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Changing Patterns of Civil Society in Europe and America 1995-2005

Is Eastern Europe Different?

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This article looks at developments in Eastern European civil society (as measured by the participation in organisations) and how this has changed between 1995 and 2005 using the World Values Survey. There are comparisons with Western Europe on the one hand and the United States on the other, which show that although civic participation of this kind has declined in the United States, it remains stable in Europe, including at a low level in Eastern Europe. Surprisingly, there seemed to be little differences between countries that had joined the European Union and those that had not. The article considers reasons for this continued weakness of civil society in Eastern Europe.

Keywords: *social capital; civil society; comparative values; Eastern Europe; social change*

The size and activation of civil society has been of concern throughout the world in the past decades. Civil society is seen as a central element of democratic and market-driven societies in classical political theory and was further developed in the context of modern democracies.¹ In the European Union (EU), the stimulation of civil society through active citizenship is seen as key to solving the “democratic deficit” resulting from the gulf between citizens and the ruling bodies of the EU, and a variety of stimulus programmes have been initiated. However, different European countries have very different traditions of civil society, with some countries having no historically dense network of associations and voluntary organisations that are linked to the welfare state or have played a key role in governance.² For example, the trade union movement is an essential part of the development of most Western European

societies and churches have likewise played a historically important part in particular European political and welfare systems.³ Hence, there are not only very different levels of participation across Europe, but the role and importance of associations also differ. For example, in the Nordic countries, the trade unions have been important in the administration of welfare, as have the Protestant and Catholic churches in countries such as Germany and Austria.

However, there are signs that the influence of civil society in European governance is declining. With increasing secularisation, the role of churches has declined and the influence of the trade union movement has waned with the loss of membership almost everywhere. In Southern Europe, civil society was underdeveloped in any case due to suppression under authoritarian regimes until the 1970s (except for the role of the Church).⁴ Robert Putnam has graphically described the contrasts between Northern and Southern Italy with respect to the development of civil society and its consequences for social progress and democracy.⁵ Others have argued, however, that civil society now takes different forms with a variety of spontaneous, localised, and non-organisational forms of participation taking place or mobilisation through internet campaigns, which do not necessarily imply conventional membership.⁶

Although the social movements of the 1980s were seen as evidence of the reawakening of civil society in Eastern Europe,⁷ civil society is generally regarded as weak.⁸ The weakness of civil society in Eastern Europe has been discussed at great length, but reasons proposed include the suppression of free speech and association under communism⁹ and slow progress in creating organisations after the fall of communism in a climate of distrust, suspicion of formal institutions, and economic collapse, which lead to people being concerned with the struggle for existence rather than participating in public life.¹⁰ Furthermore, the collapse of communism was associated with widespread anomie,¹¹ or the failure to understand the new rules of the game and a lack of perspective in life, which mitigated against public participation.

Why could there be a general reluctance to join voluntary associations in Eastern European countries? In the post-communist countries, independent civil society was generally suppressed by the communist authorities in favour of state-sponsored forms of participation such as youth organisations and communist parties.¹² When the regimes collapsed, so did much of the membership of these organisations, leaving a vacuum in civic participation that has not yet been filled. Arguably however, the mass mobilisations that overthrew the former communist regimes were a form of spontaneous civic participation as was evidenced in the kinds of names that they spawned such as “Civic Forum” or the more disguised “colour revolutions.” Indeed, this built on the anti-political politics that emerged in the form of personal gestures of non-conformity as in the case of the Czech Republic, embodied in Vaclav Havel,¹³ and/or sustained by small networks of closely trusted friends.¹⁴ Civil society was a force of mobilisation against the state in places like Poland (through the Catholic Church and Solidarity trade union movement) during the 1980s.¹⁵ However, civil society

presented itself rather in initially effective social movements that then became weaker and politically dissipated in the post-communist era once they no longer constituted an oppositional force but having succeeded in overthrowing the authorities.

Nevertheless, citizens of Eastern European societies overwhelmingly welcomed the freedom to join civil society institutions and Western donors sponsored a variety of NGOs. Yet despite the infusion of organisations and funding, a large number of these organisations were often sponsored from abroad, reflecting external concerns rather than indigenous interests.¹⁶ Hence, they were “top down” in character rather than membership driven, which meant that they did not succeed in abolishing a legacy of distrust in public organisations. The latter was also compounded by deep general distrust in political and civic institutions that emerged after communism.¹⁷ One exception was religion, which appeared to enjoy a new fluorescence in some countries as it was evidenced in the wholesale construction of churches and the expansion of religious communities during the early transition period.¹⁸ Another exception was some of the political mobilisations that helped to overthrow unpopular post-communist regimes, such as in Slovakia, Serbia, or Ukraine. However, these remained forms of civic action outside of regular organisational or associative activity and did not lead to strengthening formal channels of participation in an emerging civil society. We would therefore argue that civil society generally takes non-organisational forms in Eastern and Central Europe, something leading to low levels of participation in voluntary associations. Although these low levels or lack of formal participation should thus not be equated with a lack of civic spiritedness per se, formal associations have the advantage of being more publicly visible and enabling integration into the political processes. Hence, we would argue that a weak establishment of this sort of civil society nevertheless remains problematic and worth examining.

But is Eastern Europe with its low levels of participation in voluntary associations really the exception? In the remainder of this work, we will juxtapose the development of participatory practices in Eastern European countries with other world regions to see if there is any general trend. It therefore remains important to look at the particular forms that civil society takes in Eastern and Central Europe and also at how these have changed over time and compare this to developments elsewhere. Is civil society being (re)built in Eastern Europe? Or is the initial enthusiasm for reform withering away? Or is measuring involvement in voluntary associations the wrong way to seek meaningful answers to these questions?

The model for active civil society is usually taken as the United States. One of the earliest champions of civil society, Alexis de Toqueville saw America in the 1830s as a place where “Americans of all ages, all stages in life, and all types of disposition, are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations that will take part, but others of a thousand different types—religious, moral, serious [and] futile.”¹⁹ We should remember, however, that the

model of civil society in America was usually seen as one separate from and checking the power of the state rather than more intricately interwoven with the state, as was usually the case in Europe.

Recent critics have argued that civil society is declining in the United States too. Putnam,²⁰ for example, has influentially argued that as the generation of active participants grows older and people have more pressures on their time through increasing activity in the workplace, commuting, watching television and so on, the amount of time people are prepared to invest in voluntary associations is declining. In the United States, as in Europe, we would therefore expect to find a decline in civil society and we would expect this to follow generational patterns.

The argument hinges of course on how we define civil society. In most commentaries, it means the free association of people above the level of the individual and below the level of the state. It means the freedom to speak out and to participate in politics and public life. One measure of civil society is usually civil society associations, and this can be measured using the percentage of enrolment in these institutions and the number of these institutions altogether. Although it could be argued that loose networks, specific mobilisations, and internet networks could have replaced organisational associations in more recent times, it is nevertheless mainly the organisations that can play a key role in democratic society through their lobbying potential and through their use in consultation exercises. Thus, whilst not being the only evidence of civil society, they are a key element.

There are nevertheless a multitude of civil society organisations, and it could be argued that whilst some are more overtly political (e.g., trade unions, political parties, and environmental groups) others are less political (e.g., sports and leisure associations). Yet these latter associations can also form important political lobbies at key moments or form part of political consultation exercises. They also represent a “space” through which interactions can take place between different actors in society. It might also be argued that the nature of the interaction with civil society is also important; hence, simply paying a subscription is not the same as becoming actively involved, and Putnam²¹ rejects the idea that civil society can promote social capital if it is not face-to-face. However, we could also argue (in the context of Eastern Europe) that the fact that these associations exist and can be shown to have some kind of membership means that they can still play a part in democratic change. Furthermore, the fact that an association has few members does not necessarily mean that it is not a powerful association, although the enrolment rates must be some indication of the kind of political muscle that an association can wield.

In this article, we examine the development of participation in civil society associations over the period 1995–2005 comparing four main regions: Western Europe, the new member states of Eastern Europe, the Soviet regions of Eastern Europe, and the United States. We distinguish between those eastern European countries that have joined the EU in 2004/2007 (Poland, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Romania) and those Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that have not (Moldova, Ukraine,

and Russia). We might expect there to be differences between these two groups of countries because in the EU countries participation has been encouraged by the EU, by the Council of Europe, and by other agencies as a way of paving the path to democratisation, whilst in the CIS countries this has not been the case. Indeed, in Russia independent civil society has been actively suppressed as potentially threatening to the regime and the same was the case in Belarus. Although these represent very different regions in terms of historical development, the comparison is interesting because we wish to see if more recent developments are the same.

The participation in civil society is measured through membership of a range of civil society associations as measured by the World Values Survey. By using this source we are able to look at changes over time, at the different kinds of organisations that people might join, at the levels of participation, and at the differences between countries. Given the low level of participation in most countries, only descriptive analysis is possible and it makes no sense to break these participants down by gender, age, and sub-national regions such as urban, rural, etc. although we acknowledge that such an analysis would certainly be interesting.

Therefore our three main hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1: There will have been a decline in civil society enrolment in the United States and in Western Europe between 1995 and 2005.

Hypothesis 2: There would have been an increase in civil society enrolment in Eastern Europe between 1995 and 2005.

Hypothesis 3: There would be a difference in the development of civil society between those countries that joined the EU and those that are in the CIS, with participation in civil society being higher in the former.

Data and Methods

This article examines data from the World Values Survey, waves 3 and 5. In both waves, respondents were asked whether they are inactive or active members of a list of types of voluntary associations or whether they do not belong to them at all. The wording of the questions was, "Here is a list of voluntary organizations. For each one, please indicate whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization." The types of voluntary associations asked at both points in time were (1) churches or religious organisations; (2) sport or recreational organisations; (3) art, music, or educational organisations; (4) labour unions; (5) political parties; (6) environmental organisations; (7) professional organisations; (8) humanitarian or charitable organisations; and (9) other types of voluntary associations.

Participation in voluntary associations is often measured by lumping together all types of associations and creating an aggregated count index of civil society in a rather broad sense for individuals and countries. Depending on the number of types of

voluntary associations, these indices have a different range; however, high values are always interpreted in a way relating to a higher level of participation in associations, a higher degree of associational life, and also a stronger, or more vibrant, civil society. Whilst we also present results based on such an overall index, we additionally concentrate on five subtypes of voluntary associations in more detail. These types correspond to some important sectors of society in general and civil society in particular. On this note, we look at religious organisations such as the Church (type 1 above), political organisations in terms of political parties (5), organisations that represent the interests of people in the labour market/economy (4 and 7), voluntary associations occupied with a global agenda, such as the protection of the environment or humanitarian aid (6 and 8), and, finally, leisure associations such as sport clubs and art or music associations (2 and 3). Arguably, a “weak civil society” could still include a “strong” subarea, such as high levels of participation in trade unions but nothing else. On the contrary, a strong civil society could show low levels of participation in one or two subsections compensated for by other dimensions of civil society. Hence, splitting up formal participation in civil society associations into some of its components does make sense from an analytical perspective. This allows us to shed more light on the subdimensions of civil society and examine the composition of civil society in Eastern Europe in more detail—as well as contrasting this to Western regions.

We calculate an indicator addressing the intensity of participation for the overall measure of participation and for participation in each sector. At the individual level, these indices take value 0 when there is no involvement in one type of voluntary association, value 1 if one respondent is an inactive member, and value 2 if a respondent actively engages (participates) in a voluntary association. Where two or more types of voluntary associations belong to the same sector of civil society, we compute an equally weighted sum index also ranging from 0 to 2. We then aggregate these indices to the country level where scores provide (rough) insights into the development and size of civil society from the voluntary association perspective. For instance, whilst a value of 2 at the country level would indicate that every respondent within a given country is an active member—a quite unlikely result though—a value of 1 would mean that “on average” every respondent is an inactive member. In this case, non-participation is balanced by the most intensive form of engagement, that is, active participation. Hence, the higher the scores at the country level, the more civil society is developed in this country when using this participation in voluntary associations approach.

We present descriptive findings concerning participation levels in voluntary associations in civil society along our fivefold sectors of civil society. We start with the latest findings taken from the fifth wave of the World Values Surveys (fielded between 2005 and 2008 in various countries). To facilitate description, we group countries into regions in the first place. Results from country-specific analyses can be found in the appendix. We distinguish between Eastern European countries that are members of the EU today (four countries: Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia; *EU Eastern Europe*) and those that are not members of the EU (Moldova, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation; *non-EU Eastern Europe*). For reasons of

comparison, we also look at Western European countries, where we distinguish among *Nordic* countries (Finland, Sweden), *Central Western European* countries (Germany and Switzerland), and *Southern European* countries (Spain). We also include the United States and, however, only available for 1995/1996 some *Balkan* countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro) and countries from the *Caucasus* (Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia).²²

Since more countries were included in the earlier wave than in the second wave, we first present the two waves separately and then compare the countries that were found in both waves.

By including the United States, we draw upon classic notions of civil society in which the United States was deemed to be a leading example.²³ Although it could be argued that participation in civil society has a different tradition in Europe²⁴ and surely different again in the post-communist countries, comparisons with the United States enable us to better consider the extent to which European countries are like or unlike each other and how far trends in participation reflect global trends.

Results

Table 1 addresses participation scores in each sector of civil society in each region in 2005–2008. In general, participation in civil society associations is considerably lower in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe (with the exception of Southern Europe) and the United States. This is true for all types of voluntary associations and for participation in churches and religious organisations in particular. It is intriguing that differences between the two Eastern European regions are quite small for every type of association as shown by almost the same values for EU and non-EU Eastern European countries. However, we should also note that levels of participation in civil society associations are somewhat higher in Moldova compared to other Eastern European countries and Russia (see Table 1).

Generally speaking, in 2005 people are most likely to participate in churches and other religious associations, no matter where they live. Whilst this only amounts to average scores of approximately 0.25 in Eastern Europe, in the United States the average citizen is an “inactive member” of a religious organisation. In other words, whereas only one of four persons is an inactive member of a church in Eastern Europe on average (and the remaining three people are not involved at all), four of four people are inactive members in the United States. Most clearly, no other region has similarly high levels of engagement in religious associations, though an average of 0.79 in the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden) is also quite high. People in Central and Nordic Europe most often join sport clubs (or other leisure organisations), followed by people in the States, Southern Europe. Eastern Europe also comes at the bottom here with lowest levels of engagement. This is also true for other types of voluntary association be they active in the labour market/economy, politics, or involved in global affairs. Similarly low levels, however, are found in Southern Europe (Spain).

Table 1
Participation in Civil Society in 2005–2007 by Country (Means)

Country	Church	Leisure	Economy/ Labour Market	Political Party	Global Civil Society	Total Civil Society
Eastern European countries						
(EU)						
Bulgaria	0.06	0.04	0.07	0.07	0.02	0.39
Poland	0.36	0.18	0.15	0.09	0.11	0.16
Romania	0.15	0.03	0.07	0.06	0.01	0.05
Slovenia	0.41	0.37	0.24	0.09	0.17	0.24
Eastern European countries						
(non-EU)						
Moldova	0.46	0.22	0.23	0.12	0.10	0.19
Ukraine	0.22	0.13	0.16	0.09	0.06	-
Russian Federation	0.14	0.16	0.14	0.06	0.06	0.10
Nordic European countries						
Finland	0.97	0.43	0.40	0.17	0.20	0.35
Sweden	0.61	0.56	0.48	0.13	0.27	0.44
Central European countries						
Germany	0.60	0.51	0.16	0.08	0.12	0.25
Switzerland	0.76	0.69	0.32	0.24	0.37	0.57
Southern European countries						
Spain	0.30	0.20	0.10	0.06	0.10	0.12
United States	1.04	0.43	0.31	0.64	0.33	0.68

Source: World Values Survey 2005 (wave 5); data weighted (design weights used).

Note: Means of scales of 0 to 2 where higher values indicate higher involvement in civil society (sectors).

The examination of the total level of engagement in voluntary associations, including both active and inactive members, yields the following picture. For both EU and Non-EU Eastern Europe as well as for Southern Europe (Spain), mean scores below 0.20 on a scale of 0 to 2 illustrate that even inactive membership is not widespread among the respective populations: one or fewer people of five engage in inactive ways on average. This is particularly the case for political parties and types of associations concerned with the environment and humanitarian agendas (global civil society associations) in almost every region. Hence, the upshot of this analysis is that levels of participation in voluntary associations are very low in Eastern Europe and the lowest in a cross-national perspective. However, apart from the high levels of participation in church and religious organisations in the United States, we must also acknowledge that participation in voluntary associations is generally low across all comparison regions, especially Southern Europe but also in many instances in Central Western European countries (Germany, Switzerland).

How do these findings compare to 1995? Table 2 now presents data for 1995–1996 and shows a rather similar picture emerging. Civil society in terms of participation in voluntary associations in the United States and Western Europe was much more

Table 2
Participation in Civil Society in 1995–1996 by Country (Means)

Country	Church	Leisure	Economy/ Labour Market	Political Party	Global Civil Society	Total Civil Society
Eastern European countries (EU)						
Bulgaria	0.04	0.05	0.10	0.08	0.02	0.05
Czech Republic	0.21	0.24	0.16	0.09	0.06	0.16
Estonia	0.14	0.18	0.10	0.03	0.03	0.09
Hungary	0.30	0.14	0.18	0.06	0.06	0.14
Latvia	0.17	0.14	0.16	0.04	0.03	0.10
Lithuania	0.17	0.10	0.07	0.04	0.03	0.07
Poland	-	-	-	0.02	-	-
Romania	0.53	0.14	0.22	0.17	0.08	0.18
Slovakia	0.38	0.18	0.16	0.09	0.06	0.16
Slovenia	0.37	0.21	0.25	0.06	0.09	0.19
Eastern European countries (non-EU)						
Moldova	0.45	0.14	0.24	0.04	0.06	0.15
Belarus	0.10	0.08	0.24	0.02	0.02	0.09
Ukraine	0.11	0.07	0.20	0.02	0.02	0.08
Russian Federation	0.07	0.09	0.25	0.03	0.02	0.09
Balkan						
Albania	0.26	0.14	0.14	0.47	0.03	0.15
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.57	0.38	0.36	0.49	0.24	0.36
Croatia	0.71	0.27	0.27	0.12	0.12	0.25
Macedonia	0.22	0.23	0.22	0.27	0.17	0.21
Serbia and Montenegro	0.13	0.14	0.20	0.16	0.07	0.13
Caucasus						
Azerbaijan	0.06	0.09	0.17	0.08	0.02	0.08
Armenia	0.97	1.06	1.01	1.01	1.01	1.02
Georgia	0.02	0.07	0.04	0.06	0.01	0.04
Nordic European countries						
Finland	0.91	0.37	0.33	0.12	0.14	0.33
Norway	0.40	0.50	0.49	0.19	0.22	0.38
Sweden	0.37	0.54	0.49	0.20	0.22	0.40
Central European countries						
Germany	0.60	0.53	0.22	0.11	0.21	0.32
Switzerland	0.66	0.66	0.27	0.19	0.26	0.36
Southern European countries						
Spain	0.60	0.28	0.15	0.10	0.14	0.22
United States	1.27	0.66	0.44	0.70	0.52	0.64

Source: World Values Survey 1995 (wave 3); data weighted (design weights used).

Note: Means of scales of 0 to 2, where higher values indicate higher involvement in civil society (sectors).

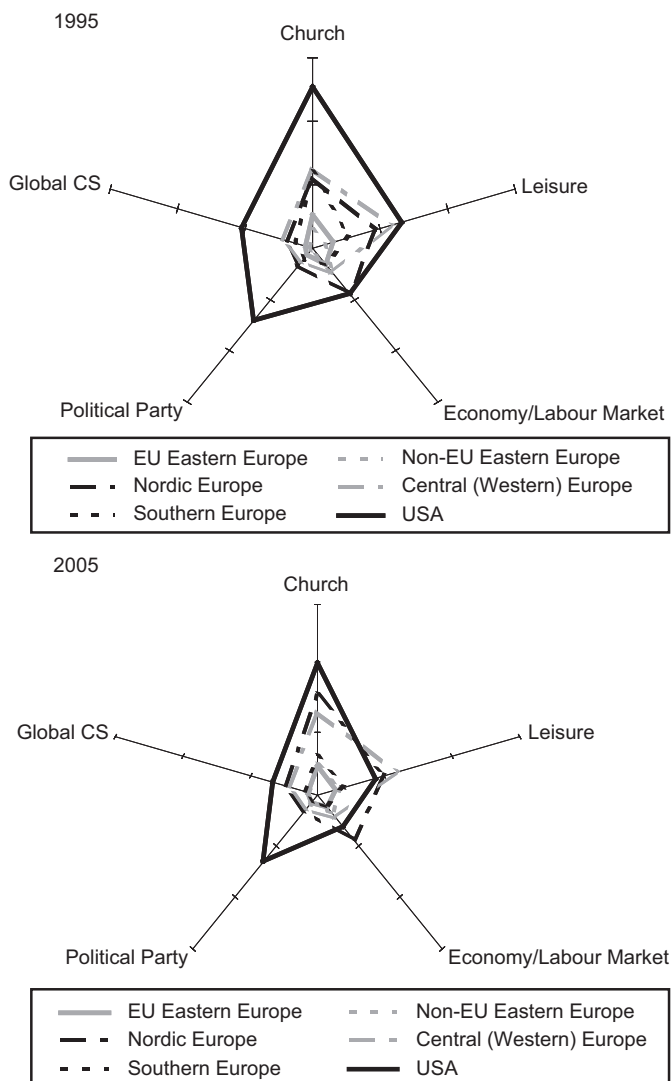
widespread ten years previously. Eastern European countries scored considerably lower than Western regions on one hand and absolutely low on the other, confirming Howard's analysis of the earlier wave.

Since we are interested in a comparison of the development of participation in civil society associations, we now move on to a juxtaposition of levels of involvement in 2005–2008 and 1995–1996. Figure 1 illustrates the size and shape of patterns of participation in voluntary associations according to the five aforementioned sectors: church and religion, leisure, labour market/economy, politics, and global affairs. The radar charts allow assessing the size of participation on a star-like diagram. The further “outward” a score in a given country/region, the more widespread is participation in the particular sector. Moreover, these charts also provide a “shape” for patterns of participation in voluntary associations by bringing all five dimensions together. The area then refers to the particular shapes of civil society as measured here. Figure 1 then shows these “shapes” or “sizes” for each region in 1995 and 2005.

Starting in chronological order, Figure 1 shows clear patterns. The United States had by far the largest levels of participation in civil society associations as indicated by the area delimited by the solid black line in 1995–1996. In this respect, it can be said that civil society in all other regions was only a fraction of the one in the United States, with the notable exception of participation in labour market/economy associations in Northern European countries (Finland, Sweden). Further to this, participation in this sort of civil society took quite similar forms across Eastern and Western European countries in 1995—though at very different levels. The overlap of the lines/areas referring to these regions is a clear sign that similar shapes occur at different levels of intensity. Civil society in EU Eastern and Non-EU Eastern countries was only a fraction of Western European countries, as Eastern European countries are clearly “within” the area of their Western neighbours. Figure 1 further shows how low the levels of participation in civil society associations are in Eastern Europe in 1995.²⁵ Within Western European countries we can clearly depict differences in participation levels in the Nordic countries, Central Western European countries, and those of Southern Europe. In Nordic countries, levels of participation in trade unions and business associations are as high as in the United States; in Central Western Europe, the level of participation in leisure organisations is almost as high as in the United States; and in all Western European regions, participation in churches and other religious associations is approximately of the same strength.

Moving on to 2005 and later, some interesting changes in participation in civil society can be reported by comparing the left-hand side (1995–1996) and right-hand side (2005–2008) charts in Figure 1. First and foremost, it catches the eye that civil society in the United States (black solid lines) has considerably declined during this ten-year period. The decline in participation rates in the United States concerns all sectors of civil society, though leisure associations and global civil society associations are the most affected. This is shown by the shrinkage and change of shape

Figure 1
The “Shape” and “Size” of Participation Patterns in Civil Society Voluntary Associations: Participation in Civil Society in Seven World Regions in 1995–1996 (top) and 2005–2008 (bottom)



Source: World Values Surveys 1995 (wave 3) and 2005 (wave 5); data weighted (design weights used). Note: Scales of 0 to 2 where higher values indicate higher involvement in civil society sectors. Each step on the axis marks a unit value of 0.5.

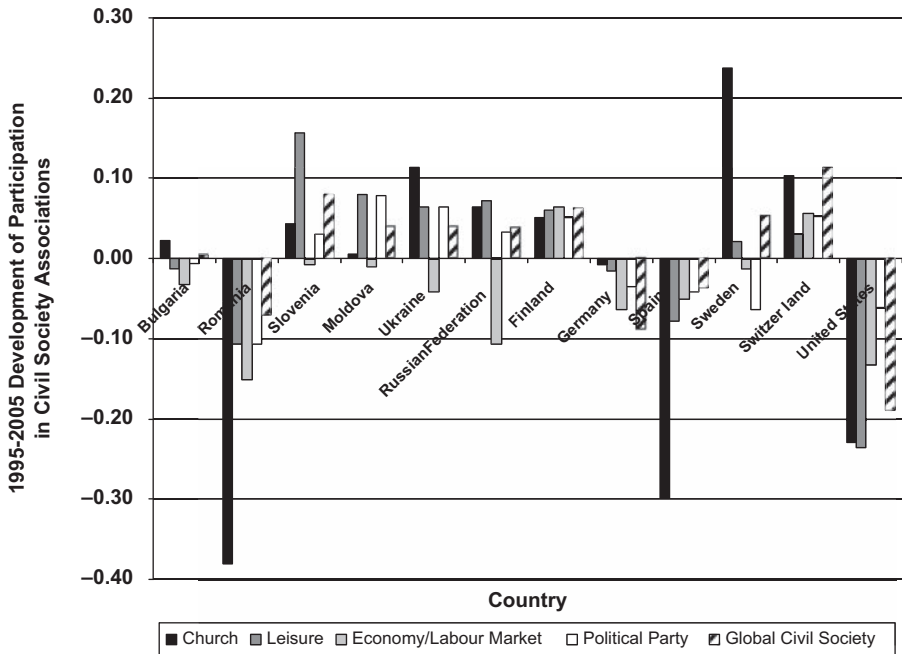
of the area delimited by the solid U.S. line. In two sectors of civil society, the United States have been overtaken by people from other world regions as the latter express higher levels of participation in several sections of civil society. On this note, levels of participation in leisure organisations are highest in Central Western Europe, and participation in trade unions and professional organisations is highest in the Nordic European countries instead of the United States being in the lead.

Another important finding is that in most Western European countries changes over the decade are minimal which is evidenced by more or less the same shapes and sizes of the areas isolated by the various lines. Southern European countries (Spain) are the only exception to this where levels of participation in churches decreased notably. As for other regions, especially Eastern Europe, it is difficult to depict a pattern from Figure 1. This is mainly because of the low level of civil society in general and the small changes in particular. It can be clearly seen in Figure 1 that the area covered by Eastern European regions are the smallest ones and, indeed, they are very small, indicating exceptionally low levels of participation in civic associations. Another interesting aspect is that in 2005, civil society in all Eastern European regions is again a fraction of Western civil society. This is again evidenced by the circumstance that the corresponding areas in the right-hand chart are part of the area of Western European countries.

Finally, we want to comment on these changes in more detail. Note that Figure 1 compares regions although we do not have data on all countries representing these regions for both points in time. Now we look more thoroughly at each country separately for which data are available for the full 10-year period. Figure 2 presents net developments concerning the levels of participation in the five sectors of civil society. Data for both points in time are made available for Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovenia (Eastern European EU countries); Moldova, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation (Eastern European non-EU country); Finland, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland (Western European countries); and the United States at the time of analysis.

The chart depicts the “net change” in the size of participation in the five subsections of civil society. We start with scores from 2005 and subtract the scores from 1995 representing the level of participation in voluntary associations. Hence, negative scores indicate a decline in levels of participation; positive ones, a growth in participatory levels. Most interestingly, there are no clear country patterns as far as the development of civil society is concerned. We can see that there are hardly any changes in Bulgaria. The biggest overall changes occur in the United States and Romania, where we observe a large decrease in participation levels in every one of the five sectors already reflected in the works of Putnam.²⁶ On a much smaller scale, we find a decline in Germany and Spain. In the latter country, churches and other religious organisations record a considerable decline. In the remaining countries, we rather observe a growth of participatory patterns in civil society, although on a very modest scale and with the general exception of growth in participating in associations

Figure 2
The Growth of Civil Society in Selected Countries between 1995 and 2005:
Net Changes in the Level of Participation in Voluntary Associations



Source: World Values Surveys 1995 (wave 3) and 2005 (wave 5); data weighted (design weights used). Note: Original scales of 0 to 2 where higher values indicate higher involvement in civil society sectors. Net changes are shown as difference in participation in civil society sectors in 2005 and 1995. Positive scores refer to an increase in participatory levels; negative scores refer to a decline in participation levels. Most of these changes are statistically significant, with the exceptions of change in participation levels in church and religious organisations in Slovenia, Moldova, and Germany; in leisure organisations in Bulgaria, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland; in associations active in the economy/labour market in Slovenia, Moldova, and Sweden; in political parties in Bulgaria; and, finally, in global civil society associations, also in Bulgaria.

active in the economy (professional organisations) and labour unions. This is largely the case in Slovenia, Ukraine, Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland. In the Ukraine and Russian Federation, we observe a steep decline of membership and participation in trade unions.²⁷ In Sweden, we notice a relatively large increase in participation in churches and religious organisations, whereas levels of participation in other sectors of civil society grew only a little.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our first hypothesis predicted that there would be a decline in civil society in Western Europe and the United States with the decline in support for Trade Unions and religious organisations. However, we can see that in general in Western Europe, there was a relatively stable pattern with some regional variations: a rise in Switzerland and Finland and a decline in Germany and Spain, the latter accounted for by radical loss of participation in the church, something we could predict from the rapid modernisation of that country following accession to the EU. However, in the United States there is a strong and dramatic decline in civil society membership across all sectors, something that fits with Putnam's thesis. Therefore insofar as there is a decline in participation across this period, it applies mainly to the United States and not to Europe.

Turning now to Eastern Europe, using data from the World Values Survey, our analysis shows that there is in general little change in the development of civil society in Eastern Europe over the period 1995–2008. Levels of participation in voluntary associations are still low and there is only limited indication of growth. Is this surprising? Based on our knowledge of patterns of civic participation and civil society in general, we should conclude that it is not surprising. Eastern Europeans are not prone to join associations in any case, but in most other countries there are not large numbers either.

Our study confirms previous research supporting the claim that levels of participation are lower in Eastern Europe. What is new is, however, a perspective on the development of civil society from the mid-1990s to 2005–2008. This comparison shows that the development of civil society within Eastern Europe is not uniform, a finding that was already highlighted much earlier²⁸ and is also supported by within-country differences in civic participation.²⁹ Whereas we find a dramatic decline in participation levels in Romania (mainly led, like in Spain, by declining church membership), there is a small rise in participation in Slovenia, Moldova, and Ukraine, whereas in Bulgaria everything remained more or less at the same low level. Therefore, our second hypothesis is only partially confirmed. The fact that Slovenia saw a rise in participation would seem to confirm our third hypothesis, but because we lack other Accession countries for the purpose of comparison, this would have to await confirmation from more extensive analysis.

Our third hypothesis predicted that there would be a difference between the EU member states and the more authoritarian CIS countries where civil society has been suppressed. Interestingly, there is no clear difference between EU Eastern European countries and those that are not member states. This is rather surprising since in some countries civil society was suppressed (Russia and Belarus) and in others it was encouraged (e.g., the new member states of the EU). One explanation might be that in Russia there has been a growth of state-sponsored civil society organisations, such as youth organisations, as well as nationalist and authoritarian associations, which

have gained membership over the period. Does this represent participation in civil society in the conventional sense? It should certainly prevent us from talking about a decline in civil society at any rate.

We should thus relate this to a larger picture including the trends in other regions of the world, mainly the West. There we find a notable decline in participation levels, especially in the United States. It is thus not particularly negative to find low levels of civic participation in voluntary associations in Eastern Europe in a period when civic participation is often discussed and attempts are made to encourage it, but it is not necessarily rising in other parts of the world either.

The upshot is that civil society in Eastern Europe was weak and remains weak, although there are some signs of growth. The observed changes do not offer an indication that this will change (dramatically) in the near future. And why should it? What we also have shown is that the patterns of participation in Eastern Europe approximately parallel those in Western countries, despite internal variation across the region and on a different scale. By comparing what types of voluntary associations people participate in, we observe the trend that Eastern Europeans choose more and more the same types as do Western Europeans and Americans. This brings some evidence of a “Westernisation” of civil society in Eastern Europe. Some critics have argued that these measures of civil society measure Eastern Europe against a Western yardstick, using indicators drawn from very different historical experiences.³⁰ The future will then show whether there will be more convergence between Eastern and Western European countries or whether they start to take a different direction.

The findings presented here are at a descriptive level. Measuring civil society necessarily remains a difficult task. In large-scale surveys, this is often done with indicators of participation in voluntary associations. We use these indicators from the World Values Survey waves 3 and 5 in our study and present intriguing insights in the development of civil society in mainly Eastern Europe; however, we also provide a reference to some Western European countries and the United States. We should thus be aware that participation in voluntary associations is not the only way to capture civil society. Nevertheless, formal associations play an important role in shaping policies at the state level and beyond. Formal associations represent persons, groups, legal bodies, or ideas and give them a voice through channels that are not accessible for more spontaneous formations of civil engagement, such as social movements or demonstrations. Formal associations are continuously contributing to policy shaping and making and therefore might be more sustainable and successful than other forms, depending, of course, on the political climate. It remains, however, to be seen whether this way of measuring civic participation is the most appropriate instrument for an analysis of civil society in Eastern Europe. However, other research points towards the finding that non-organisational forms of activity have declined in these countries as well,³¹ indicating that with the social movements of the early 1990s, civil society has withered away, has been marginalised³² or, on a more optimistic note, taken different forms, for instance web-based participation.³³

Hence, examining the levels of membership of different associations does help us make comparisons with other countries and over time, which can be illuminating especially in a cross-national comparative perspective. It is, however, only one aspect, although arguably an important one, when exploring civil society in Eastern Europe and beyond. Future research should analyse these aspects from various angles contributing to a more holistic picture of Eastern Europe's civil society.

Notes

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16. cf. Velina P. Petrova, "Civil Society in Post-Communist Eastern Europe and Eurasia: A Cross-National Analysis of Micro and Macro-Factors," *World Development* 35 (2007): 1277–305.

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18. Oleg Kharkhordin, "Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50 (1998): 949–68.

19. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 65, cited in William Outhwaite and Larry Ray, *Social Theory and Postcommunism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 153.

20. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

21. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

22. Countries included are Bulgaria*, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland*, Romania*, Slovakia, Slovenia*, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova*, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Ukraine*, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Russian Federation*, Finland*, Germany*, Norway, Spain*, Sweden*, Switzerland*, and the United States*. The asterisk marks countries available in both waves, 1995 and 2005.

23. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*; Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*; Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty*; Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

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25. Howard, *Weakness of Civil Society*.

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27. cf. Paul Kubicek, "Civil Society, Trade Unions and Post-Soviet Democratization: Evidence from Russia and Ukraine." *Europe-Asia Studies* 54 (2002): 603–24.

28. E.g., Michael Bernhard, "Civil Society and Democratic Transition in East-Central Europe," *Political Science Quarterly* 108 (1993): 307–26.

29. E.g., Gabriel Badesco and Sum E. Paul, "Historical Legacies, Social Capital and Civil Society: Comparing Romania on a Regional Level," *Europe-Asia Studies* 57 (2005): 117–33.

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Corrigendum

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In this article, published in the February 2012 issue, the name of one of the authors in endnote 29 was incorrectly listed as "Sum E. Paul." It should be "Paul E. Sum."

The correct endnote should be as follows:

E.g., Gabriel Bădescu and Paul E. Sum, "Historical Legacies, Social Capital and Civil Society: Comparing Romania on a Regional Level," *Europe-Asia Studies* 57 (2005): 117-33.