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Civic Engagement and Democracy in Romania and Bulgaria*

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The transition to democracy and consolidation were generally explained by processes conditioned by the former communist structures (the *path dependency* theory), or by processes determined by the competition between recent political actors (the *competition* theory). The former emphasizes the conflicts affecting the elites and their conversion according to the new political environment, while the latter emphasizes the generation of new political rules according to the specific interests of these competing actors¹. Both perspectives consider the capitals and strategies of actors participating in the process of transformation of the economic property, institutions and democratic rules. But the wide differences in the consolidation of democracy suggest that other factors – cultural factors – must also be considered. These kinds of factors were highly praised when the classic study of Almond and Verba was published in the '60s, but have been neglected since that time². The discussion on the importance of cultural factors in the democratic process was instigated by Putnam's research on democratic performance in the early '90s, in terms of social capital³.

This article intends to determine if social trust and participation in voluntary associations assist in supporting democratic values in two East European countries and whether those who participate differ from the general public in terms of political interest and political competence. If it be the case, those who participate are a hope for democracy in the region, working for the dissemination of democratic values and significantly influencing the political system.

The countries we focus on are Romania and Bulgaria. They are the last candidate countries expected to join the European Union from the "wave" of former communist states. Even if the two countries match the political criteria for EU accession, they face similar economic and social problems. They are also similar in terms of corruption, democratic consolidation and civil society weakness, which make the difference from the other 10 former candidate countries in Central and Eastern Europe. With the knowledge that citizens from the former communist countries are not quite satisfied with the performance of their new elected governments, the weakness of civil society can threaten democratic consolidation in the context of internal economic and social crisis.

* I want to thank Alina Mungiu-Pippidi for the access to the data from a SAR-CURS survey.

¹ Dumitru SANDU, *Spațiul social al tranziției*, Polirom, Iași, 1999.

² Gabriel A. ALMOND, Sidney VERBA, *The Civic Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1963.

³ Robert D. PUTNAM, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993.

THE RESEARCH ON SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital can be defined as a resource that helps individuals to acquire mutual benefits they wouldn't otherwise get, a social resource that makes people cooperate and pursue common objectives more effectively¹. For Putnam, social capital "refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions"².

It is obvious, emphasizes van Schaik, that social capital is a multifaceted phenomenon which needs multiple indicators³. This may explain why the measurement of social capital was made, according to Flap, in an *ad-hoc*, pragmatic and un-systematic manner⁴. Narayan and Cassidy have already made an inventory and have pointed out the large diversity of social capital measures, confirming the findings made by Flap⁵. Although the exact relationship between the components of social capital remains unclear, van Schaik underlines that there seems to be an agreement on the main constituents of the social capital. At least two components figure in almost all definitions, i.e. *the generalized trust* and *the participation in civil society*.

Trust is considered important because it facilitates communication, pursuit of common goals, and plays an essential role in solving problems raised by collective action. Putnam turns trust into the basis of all cooperation between individuals. Social trust is generally measured by the question: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?". Two replies are possible: 1. most people can be trusted; 2. can't be too careful. This is the way both World Values Surveys and European Values Surveys measure social trust.

Participation in civil society could be formal and informal. It can refer to the engagement in informal networks or relations (that is being socially active) or to the engagement in formal networks or relations (that is being a member of a voluntary organization or /and doing voluntary work for an organization). Whereas the first type of engagement – the informal connection – is measured by the amount of time one spends with friends, with colleagues from work or outside the work place or with people at church, the second type of engagement is measured by the number of organizations one is an active member of. Moreover, another indicator of the formal engagement is the number of organizations one is doing voluntary work for. And, according to Putnam, it does not really matter what kind of organization it is. The consequences of participation do really matter, whereas "networks of civic engagement [...] represent intense horizontal interaction"⁶.

¹ Dietlind STOLLE, "Social Capital – A New Research Agenda? Toward an Attitudinal Approach", paper presented at the European Consortium for Political Research Workshop, Copenhagen, 2000.

² Robert D. PUTNAM, *Making Democracy Work...cit.*, p. 167.

³ Ton VAN SCHAİK, "Social Capital in the European Values Surveys", paper prepared for the OECD-ONS International Conference on Social Capital Measurement, London, September 2002.

⁴ Henk FLAP, "Creation and Returns of Social Capital. A New Research Program", *La revue Tocqueville/The Tocqueville Review*, XX, 1999, pp. 5-26.

⁵ Deepa NARAYAN, Michael F. CASSIDY, "A Dimensional Approach to Measuring Social Capital: Development and Validation of a Social Capital Inventory", *Current Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2001, pp. 59-102.

⁶ Robert D. PUTNAM, *Making Democracy Work...cit.*, p. 173.

Ton van Schaik includes another two dimensions of social capital: the institutional trust and the trustworthiness of the respondents themselves. Whereas the first dimension is measured by the particular trust in a series of institutions – ranging from the church to the press and some international organizations as the European Union and the United Nations Organization – the second dimension is indeed more difficult to measure. The civic cooperation appears from the willingness to put the groups or some one else's interest ahead of pure individual interest, from the disapproval of free riding. This disapproval of free-riding, emphasizes van Schaik, can be tapped from a battery of questions about the justification of behaviors like "claiming state benefits which you are not entitled to", "cheating on taxes if you have the chance" or "lying in your own interest"¹.

The problems that operationalization and measurement raise still remain. Should social capital be measured at a national-aggregate, or at an individual level? Is it a personal quality or a relational asset? It is obvious that social capital is defined in two ways. Putnam considers social capital as an individual quality, while by other scholars as strictly connected to personal relationships, with no social extension. Coleman's definition is a structural one: social capital is an aspect of the social structure, it is created by the participation of the individuals but it is not an attribute of individuals. Other authors, Putnam, Newton, Whiteley, define social capital as a subjective phenomenon composed of specific values and attitudes². We use the second definition because: 1. we believe socialization may influence one's attitudes and values; 2. these values and attitudes may spill out from specific relationships and generalize at societal level; people may transpose these values and attitudes – e.g. trust, honesty, commitment, and reciprocity – from a relationship to another.

The claimed link between the generalized trust and the density of a voluntary association network is another problem. Putnam does not clarify the relationship he examines between participation and trust; thus he does not make a difference between dependent and independent variables. The correlation between participation and trust we generally find in our surveys could have been caused by a *selective recruitment* of participants: the members of such associations are exactly those who have already displayed a higher amount of social trust, whereas individuals with lower amounts of trust do not participate. Thus, trust may be the resource that makes some people participate, while discouraging participation among others. Though the socialization hypothesis seemed largely disproved, new research has found a relative effect of participation. By testing the relation between the two variables, Marc Hooghe does not invalidate the selective recruitment hypothesis but rather shows how associational life seems to produce some effects much better explained by the logic of socialization³. Dietlind Stolle finds similar results and demonstrates how participation in voluntary associations provides for the spread of civic attitudes and values⁴. However, it is difficult to fully support these two hypotheses.

¹ Ton VAN SCHAİK, "Social Capital in the European Values Surveys...cit.", pp. 10-11.

² Kenneth NEWTON, "Social Capital and Democracy", *American Behavioral Scientist*, no. 4, 1997, pp. 575-586; Paul WHITELEY, "The Origins of Social Capital", in Jan VAN DETH (ed.), *Social Capital and European Democracy*, Routledge, London, 1999.

³ Marc HOOGHE, "Socialization, Selective Recruitment and Value Congruence. Voluntary Associations and the Development of Shared Norms", paper presented at ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Copenhagen, April 2000.

⁴ Dietlind STOLLE, "Clubs and Congregations. The Benefits of Joining an Association", ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Copenhagen, April 2000. See also IDEM, "Getting to Trust.

These two difficulties – the measurement level and the sense of the relationship between participation and trust – influence the assumed connection between democratic values and institutional performance and social capital. Which of the two components influence democratic performance? For Putnam it is the participation. But if we dissociate the two components – as demonstrated by Pippa Norris – social trust would be much stronger correlated to a series of economic development and democratic performance indicators. This is the only way the two components make together a variable that strongly relates to democratic performance indicators¹. Edwards and Foley conclude that we need to explore this relationship at an aggregate level – much more sensible to political and economic differences between different societies².

Putnam endows social capital with strong effects on democratic functioning. It would allow for greater control over politicians and for greater electoral responsibility and also for a higher level of electoral and political participation. A responsive government in turn would stimulate public trust and improve democratic legitimacy. Following de Tocqueville, Putnam has strong confidence in the ties between the habits of a society and its political practices. Civic associations, for example, consolidate those *habits of the heart* essential for stable and efficient democratic institutions.

A number of local, national and international studies have intended to prove the claimed link between social capital and democratic performance. The World Values Survey (WVS) revealed a suitable instrument for the numerous researchers:

“The survey allows comparison of social capital in 47 nations, including a wide range of developing and industrialized societies, older and newer democracies, semi-democracies and non-democratic political systems, and cultural regions of the world [...] The WVS allows us to compare measures of belonging to voluntary organizations and civic associations, and also provides a direct measure of personal trust that lies at the heart of social capital theory, and multiple standard indicators of political participation and civic engagement as the dependent variables”³.

There are great differences in the level of social capital in the countries included in the survey. By combining the two components of social capital – civic activism and social trust – Norris discovers that Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, Austria, Germany and the United States are characterized by high levels of social capital, while Central and East European countries, Turkey and the former soviet republics by low levels of social capital, with Latin American and far East countries at an intermediary level. Correlations between social capital and some socioeconomic indicators proved the link between cultural factors and socioeconomic

An Analysis of the Importance of Institutions, Families, Personal Experiences and Group Membership”, in Eric M. USLANER, Paul DEKKER (ed.), *Politics in Everyday Life: Social Capital and Participation*, Routledge, London, 2001.

¹ Pippa NORRIS, “Making Democracies Work. Social Capital and Civic Engagement in 47 Societies”, paper for the European Science Foundation EURESCO Conference on *Social Capital: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* at the University of Exeter, 15-20 September 2000.

² Bob EDWARDS, Michael W. FOLEY, “Civil Society and Social Capital beyond Putnam”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 42, no. 1, 1998, pp. 124-139.

³ Pippa NORRIS, “Making Democracies Work...cit.”, p. 9.

development to be valid, even if they did not establish causality. The finding was that the link operates by way of social trust and not of civic network density. Though electoral participation and institutional trust do not seem related to social capital, the latter appears much more related – again through social trust – to civic engagement indicators, such as political interest and frequent political discussions. Finally, the tested link between democratic performance – measured by the Freedom House index – and social capital proved valid. The dimension of the index most significantly related to social capital is civic liberty.

Another link revealed at the aggregate level is to social tolerance. Civic participation seems significantly related to the propensity to accept individuals with different lifestyles, social origins, or political values. This point is well illustrated by Dumitru Sandu in his study of European tolerance, which also uses World Values Surveys¹. The pattern discovered is similar to the previous: the greatest tolerance is specific to the Northern Protestant countries, Catholic countries are closer to the tolerance mean, whereas the greatest intolerance is to be found in the former communist countries. Once more, the social capital dimension most significantly related to social tolerance is trust.

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN EUROPEAN POSTCOMMUNIST COUNTRIES

Social Capital in Eastern Europe

After the regime change in Eastern Europe, democratic consolidation was seen in accordance with economic and institutional reforms. Ten years after, the regional perspective is more shattered with clear distinctions appearing in the performance of these countries². Though revival of communism is not a strong option, citizens from the former communist countries are not satisfied with the performance of their new elected governments³. Additionally, civil society is weaker than expected⁴. What we intend to discover is the importance of civic activism and civic norms for democracy. Thus, we will measure social capital in its two dimensions, *social trust* and *participation in secondary organizations*. Though *institutional trust* is not part of the social capital, it plays an important role in fostering attitudes regarding the democratic regime⁵. We will look at the effects of these dimensions on positive attitudes concerning democracy, awareness of political system, political interest, and orientations towards political *inputs* and *outputs*.

¹ Dumitru SANDU, "Diferențieri europene ale toleranței sociale", *Sociologie Românească*, no. 1-2, 2002, pp. 1-37.

² See the 2001 Freedom House Survey, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 1, January 2002.

³ Richard ROSE, William MISHLER, Christian HAERPFER, *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies* Polity Press, Cambridge and Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1998.

⁴ Marc MORJÉ HOWARD, "The Weakness of Postcommunist Civil Society", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 1, January 2002, pp. 157-169.

⁵ Kenneth NEWTON, "Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society and Democracy", *International Political Science Review*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2001, pp. 201-214.

Comparing social capital in Western and Eastern Europe, Bădescu et al. find out that social capital levels in Eastern Europe are lower than those in Western Europe. The gap concerns in first place association membership. The proportion of people declaring that they belong to at least one association is lower in the former communist countries than in the Western European countries (4.7% vs. 11.8%). Another element to consider is the time one spends every week or every month in organizations' activities. The time spent is lower in the former communist countries than in the Western European countries, as well. So higher levels of activism do not compensate the lower numbers of members in Eastern European associations¹. The gap in membership and activism is accompanied by a significant difference in social trust. The mean of social trust is only 2.6% in Eastern Europe, compared to 36% in the other countries, when measured by the 1999 European Values Survey².

Social Capital in Romania and Bulgaria

The analysis of social capital in Romania and Bulgaria is based on a series of surveys conducted in 2000. The Center for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS) Bucharest conducted the Romanian survey at the Romanian Academic Society (SAR) request, using a sample counting 1237 respondents. The Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) Sofia conducted the Bulgarian Survey, using a sample counting 2322 respondents. Both samples are representative for the Bulgarian and the Romanian adult populations. Our analysis is possible by the standard questionnaire that CURS and CSD used in Romania and Bulgaria.

Our analysis ten years after the regime change is made easier by the similar situations of these countries. Both countries were invited to join the European Union in the second "wave" of enlargement (at the European Council held in Helsinki, in 1999) – even if the practice of wave enlargement was later abandoned in favor of specific negotiations with individual countries. The European Council held in Brussels in December 2004 decided that Romania and Bulgaria would sign the membership treaties at the same time – in 2005 – since Romania succeeded in completing negotiations in November 2004 and the treaties have been actually signed in 2005. From an economic perspective, these two countries are more similar than when compared to other former candidate countries. Romania and Bulgaria started much later to accomplish the economic reform and have faced similar economic problems, reflected by regional statistics (see table 1). From a historic perspective prior to communism, these countries were also regarded as less developed than other countries in the region³.

¹ Gabriel BĂDESCU, Paul E. SUM, Eric M. USLANER, "Civil Society and Democratic Values in Romania and Moldova", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2004, pp. 316-341.

² Gabriel BĂDESCU, "Încredere și democrație în țările în tranziție", *Sociologie Românească*, no. 1-2, 2003, pp. 109-128.

³ Henry L. ROBERTS, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, Yale University Press, New York, 1951. See also Jacques RUPNIK, *The Other Europe*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1988.

Table 1
Economic and Political Indicators for Romania and Bulgaria

	Romania	Bulgaria
GDP/capita – 1998 (USD)*	1697	1700
Foreign direct investments/capita 1990-1998 (USD)**	201	168
Unemployment – 1998 (%)*	10.3	12
Trade balance – 1998 (mil. USD)**	- 3521	- 702
Current account balance – 1998 (% GDP)*	- 7.9	- 2.3
FH rating of Political Rights – 1999***	2	2
FH rating of Civil Liberties – 1999***	3	2
FH – NiT Democratization score – 1999****	3	3
FH – NiT Rule of Law – 1999****	4	4
FH – NiT Economic Liberalization – 1999****	4	4
Corruption Perception Index – 1999****	2.9	3.5

* BERD, *Transition Report Update*, April 1999; ** UN – Economic Commission for Europe, *Economic Survey of Europe*, 1999, no. 2; *** Freedom House, *Freedom in the World*, 2000; **** Freedom House, *Nations in Transit*, 2000; ***** Transparency International, 2000 (see www.transparency.org)

The research on Central and Eastern Europe has displayed wide differences among countries concerning democratization¹. Support for democracy was measured a few years after the regime change by the New Europe Barometer Surveys, just as the euphoria had disappeared and the new regimes were facing unexpectedly high economic and social difficulties². To truly estimate the feeling towards a vivid political regime and to avoid measuring opinions about ideal democracy, Rose *et al.* compared the support for democracy in competition with the support for other plausible alternatives. Though satisfaction with the evolution of democracy is similar to many EU countries – when the competing definition of democracy was introduced – non-democratic alternatives were more strongly supported in Eastern Europe. Each alternative is a governing solution that avoids representation by way of popular vote or that makes impossible an effective representative government. Even if this measure of democratic support may also be questionable, at least it is a realist measure. According to Mishler and Rose, most recent work on support adopts an idealist approach, measuring support in terms of citizens' adherence to the principles or ideals of democracy. The realist conception is based on the idea that citizens of new regimes have little understanding of democratic ideals but strong feelings about the performance of the new regime especially in comparison to the past³.

¹ Richard ROSE, "A Diverging Europe", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2001, pp. 93-106.

² Richard ROSE, Christian HAERPFER, "Adapting to Transformation in Eastern Europe: New Democracies Barometer", *Studies in Public Policy*, vol. 212, 1993.

³ William MISHLER, Richard ROSE, "Political Support for Incomplete Democracies: Realist vs. Idealist Theories and Measures", *International Political Science Review*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2001, pp. 303-320.

We will similarly measure the support for democracy by using data from our 2000 surveys. The results are shown in table 2. When asked about democracy as an ideal regime, Romanians proved to appreciate the most democracy as the best form of government. When asked about competing non-democratic alternatives, some important differences must be stressed. The first alternative is the country being run in fact by the president, with no appeal to an elected parliament and to the composing political parties which form the government. Southern European and Latin American countries have largely experienced this kind of rule¹. Romania was also confronted with this governing style in the inter-war period.

The second alternative is the country being run by experts, who make the best decisions for the well being of the country, as they consider appropriate. This technocratic rule was frequently pointed out in former communist Europe as an option for the parties' lack of experience in economic and administrative management. Therefore is not very clear if this option actually reveals a non-democratic attitude, or if it expresses an honest public desire for managerial competence, economic efficiency and nonpartisan involvement.

The third alternative is when the country being run by the military. This kind of rule – specific to some Latin American countries – is well known to East European countries as well. For example, a marshal ruled Romania during the Second World War. But communist rule represented a political noninvolvement for the military, in spite it's massive politicization. Thus, the support for military rule is not so high even for those who display the greatest trust in the military. In fact, this is the least supported alternative in both samples.

Table 2

Democracy and Non-democratic Alternatives in Romania and Bulgaria

	Romania (%)	Bulgaria (%)
A	<i>Even it is not perfect, democracy is still the best form of government</i>	
Strongly disagree	5.0	12.4
Disagree	16.4	23.9
Agree	41.1	36.0
Strongly agree	37.5	27.7
N	1118	1760
B	<i>The president should – in fact – run the country</i>	
Strongly disagree	23.9	10.2
Disagree	33.1	23.6
Agree	25.6	30.5
Strongly agree	17.4	35.7
N	1075	1864

¹ Juan J. LINZ, Alfred STEPAN, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1996.

C	<i>Experts should – in fact – run the country</i>	
Strongly disagree	4.4	5.6
Disagree	14.4	17.1
Agree	43.9	36.7
Strongly agree	37.3	40.6
N	1022	1708
D	<i>It would be better if the country were run by the military</i>	
Strongly disagree	59.5	66.7
Disagree	24.9	22.4
Agree	9.6	6.8
Strongly agree	6.0	4.1
N	1050	1856
	<i>The number of non-democratic alternatives</i>	
None	20.7	24.4
One	46.8	36.8
Two	26.6	34.6
Three	5.9	4.2
N	1237	2322

As shown in the table above, there are some differences between Romania and Bulgaria. While Romanians are those who reveal the greatest support for military rule, Bulgarians show the greatest support for ruling by the president. As presented in the table above, there is a striking difference between the two countries regarding the support for a presidential rule. We can only be surprised by the low figure for Romania in 2000, when one candidate posed as a strong and effective president. No major difference is apparent regarding the number of non-democratic alternatives when comparing countries. On the basis of the responses to the questions about non-democratic alternatives and about democracy as the best form of government, we will compute an indicator of democratic attitudes by adding the specified variables. We will use this when discussing the relationship between components of social capital and democracy and will call this a *democratic indicator*.

Since social capital theories are rather abstract, their translation into operational measures requires subjective interpretation. As mentioned above, for the current study, we will stick to the operationalization made by Inglehart in the World Values Survey¹. He operationalized social capital into two dimensions: trust and membership in associations. We test trust by using the question: "most people can be trusted"? There are also differences between the countries included in our sample.

¹ Ronald INGLEHART, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997.

Table 3
Most People Can Be Trusted

	Romania (%)	Bulgaria (%)
Strongly disagree	31.1	18.5
Disagree	32.4	43.8
Agree	32.4	28.9
Strongly agree	4.1	8.9
N	1217	2208

We can see from other studies how citizens of Eastern European countries display less social trust than citizens of West European countries generally do. By using the 1990 and 1995 waves of the WVS and the 1999 wave of the EVS, Gabriel Bădescu discovered that the mean proportion of trustworthy persons is higher in the consolidated West European democracies than in the former communist countries¹. How to explain this difference? We should not avoid paying attention to the question itself, because the answer largely depends on what *people* means. Therefore, a better operationalization of trust may be that of ethnic trust². Uslaner discovered different effects of generalized and particularized trust in the case of American communities³. But significant differences may be real. One explanation may be socialization in dissimilar political regimes. The free expression of opinions is a different risk that people from these regimes assume. Totalitarian repression makes citizens much more cautious in establishing relations and less willing to freely communicate, features clearly tested by Almond and Verba in Italy and West Germany some fifteen years after the collapse of fascism⁴.

By using the 1999 wave of the EVS, Gabriel Bădescu also discovered a significant positive correlation between the level of generalized trust and a build indicator of democratic attitudes when measured at an individual level. The relationship continues to be valid when measured at a national aggregate level as well, with no distinction for the geopolitical context⁵. Therefore, the findings allow the author to conclude that generalized trust is a necessary resource for the quality of the democracy, with no suggestion for the direction of the causal influence.

In our research, we look for the relationships between democratic attitudes and several types of trust, i.e. social trust, institutional trust and political trust. The social trust seems somehow related to the democratic indicator that we previously built. The correlation is positive, even it is weak, for each national sample (for Romania, $R = .063$, $p < .05$; for Bulgaria, $R = .090$, $p < .001$). Social trust also appears strongly related to institutional trust when measured for each of the national sub-samples (for Romania, $R = .336$, $p < .001$; for Bulgaria, $R = .205$, $p < .001$). The

¹ Gabriel BĂDESCU, "Încredere și democrație în țările în tranziție...cit.", p. 113.

² IDEM, "Social Trust and Democratization in the Post-Communist Societies", in Gabriel BĂDESCU, Eric M. USLANER (ed.), *Social Capital and the Transition to Democracy*, Routledge, New York, 2003.

³ Eric M. USLANER, Richard S. CONLEY, "Civic Engagement and Particularized Trust: The Ties That Bind People to Their Ethnic Communities", *American Political Research*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2003, p. 334.

⁴ Gabriel A. ALMOND, Sidney VERBA, *The Civic Culture...cit.*, chapter III.

⁵ Gabriel BĂDESCU, "Încredere și democrație în țările în tranziție...cit.", p. 124.

expressed trust in a democratic state's institutions proves to be significantly related to the democratic indicator for each national sample (for Romania, $R = .142$, $p < .001$; for Bulgaria, $R = .101$, $p < .001$).

Participation in secondary organizations is the second element of the social capital. Membership in associations is less developed in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. Membership in one or several associations – religious, professional, human rights protection, environment protection, charity or sports associations, labor unions – differ from one country to another. Over three-quarters of Romanians and over four fifths of Bulgarians are not members of any one of these associations. In other surveys participation seems even lower.

Eastern European societies have already experienced some effects of networks of informal cooperation, as Rose demonstrates with the Russian case.

“When a formal organization does not deliver and an individual cannot substitute the market or an informal network, three different types of network can be invoked to ‘de-bureaucratize’ dealings with an organization, that is, to find a way to make it produce goods and services. A person can try to personalize his or her relationship, begging or cajoling officials to provide what is wanted [...] The concept of ‘blat’ usually refers to using connections to misallocate benefits, as they are invoked to get an official to ‘bend’ or break rules [...] Connections, that is, asking for favors on the basis of being part of a ‘circle’ or network”¹.

These are pre-modern tactics of getting what modern states provide through the free market and efficient bureaucracy. But they prove that these societies experienced somewhat a specific type of cooperation. The main problems now, as voluntary associations become effective again, are different: the level and the type of participation. A study on Romania and Moldova clears up these problems. The first observation is that both countries fit into a regional framework². Membership in Eastern European countries is lower, and when citizens are members in associations, they are less active.

“(They) tend to have fewer resources and incentives to create new organizations or become active in existing ones. At the same time, the capacity of the civil society organizations to promote activism and provide incentives for membership is very low”³.

The relatively low number of associations and unequal territorial distribution reduces mobilization. Membership in associations seems to be influenced by social structure, and also by the attitudes people display regarding civic associations. Romanians spend less time with friends and consider friends less important than their western counterparts. Their trust in civic associations is constantly low, as it shown by various public opinion surveys⁴. The associations must rely on external financial resources and on *a priori* settled objectives, which sometimes neglect local

¹ Richard ROSE, “Getting Things Done in an Anti-Modern Society: Social Capital Networks in Russia”, World Bank, Social Capital Initiative Working Paper, November 1998.

² Gabriel BĂDESCU, Paul E. SUM, Eric M. USLANER, “Civil Society and Democratic Values in Romania and Moldova...cit.”, p. 323.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 324.

⁴ See the Public Opinion Barometer (BOP) financed by the Open Society Foundation Romania www.osf.ro/bop/

needs. In fact, authors show that their members turn into private functionaries rather than into true civic volunteers.

The social capital theory emphasizes the benefic effects that membership in associations has on democratic attitudes. Democratic attitudes, however, do not equal our democratic indicator. While the latter indicates support for the current democratic regime and the rejection of non-democratic alternatives, the former reflect more an expression of the people's orientation toward the political system (political interest and participation)¹. We use these democratic attitudes in order to clarify further the link between social capital and democracy in Romania and Bulgaria.

Tested in several occasions, membership seems to have some effect on social trust². Social trust itself may be related to institutional trust. Therefore we test relationships occurring in our Romanian and Bulgarian samples, through a comparison of participating citizens, the general public, the urban public, and highly educated public.

Table 4
Social Trust and Political Trust

	Members	General Public	Urban Public	Highly Educated Public
Romania, trust in other people	%	%	%	%
Low	28.0	32.1	32.4	28.3
Medium	66.2	64.3	64.6	64.6
High	5.8	3.6	3.0	7.1
Bulgaria, trust in other people				
Low	21.6	17.7	17.8	17.9
Medium	67.3	73.9	72.7	69.2
High	11.1	8.4	9.5	12.8
Romania, trust in state institutions				
Low	31.9	33.7	35.9	32.3
Medium	63.5	63.0	61.3	63.8
High	4.5	3.3	2.8	3.9
Bulgaria, trust in state institutions				
Low	17.7	17.0	19.0	19.5
Medium	76.6	79.7	76.7	77.3
High	5.7	3.3	4.3	3.2

Membership in associations seems to have in Romania and Bulgaria a generally low influence on social and institutional trust. Those who participate don't seem much more trusting than the urban and highly educated publics in both countries. The correlation between membership and trust in Romania is weak

¹ Gabriel A. ALMOND, Sidney VERBA, *The Civic Culture...cit.*, chapter II.

² Dag WOLLEBAEK, Per SELLE, "Does Participation in Voluntary Associations Contribute to Social Capital? The Impact of Intensity, Scope, and Type", *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2002, pp. 32-61.

($R = -.040$) and statistically not significant, whereas it is significant for the Bulgarian sample ($p < .05$), but still very weak ($R = -.042$). The Pearson correlation indicator is negative in both countries. Its low value does not allow us to conclude that participants display even less social trust. Institutional trust is not even significantly related in either of the two samples to social trust or participation.

As stated before, membership should encourage those aptitudes that make individuals develop into active citizens, making them surpass their subjective or parochial roles. Following the main thesis of the socialization theory, and especially Putnam¹, we expect those who participate in voluntary organizations to reject less the political output and be more oriented towards the political input and the political process. Therefore, we expect them to display a greater subjective competence, due to their awareness of the possibility they have to influence political decisions. Marc Hooghe demonstrates for the Belgian case how membership reduces the feelings of political powerlessness². We also expect members in associations to be the most interested in both passive (voting) and active (party membership) forms of political participation.

Table 5
Impact of Membership on Civic Attitudes

	Members	General Public	Urban Public	Highly Educated Public
Romania, impact of political events	%	%	%	%
Low	19.4	17.6	16.7	15.2
Medium	51.7	51.8	49.1	53.6
High	28.8	30.6	34.2	31.2
Bulgaria, impact of political events				
Low	12.8	16.4	13.2	6.6
Medium	68.0	67.3	69.2	65.8
High	19.2	16.4	12.1	27.6
Romania, influence on political events				
Low	38.5	45.0	42.6	31.7
Medium	48.1	45.3	46.5	57.9
High	13.4	9.7	10.9	10.3
Bulgaria, influence on political events				
Low	30.3	40.0	32.0	21.2
Medium	63.5	51.7	60.1	72.8
High	6.3	8.3	7.9	6.0
Romania, political interest				
Little	21.2	34.1	26.4	19.7
Some	41.4	45.6	45.2	38.6
Important	29.1	16.2	22.6	32.3
Great	8.2	4.1	5.7	9.4

¹ Robert D. PUTNAM, *Making Democracy Work...cit.*, p. 11.

² Marc HOOGHE, "Participation in Voluntary Associations and Value Indicators: The Effect of Current and Previous Participation Experiences", *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2003, p. 60.

Bulgaria, political interest				
None	9.3	30.1	22.3	6.4
Some	19.9	30.5	27.6	23.6
Important	52.3	32.0	39.7	51.6
Great	18.5	7.4	10.4	18.5
Romania, electoral participation				
Yes	93.2	91.2	92.4	100
No	6.8	8.8	7.6	0
Bulgaria, electoral participation				
Yes	81.9	75.0	71.5	71.6
No	18.1	25.0	28.5	28.4
Romania, party membership				
Yes	29.6	0	5.2	13.4
No	70.4	100	94.8	86.6
Bulgaria, party membership				
Yes	37.5	0	7.4	10.2
No	62.5	100	92.6	89.8

Some effect of membership was also detected, though differences between participants, the urban public and the highly educated public are not so impressive. They are more important however for the Bulgarian sample, than for the Romanian one. Awareness of the political process can be measured by way of other indicators, such as the tendency to read political news in the newspapers, to discuss politics with friends and family, to watch political news on TV, or to listen to political news on the radio. We can then build an index variable for the interest in the political system based on the previously named indicators. In fact, membership in associations seems significantly related to this index of political interest, for both Romania ($R = .185$, $p < .001$) and Bulgaria ($R = .245$, $p < .001$).

The research of Bădescu *et al.* leads to similar results. In the case of western societies, members in associations tend to display attributes that are more often generally associated with the ideal type of democratic citizen. In the case of Romania and Moldova we also see that the most active volunteers are the people most trusting in the population. They are more likely to support the rights of minorities and unpopular groups. In both countries activists are, generally speaking, more active politically.

*"They have a greater sense of their own political competence, although they do not necessarily see politicians as any more responsive. Being highly active in an organization is not generally the key to greater political participation and a sense of efficacy. Instead, it is taking part in decision making that matters the most [...] Activists participate more and have greater interest, but the key to believing that you can make a difference is not just taking part, but getting involved in the nuts and bolts of your organization"*¹.

¹ Gabriel BĂDESCU, Paul SUM, Eric M. USLANER, "Civil Society and Democratic Values in Romania and Moldova...cit.", p. 337.

They have discovered an important difference between activists involved in the decision making process and other members of the examined organizations. There is also a difference between members and the general public. The main problem is the quality and duration of participation. For example, in the case of the city of Cluj, participation is no longer than a couple of years and those who get involved stay no longer than their predecessors do. The risk is that they again resemble the general public, which displays very low civic values. As the authors emphasize:

“People do not trust each other. They are not tolerant of minorities and other unpopular groups. They have fewer social interactions with friends and neighbors, and they join fewer voluntary organizations, do not trust their leaders, do not feel efficacious, and do not participate much in politics”¹.

In short, activists are the most tolerant and they display the greatest social trust. They could become opinion leaders and work for the spread of democratic values but, as the authors say, they are few in number and their participation is too short in order to have some effect on society.

In the case of our sample, those who are members in associations estimate that politicians in power and in opposition manage to respond to public requests more often than those who do not participate (for Romania, $R = .094$, $p < .001$; for Bulgaria, $R = .096$, $p < .001$), but correlations are far too weak. Membership is also significantly related to the displayed support for democracy. The members in associations are not only much better oriented towards the political system, towards the *input* and *output* processes, but they more frequently display democratic attitudes. The correlations between membership and the democratic indicator we have built are positive for the Romanian sample ($R = .104$, $p < .001$) and for the Bulgarian sample as well ($R = .123$, $p < .001$), but still not too strong.

The table below summarizes the correlations between social trust, membership in associations, and political attitudes and beliefs in Romania and Bulgaria.

Table 6
Social Trust, Membership and Political Attitudes and Beliefs

	Romania	Bulgaria
	Social trust	Social trust
Indicator of democratic attitudes	.063*	.090***
Institutional trust	.336***	.205***
Trust in state's institutions	.142***	.101***
	Membership in associations	Membership in associations
Social trust	-.040	-.042*
Trust in state's institutions	.024	.015
Indicator of democratic attitudes	.104***	.123***
Political interest	.185***	.245***
Belief in the political responsiveness	.094***	.096***

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 338.

We need to estimate more clearly the importance of social capital. Using a regression analysis, we find that the impact of the social capital elements on our democratic indicator is insignificant. The social capital elements do not add anything to the variance of the democratic indicator explained by the socio-demographic variables. Thus it is not surprising that social trust and the membership in associations explain less than the belief in the responsiveness of political institutions and the political interest one may display.

Table 7*Ordinary Least Squares Estimates of Democratic Attitudes in Romania*

Male (1)	.160***	.148***	.147***	.131***	.113***
Age (continuous)	-.102***	-.095**	-.094**	-.078**	-.117***
Education (1-7)	.226***	.211***	.207***	.194***	.138***
Urban (1)	.069*	.073*	.073*	.090**	.047
Church attendance more frequent (1)	.031	.043	.043	.002	.015
Social trust		.055*	.054*		
Association membership			.015		
Political responsiveness				.178	
Political interest					.251***
Adjusted R Square	.113	.103	.103	.118	.160

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; standardized coefficients *beta* shown only.

Table 8*Ordinary Least Squares Estimates of Democratic Attitudes in Bulgaria*

Male (1)	.112***	.111***	.111***	.075***	.056**
Age (continuous)	-.042***	-.048*	-.048*	-.022	-.086***
Education (1-7)	.321***	.309***	.309***	.244***	.216***
Urban (1)	.154***	.150***	.150***	.141***	.140***
Church attendance more frequent (1)	.061**	.066**	.066**	.049*	.057**
Social trust		.088***	.088***		
Association membership			---		
Political responsiveness				.210***	
Political interest					.227***
Adjusted R Square	.192	.192	.191	.188	.228

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; standardized coefficients *beta* shown only.

CONCLUSION

We are unable to conclude that both social trust and membership in associations assist in supporting democratic attitudes, since the values of our measures are quite low and sometimes not significant. The analysis on Romania and Bulgaria demonstrates that democratic values are somehow related to social trust, but also to a particularized institutional trust: the trust in state democratic institutions. Those who participate in voluntary organizations are somewhat more trusting in other people and in state institutions; they orient themselves more towards the political system and display a greater political competence. Moreover, they seem to embrace democratic values more than others do. But the overall effects of membership in associations are not as impressive as expected. Though the civic activists are a hope for a future consolidation of the civil society and for a strong influence on the political system, we don't have yet any strong proof that they could become opinion leaders and pressure politicians and state institutions.

Moreover, we cannot explain the low level of membership in voluntary associations. The findings made by Marc Morjé Howard in Russia and East Germany may be the same in Romania and Bulgaria.

"As a result of the institutional experience of communism, with its forced mobilization and strict separation of public and private spheres [...] three main causal factors are responsible, and all three involve people's ongoing reinterpretations of prior and present experiences. These factors consist of 1. people's prior experiences with organizations, and particularly the legacy of mistrust of formal organizations that results from the forced participation in communist organizations, 2. the persistence of informal private networks, which function as a substitute or alternative for formal and public organizations, and 3. the disappointment with the new democratic and capitalist systems today, which has led many people to avoid the public sphere. Together, these three factors present an account of the causal link between people's interpretations of their prior experiences and their social behavior and activities today"¹.

Our analysis has shown that the differences between Romania and Bulgaria – the two countries included in our sample – are not so important. The same features were pointed out in both countries. Though participation relates more to the standard qualities of a good citizen in the Bulgarian case, the overall conclusion is that social capital adds little to the democratic values in Romania and Bulgaria. The civic participation is essential for the spread of democratic values and the full consolidation of democracy, but these two countries still face weak civil societies in their transitions from authoritarian rule. And a weak civil society means that the democratic consolidation would depend merely on the political elites and institutions, and the functioning of market economy.

¹ Marc MORJÉ HOWARD, "Why Post-Communist Citizens Do Not Join Voluntary Organizations", in Gabriel BĂDESCU, Eric M. USLANER (ed.), *Social Capital and the Transition to Democracy*...cit.