carrying out research on contentious politics in East-Central Europe.

Sidney Tarrow teaches government and sociology at Cornell; he is the author of the recently published *New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge 2005).

Acknowledgements: The authors wish to express their gratitude to Graham Saul of Friends of the Earth Canada for suggesting that we examine the rRing road episode in Bulgaria and to Andras Lukacs, founder and coordinator of the Hungarian Clean Air Action Group who provided us with information about the case. The authors also acknowledge the support of the Mellon-Sawyer Seminar on “Towards a Transnational and Transcultural Europe” at Cornell University and the comments of our colleagues in that group as well as of Bela Greskovits, Mark Howard, Sarah Mendelson, David Stark, Laszlo Bruszt, James Gibson, Charles Tilly, Beate Sissenich, and Ondrej Cisar.